A comparative analysis between 'Boroca' and 'Buckskin bag' on the lexical effervescence regarding the establishment of gold mines in Brazil and in the USA

Uma análise comparativa entre 'Boroca' e 'Buckskin bag' sobre a efervescência lexical em relação ao estabelecimento de minas de ouro no Brasil e nos EUA

DOI: 10.55905/oelv21n10-008

Recebimento dos originais: 28/08/2023
Aceitação para publicação: 25/09/2023

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ABSTRACT
This paper addresses the significant influence of economic activities, such as “Gold Rush” or "Gold Fever”, in the United States, and the intense human movement caused by the discovery of "Serra Pelada", in Brazil, on the language related to the economic context of the affected regions. "Newspaper Corpus from the Library of Congress" was used as a reference for the English term and the archive from Hemeroteca of the National Library was adopted for the Brazilian one. A comparative analysis was conducted between the words "Boroca" (Brazil) and "Buckskin bag" (USA), which refer to a type of bag used by the "garimpeiro" (Brazilian term) and "miner" (American term) to store and transport small gold nuggets. According to the results, gold extraction as an economic activity influences the media propagation of the terms "boroca" and "buckskin bag," revealing similar linguistic behaviors despite the temporal, geographical, and linguistic separation and highlighting the influence of economic activity on the language of society in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Keywords: linguistic effervescence, mining vocabulary, boroca, buckskin bag, gold rush, Serra Pelada.
RESUMO
Este artigo aborda a influência significativa das atividades econômicas, como a "Corrida do Ouro" ou "Fevere do Ouro", nos Estados Unidos, e o intenso movimento humano causado pela descoberta de "Serra Pelada", no Brasil, na linguagem de linguagem relacionada ao contexto econômico das regiões afetadas. O "Corpus de Jornal da Biblioteca do Congresso" foi usado como referência para o termo inglês e o acervo da Hemeroteca da Biblioteca Nacional foi adoptado para o brasileiro. Uma análise comparativa foi realizada entre as palavras "Boroca" (Brasil) e "Buckskin bag" (EUA), que se referem a um tipo de saco usado pelo "garimpeiro" (termo brasileiro) e "mineiro" (termo americano) para armazenar e transportar pequenas pepitas de ouro. De acordo com os resultados, a extração do ouro como uma atividade econômica influencia a propagação dos termos "boroca" e "buckskin bag", revelando comportamentos linguísticos semelhantes, apesar da separação temporal, geográfica e linguística e destacando a influência da atividade eco-nômica na linguagem da sociedade nos séculos 19 e 20.

Palavras-chave: efervescência linguística, vocabulário de mineração, boroca, bolsa de couro, corrida do ouro, Serra Pelada.

1 INTRODUCTION
Occasionally, unfamiliar words encountered, such as “boroca” arouse our curiosity, leading us to ask “What is its meaning? Where does it originate?” In our quest for understanding, our initial recourse is to consult dictionaries, which, as pointed out by Biderman (1998, p. 130), serve as repositories of “the lexical treasures of language at a specific moment in the history of a social group.” However, it becomes evident that “boroca” has yet to be included in dictionaries and, consequently, people are compelled to delve into alternative sources, such as newspapers, magazines, and personal accounts towards gaining insights into its occurrences and usage.

The study of the lexicon as a discipline can assist in the process of unearthing the earliest documented usage of the word. In this paper, the study of lexicon refers to the collective knowledge that resides in the minds of language users, forming the repository of vocabulary within a sociolinguistic and cultural group. As the lexicon serves as the primary gateway to textual communication, it acts as a window through which a community perceives the world. At this linguistic level, a community's values, beliefs, customs, and habits are most transparently reflected, along with technological advancements, socioeconomic changes, and political transformations. Thus, the lexicon of a language maintains a profound connection to the cultural history of its community (Biderman, 2001, p. 9).
Based on Biderman’s (2001) definition of the lexicon as the way a particular community “perceives” the world, this study investigated the words "boroca" and "buckskin bag" through lexical research, seeking occurrences of the terms in gold mining areas, specifically in Serra Pelada, in the Northern region of Pará State, Brazil, and in the Western region of the United States. Both areas are known as “Gold Rush” or "Gold Fever,”, which refer to a historical, economic, and social period in which those words gained lexical relevance within the extractive activity and eventually spread throughout the respective regions in the two countries.

