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Regimes Of Voice: Humor, Written Accent, And the Construction of National Belonging in Argentina's Print Public Sphere (1900–1920)

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Abstract

This paper examines how early twentieth-century Argentine print culture shaped national belonging through the comic representation of foreign speech. Focusing on mass-circulation newspapers and illustrated magazines between 1900 and 1920, it analyzes the graphic rendering of accent as a recurring device that made certain voices audible while simultaneously limiting their credibility. Rather than treating humor as a marginal or merely entertaining feature, the study approaches it as a structured practice embedded in the expanding public sphere of the Centenario period. By reproducing speech through altered spelling, exaggerated syntax, and typographic distortion, the press established hierarchies of legitimacy that distinguished normative national speech from marked forms of difference. The article argues that these regimes of voice did not simply exclude newcomers; they integrated them through classification, producing differentiated forms of belonging. Drawing on close textual analysis of print materials alongside contextual reconstruction of debates over immigration, citizenship, and cultural sovereignty, the paper demonstrates how laughter operated as a mechanism of boundary-making in a society redefining itself as modern and national. The Argentine case is presented as a historically grounded laboratory for understanding how media environments participate in the production of audibility, credibility, and symbolic inclusion in modern societies.

Keywords: Audibility; Boundary-Making; Mass Print Culture; Migration; Public Sphere