Considering the investigation on the use of the terms "boroca” and "buckskin bag” in different diatopic contexts, this study presents the probable birthplace of “boroca” as a synonym for "bag”, namely Serra Pelada gold mine in Pará, Brazil, referred to as "lexical effervescence” by Pagotto (2018). Its occurrences are subsequently highlighted in the 1900-2000 temporal range, in the database of Hemeroteca da Biblioteca Nacional, and "buckskin bag” is examined in the newspaper corpora from the Library of Congress.

2 BOROCA: A WORD FROM A GOLD MINE

The beginning of the "Gold Rush" at Serra Pelada dates back to the end of 1979. (Mathis, 1995). According to the narrative, a man named Genésio Ferreira da Silva discovered alluvial gold in the Grota Rica stream, and, in 1980, the gold rush commenced in Serra Pelada. This particular gold mine, located in the southeast of Pará, Brazil, serving as a neighborhood of the city of Marabá, was considered the largest open-pit mine in the world. Due to the migration of several gold miners to the region, João Batista Figueiredo, the military president of Brazil, appointed Major Sebastião Rodrigues de Moura, nicknamed Major Curió, as the intervener and representative of the State in the gold mine. Sebastião Curió Rodrigues de Moura, who adopted "Curió" as part of his name, remained in the Serra Pelada area until 1982, when he became the most voted Federal Deputy in Pará, mainly due to his electorate in Serra Pelada, which is still considered a district of Curionópolis (formerly known as Vila do Trinta).

The Serra Pelada gold mine attracted an estimated 80,000 gold prospectors (Mathis, 1995, p. 11) from several regions of Brazil. Most of those miners were
impoverished men who hoped to strike it rich, drawn to the area by tales of abundant gold. According to Bitencourt (2009),

The mining activity attracted many workers, particularly immigrants from the Northeast region of Brazil. The Serra Pelada gold mine became an option for those marginalized by the Brazilian socioeconomic process as they sought survival in the mining industry (p. 29).

The author highlights the mining activity in Serra Pelada attracted many workers, particularly immigrants from Northeast Brazil, driven by their marginalized status within the Brazilian socioeconomic framework, seeking alternative means of survival and an opportunity to improve their living conditions through gold mining in Serra Pelada. This situation parallels the events of the American gold rush in the 19th century, in which migrants pursued the "California Dream" in their quest for quick wealth.

3 "BUCKSKIN BAG": THE WESTERN EXPANSION

The expansion into the American West and the emergence of alluvial gold in California, specifically in the American River, share similarities with the events of Serra Pelada, despite their occurrence almost a century and a half later.

In 1848, while working in the construction of John Sutter's ranch in the Sierra Nevada region of California, carpenter James Wilson Marshall made a remarkable discovery. He privately approached John Sutter and revealed his findings, namely two small, shimmering yellow stones he had stumbled upon while repairing Sutter's sawmill. After confirming their authenticity through nitric acid testing, Sutter determined they were indeed high-quality gold, with an at least 23-carat purity (Kölln, 2019, p. 252).

Despite the blacksmith's request for discretion, news of the discovery spread rapidly. Two weeks later, The Californian published an article reporting the abundance of gold in Sierra Nevada.
Almost overnight, cities began to emerge in California\(^1\), concomitantly with the phenomenon of "ghost towns", since people abandoned their homes with the hope of striking it rich through gold mining.

Overnight, citadels of hundreds - sometimes thousands - of people emerged, including miners, prostitutes, merchants, gamblers, common criminals, and various other groups whose professions were more accepted by the strict moral standards of the East: teachers, lawyers, and so on. After the euphoria of easy pickings on the surface, many of these mining towns were literally abandoned, turning into ghost towns (Karnal et al., 2007, p. 139).

The gold rushes in both Brazil and the United States of America attracted a significant influx of migrants from various backgrounds. California witnessed a substantial exodus of Europeans, American citizens, Hispanics, and Native Americans (Brands, 2003, pp. 43-46) and those who arrived in 1849 from other regions of the United

\(^1\) "San Francisco’s population went from an estimated 600 in early 1848 to over 20,000 in 1849". Available at: https://museumsrv.org/post-1179/. Accessed on July 4, 2023. Considering the total population of the 19th century, the numbers presented are significant.
States became known as Forty-Niners, whereas foreign immigration, including Chinese immigrants from Asia, intensified (Brands, 2003, pp. 69-71; Grant, 2014, p. 237).

The population boom resulting from those gold rush events in both countries led to a fusion of cultures, histories, and languages, giving rise to a unique lexicon associated with emerging economic activity. Such a phenomenon can be referred to as "lexical effervescence," which highlights language's rapid and dynamic development within those contexts.

4 THE LEXICAL EFFERVESCENCE

Due to a large and diverse population involved in the gold rush events, the emergence of a new lexicon specific to the mining activity was inevitable. Mining is a transformative force in the regions or cities where it takes place, influencing economy, culture, and society. Its significance for the localities is it can give rise to entire cities within days or cause them to suddenly disappear (Guanaes, 2001, pp. 71–72).

Wanderley (2019, p. 115) describes gold rush as a remarkable migratory movement characterized by a mass displacement of individuals seeking resource-rich frontier regions. Such migration extends beyond the destination locality and assumes regional, national, and transnational significance. Although its flows often originate from other regions within the country or even from foreign countries, settlements within a resource-rich region can also generate migratory movements. In significant gold rush events, the mobilization of populations transcends political boundaries, attracting Europeans and enslaved Africans to the westward expansion in both American and Brazilian contexts. In other words, population migration in response to an unexpected gold discovery follows a similar pattern throughout human history, regardless of geographic location. Therefore, it can be inferred that similar socio-historical linguistic behaviors will occur under comparable conditions, even in different countries. Building upon this observation, Pagotto (2018) elucidated the process of interaction between economic activity and linguistic functioning:

The relationship between economy and sociolinguistic functioning needs to be clarified, even though it is sometimes assumed to be or ignored as irrelevant.
Since economic processes are fundamental to how societies are constituted, they are crucial to how sociolinguistic processes and linguistic change occur within social functioning. (p. 54).

The excerpt highlights the distinctive linguistic interaction in the intense mining activity, in which a specific lexicon is developed and defined, and emphasizes all individuals are referred to as miners in the mining context, whereas other professions are not recognized. Such linguistic self-definition and self-delimitation reflect the unique dynamics and sense of belonging within the mining community.

The discussion underscores the interplay between economic activities and linguistic practices, indicating economic transformations shape a society's sociolinguistic processes and linguistic changes. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for recognizing the interconnectedness of economic and social dynamics and their impact on language.

The quote from the movie "Serra Pelada - The Legend of the Gold Mountain" exemplifies the linguistic self-definition within the mining context, where individuals are identified solely as miners, reinforcing their sense of camaraderie and belonging.

Overall, the excerpt underscores the importance of understanding the sociolinguistic dynamics influenced by economic activities and highlights the unique linguistic features that emerge within specific contexts, such as the mining environment.

This new center of economic activity enables a new "boiling" or "linguistic effervescence," as defined by Pagotto (2018):

By "boiling" or "linguistic effervescence," I understand those linguistic situations in which particular economic processes give rise to transient societies, often resulting from the migration of speakers from different languages or dialects. Such situations can lead to highly accelerated but also volatile linguistic dynamics. Furthermore, all this boiling can cease when the motivation for human gathering ceases. In more recent periods, this would be the case of the Serra Pelada gold rush at its peak. (p. 59-60 [emphasis in the original]).

Once again, Pagotto's passage (2018) is enlightening, since migrating speakers from different dialects to a specific location for a particular economic activity have significant linguistic impacts, such as "linguistic effervescence." This boiling, coupled with the determination everyone entering to work in the mining field becomes a miner,
leads to the adoption, by the miners themselves, of specific vocabulary associated with that activity for two main reasons, namely mastery of the work technique and a sense of belonging to that new microcosm.

The California Gold Rush witnessed a significant influx of people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, all seeking opportunities for wealth. Such a mixture of speakers from different languages and dialects resulted in an intense linguistic dynamic characterized by interaction, mutual influence, and development of specific forms of communication.

Within the context of mining and gold rush, "lexical effervescence" refers to the rapid and intense emergence of new terms and expressions specific to gold extraction activities. During those periods, a linguistic explosion occurred, since the arrival of miners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds led to the creation and adoption of a unique and specialized vocabulary for describing mining practices, tools, and experiences related to gold mining. This "lexical effervescence" was driven by the need for effective communication among miners and reflects the linguistic dynamics resulting from intense social and cultural interactions in those contexts.

However, such linguistic effervescence can be volatile and temporary, as in the case of the Serra Pelada gold mine in a more recent period. The intensity and linguistic transformations associated with the gold rush can cease when the driving force behind the influx of people ends. In such cases, a decrease in gold extraction activity or a reduction in the region's population can lead to a decline in both diversity and linguistic dynamics observed during the gold rush, similarly to the emergence of "ghost towns" in the American West.

When the "human anthill" of Serra Pelada dispersed, the lexical framework was mobilized by speakers in moments related to that specific economic activity, i.e., gold mining or the gold miner. Such a lexical vocabulary is still remembered; in this sense, a specific lexicon is also permeable.

This research demonstrates "boroca" did not remain confined to the Serra Pelada gold mine in the southeast of Pará, but spread with the garimpeiros (gold miners) who were there throughout Brazil, extending from Pará to Rio de Janeiro and even reaching
Rio Grande do Sul, in all regions where some mining activity had been established. The same occurred with "buckskin bag," taking into account the historical and social differences and the nearly one and a half centuries separating the emergence of the two “Gold Rushes” in the United States of America and in Brazil.

Towards illustrating both occurrences and frequency of the term "boroca" originated from the Serra Pelada gold mine, Graph 1 shows it had a limited usage prior to the "Serra Pelada" event. A peak in the frequency of occurrences was observed in the 1980s, followed by a decline immediately after the definitive closure of the mining area in the 1990s.

Graph 1: Occurrences of "boroca" in the Hemeroteca da Biblioteca Nacional

The graph shows the behavior of the word over time. The first two occurrences are different – the first is the name of a character in a narrative text and the second is a person's surname. Until the 1980s, the term oscillated between being a nickname, a person's surname, or the name of an animal, until finally reaching the definition identified by this research as a synonym for bag, suitcase, satchel, i.e., a more specific use given during the mining activity period.

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on data provided by the Hemeroteca da Biblioteca Nacional².

A long article entitled “The Gold of Serra Pelada”, produced by José Nêumanne Pinto, introduced the "boroca" of the garimpo to the whole Brazil, considering the word traveled from Serra Pelada, in the interior of Pará state, to a newspaper article in Rio de Janeiro as part of the essentially technical language of the garimpo.

Figure 2: "The Gold of Serra Pelada", by José Nêumanne Pinto - Jornal do Brasil (RJ), 1980.

A tiracolo, uma bolsa de couro. É a boroca, artigo disputado pelos garimpeiros para a guarda mais segura de seus objetos pessoais, enquanto cavam o solo rico do Morro da Babilônia. Agamenon Severo tem um sócio que viaja frequentemente para São Paulo, onde compra as borocas, transportando-as numa C-10, até o garimpo. O outro sócio ajuda a vender as bolsas e, quando o estoque está para acabar, nova viagem é feita ao centro de compras da primitiva sociedade limitada dos três maranhenses, que também pertencem à mesma família. O que viaja, por exemplo, é seu cunhado. No fim do mês, cada um tem mais de Cr$ 100 mil livres, em média.


Over the shoulder, a leather bag. It is the "boroca," an article highly sought after by the gold miners for the safer keeping of personal belongings while they dig the rich soil of Morro da Babilônia. Agamenon Severo took on a partner who frequently travels to São Paulo, where he purchases the "borocas" and transports them in a C-10 truck to the mining site. The other partner helps sell the bags and, when the stock is reduced, they make a new trip to the shopping center of the primitive limited company owned by the three Maranhenses, who are members of the same family. As an example, the one who travels is his brother-in-law. At the end of the month, each one has over Cr$ 100,000 on average.

Similarly, the term "buckskin bag" experienced a significant increase in the 1840s, and, in the 1850s, its occurrence in American newspapers exponentially rose. After the California Gold Rush, other "gold fevers" were reported in South Dakota, Colorado, and Alaska. The search for gold along the Rocky Mountains kept the term prominent in American newspapers during the second half of the 19th century, as shown in Graph 2.
The word "buckskin" is derived from Old English "būc," meaning "buck" (male goat), and "skinny," meaning "skin." Originally, "buckskin" referred to the skin of a male goat, which was used in clothing and accessories, and later, described a yellowish leather color resembling the skin of a buck. The word "bag" comes from Old English "bēg" and has Germanic origins. It is a generic term that describes a sack or pouch for carrying objects, according to etymological dictionaries:

buck (n.1)  "male deer," c. 1300, earlier "male goat;" from Old English bucca "male goat," from Proto-Germanic *bukkon (source also of Old Saxon buck, Middle Dutch boc, Dutch bok, Old High German boc, German Buck, Old Norse bokkr), perhaps from a PIE root *bhugo (source also of Avestan buza "buck, goat," Armenian buc "lamb"), but some speculate that it is from a lost pre-Germanic language. Barnhart says Old English buc "male deer," listed in some sources, is a "ghost word or scribal error." The Germanic term (in a sense, "he-goat") was borrowed in French as bouc. (Harper, 2001-2023, Disponível em: https://www.etymonline.com/word/buck#etymonline_v_17199. Acesso em: 10 jul. 2023)

In Old English, "buck" originally referred to a "male goat", denoted explicitly by the word "bucca." Over time, its meaning expanded to including a "male deer." The word has roots in Proto-Germanic *bukkon, which also influenced related terms in other Germanic languages such as Old Saxon, Middle Dutch, Dutch, Old High German, German, and Old Norse. The Proto-Indo-European root *bhugo may be connected, as seen in Avestan and Armenian languages. However, there is speculation that the term may have originated from a lost pre-Germanic language. The Old English word "buc," listed as "male deer" in some sources, is considered a "ghost word or scribal error." The Germanic term was borrowed into French as "bouc" in the sense of a "he-goat."

Let us examine how the term "buckskin" is constructed from the word "buck":

buckskin (n.)  c. 1300, "skin of a buck," from buck (n.1) + skin (n.). The meaning "kind of soft leather made from buckskin" was used in 1793. Formerly much used for clothing by Native Americans and frontiersmen, the word was a nickname for Continental troops in the American Revolution. (Harper, 2001-2023, Disponível em: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=buckskin+bag. Acesso em: 10 jul. 2023)
“Buckskin” refers to the skin of a buck, a male deer. It emerged approximately in the year 1300 and combined "buck" and "skin." By 1793, it began to denote a particular type of soft leather made from the skin of a buck. Historically, such durable and pliable leather was extensively used for clothing by Native Americans and frontiersmen. Notably, during the American Revolutionary War, the term "buckskin" became a nickname for Continental troops, possibly due to their attire or association with the rugged frontier lifestyle.

Graph 2 shows the occurrences of the word throughout the 19th century, focusing on the post-Gold Rush period that originated in California and spread across the West Coast of the United States.

Graph 2: Frequency of the term "buckskin bag" on the Library of Congress website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800-1809</td>
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<td>1810-1819</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1870-1879</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1880-1889</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-1899</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on data provided by the Library of Congress.

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3 The newspaper “The Californian” is not included in the statistics because it is not available in the digital archives of the Library of Congress.

4 Available at: https://www.loc.gov/newspapers/?q=%22buckskin+bag%22&dates=1800%2F1899&dl=page&sb=date. It was accessed on July 4, 2023.
According to the graph, the frequency significantly increased throughout the chronological progression, reaching its zenith in the 1890s, with a total of 1,259 documented occurrences, indicating the term was extensively used and referenced in newspapers during the latter part of the 19th century. The surge in occurrences during 1890 can be directly attributed to the momentous discovery of gold in the Yukon Valley, Alaska.

The image below refers to a narrative in "The Mitchell capital" (Mitchell, Dakota [S.D.]), March 25, 1892. The gold discoveries in South Dakota took place between 1876 and 1877, when, as seen in Graph 2, the "buckskin bag" occurrences were starting to increase in American newspapers.

The term "buckskin" indicates the material used in the bag, which is considered valuable due to its association with deer hide. Therefore, using a "buckskin bag" highlights the precious and significant nature of the items within it, representing gold's economic value in commercial transactions during the gold rush and demonstrating the bag's usefulness in that context as a personal belonging of an American miner.

A comparison of the two graphs illustrates the impact of gold extraction as an economic activity on the dissemination of terms "boroca" and "buckskin bag" in Brazil and in the United States, respectively. The "Gold Rush" events and the discovery of ore in "Serra Pelada" exhibit comparable linguistic behaviors, despite their considerable
temporal, geographical, and linguistic disparities, underscoring a profound influence of economic activities on language dynamics within societies in the 19th and 20th centuries.

5 FINAL REMARKS

The investigation of the terms "boroca" and "buckskin bag" has revealed their lexical significance within gold mining regions, specifically Serra Pelada, in Brazil, and the western United States during the "Gold Rush" era. They became synonymous with a bag within the context of intensive mining activities and widely used in those regions. Analyses of the occurrences of "boroca" in the Hemeroteca da Biblioteca Nacional database from 1900 to 2000 and "buckskin bag" in the newspaper corpora of the Library of Congress have provided insights into the usage patterns of the terms over time. This lexical research enriches the understanding of the intricate relationship between economic activities and language development, underscoring the role of language in shaping and evolving within economic contexts.

The commencement of the Serra Pelada gold mine in 1980 marked a significant milestone in Brazilian history. The influx of workers, primarily immigrants from the Northeast region, was motivated by the pursuit of better living conditions and the prospects of rapid wealth accumulation. Those predominantly male miners from several parts of the country were enticed by the legends of abundant gold in the area. The mining activities at Serra Pelada provided an alternative means of survival for those marginalized by the socioeconomic processes in Brazil, thus resembling the gold rush phenomenon in the United States during the 19th century. The underlying objective in both cases was to achieve the "California Dream" and attain substantial wealth quickly.

The "Gold Rush" events in California and Serra Pelada sparked mass migrations and triggered intense economic activities, giving rise to a distinct lexicon associated with mineral extraction. The sudden discovery of gold in those regions led to a rapid emergence of cities and abandonment of homes as individuals pursued the elusive promise of instant wealth. Apart from internal migrations in California, a significant influx of foreign immigrants, including Europeans and Chinese, joined the pursuit of gold. Such a historical episode brought together a fusion of cultures, histories, and
languages, resulting in a unique and characteristic lexicon specific to the economic activities of gold mining, thus exemplifying an authentic "lexical effervescence" from those transformative events.

This study has highlighted remarkable similarities between Serra Pelada gold rush and California gold rush regarding mass migrations, economic transformations, and sociolinguistic impacts. Both events triggered a surge in population, since people from diverse backgrounds flocked to those regions, giving rise to a distinct linguistic effervescence within such contexts. The lexicon developed during those periods reflects the mastery of mining techniques and a sense of belonging to the mining community. Although the intensity of linguistic dynamics may diminish in function of the decline of gold mining activities, specific terms and expressions associated with mining can persist and find usage within mining-related contexts. This study has demonstrated the enduring influence of those historical events in shaping a unique lexicon and its dissemination to regions beyond the original mining sites.
REFERENCE


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS NEWSPAPERS. (n.d.). Search "buckskin bag". Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/newspapers/?q=%22buckskin+bag%22&dates=1800%2F1899&dl=page&sb=date


