

REVIEW

Linguistic and social heterogeneity in the classroom: reflections for teaching based on science



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ABSTRACT

The conference delivered by Professor Doctor Carlos Alberto Faraco had as main objective to present the bases of a Pedagogy of Linguistic Variation. The speaker argued that the Portuguese Language Teacher needs to work on the phenomenon of linguistic variation not in a “folkloric and cosmetic” way, as something that occurs only in rural speech, but to lead students to understand that language is an essentially heterogeneous reality and this heterogeneity is functional and intrinsic to human languages, being conditioned by social, geographic, historical and cultural factors, that is, the teacher has to teach the mother tongue not based on dogmas, but on science.

RESUMO

A conferência proferida pelo professor Doutor Carlos Alberto Faraco teve como objetivo primordial apresentar as bases de uma Pedagogia da Variação Linguística. O conferencista defendeu que o professor de Línguas Portuguesas precisa trabalhar o fenômeno da variação linguística não de uma forma “folclorizada e cosmética”, como algo que ocorre apenas no falar rural, mas levar os alunos a compreenderem que a língua é uma realidade essencialmente heterogênea e essa heterogeneidade é funcional e intrínseca às línguas humanas, sendo condicionada por fatores sociais,

geográficos, históricos e culturais, isto é, o professor tem que realizar um ensino de língua materna não pautado em dogmas, mas na ciência.

KEYWORDS

Linguistic variation. Portuguese Language Teaching. Sociolinguistics.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Varição linguística. Ensino de Língua Portuguesa. Sociolinguística.

Introduction

This review discusses the conference promoted by the Brazilian Linguistics Association (ABRALIN), aired on May 8, 2020, at 7 p.m., on YouTube streaming platform, as one of the activities in the ABRALIN LIVE event schedule. This event occurred during the ongoing period of social distancing due to the new coronavirus pandemic. The conference entitled “Bases for a Pedagogy of Linguistic Variation” was lectured by Professor Carlos Alberto Faraco and moderated by Professor Raquel Meister Ko. Freitag, chair at UFS and vice-president of ABRALIN. Faraco is a retired professor at UFPR and holds a Doctorate in Linguistics from the University of Salford (1982) and among his research interests is Portuguese Language teaching in Basic Education.

An ideal conception of language, despite scientific advances in the field of linguistic studies (and in Sociolinguistics field more specifically), is still prevalent in schools: an ideal of a homogeneous language, which exists only “in a certain social imagery”, as Faraco points out. To break up with this view, he proposes a necessary viewpoint for a “linguistic variation pedagogy”, in which the phenomenon of variation ought to be inserted in Portuguese language classroom, but not in a “folkloric and cosmetic” way. That is to say, such phenomenon should not be seen as something that happens only in the speech of countryside individuals. The lecturer adds up to the discussion that if one is to treat linguistic heterogeneity this way, linguistic prejudice will be perpetuated. So it is preferable for the teacher to leave this kind of treatment out of their classes. Faraco advocates for a mother tongue teaching that develops students’ reading and writing skills and other interrelated pedagogies are required to this end: a pedagogy of orality, reading, text production and grammar, all intertwined by linguistic variation.

The pedagogy of linguistic variation aims to lead students to understand that language is an essentially heterogeneous reality and such heterogeneity is functional and intrinsic to human languages, as well as conditioned by social, historical and cultural factors. Faraco also proposes a language teaching based not on dogmas, but on science. Thus, it is up for the teacher to show students that language, as a social institution, reflects the diversity and contradictions present in a society which, in Brazil’s case, is deeply marked by both brutal income inequality and privilege perpetuation.

Brazilian sociolinguistic polarization legitimized, in the language perspective, social contradictions that marked the socio-history of Brazil: on the one hand, the privileged linguistic norm and on the other the Portuguese spoken by socially marginalized peoples (LUCCHESI, 2015).

As for Faraco, a language teaching based on the above-mentioned pedagogy should provide students with a portrait of the Brazilian sociolinguistic reality and lead them to understand the socio-historical factors that made Brazil develop a validated linguistic norm and a stigmatized one. In this perspective, he advocates for a teaching that is no longer based on decontextualized transmission of anachronistic and artistic grammatical rules, but one that is based on interdisciplinary linguistic education, in which teachers have the task of explaining the socio-historical-cultural circumstances that led to the legitimation of one linguistic norm over others.

Faraco also points out that a consistent understanding of the variation is made up of an exploration of multiple factors conditioning heterogeneity, e.g. demographic history. This means that teachers need to present the students the extent to which this "broken society" and the linguistic implications of its partition have been historically formed. In this context, it is peremptory for students to understand that the Portuguese colonial enterprise, which lasted for almost four centuries in Brazil, took form through exploitation of slave forced labor and extermination of autochthonous population.

In this historical circumstance, the Portuguese language was acquired in an unsystematic way, being deeply modified, nativized, with marks of intense linguistic contacts. According to Mattos e Silva (2004), this variety, which has carried the effects of its precarious acquisition process, is the historical antecedent of the popular Brazilian Portuguese.

After the official abolition of slavery in 1888, the biggest part of former enslaved people were not assisted by Brazilian governments through reparation policies, such as access to education, having most of them to live under poverty and marginalization. It was a reality had that lasted for a long time until some public policies came to exist thanks to the government of former President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva. Among those successful public policies are the quota system for blacks and poor people to have access to universities, as well as minimum income distribution programs (such as the worldly renowned *Bolsa Família*) and the expansion and internalization of higher education (like the creation of new universities and federal institutes, as well as permanence programs).

Colonization was such a big enterprise, in its multiple façades, because it colonized, above all, the minds of the colonized ones, leading them to recognize the colonizers and all that came from Portugal as "civilized" and "worthy of admiration". This is evident in the linguistic level because there is an appreciation, in the school spaces and in social imagery, of a grammatical tradition that reflects the European linguistic norms and also because there is linguistic prejudice, which is nothing more but the reflection of a society marked by a enslaved mentality that stands out against popular linguistic variants.

According to Faraco's thinking, a pedagogical practice based on the pedagogy of linguistic variation needs to foster the understanding that linguistic heterogeneity is a mirror of social heterogeneity. Thus, Portuguese language classes have three objectives to fulfill with regard to linguistic variation: i) to know and understand linguistic variations; (ii) to understand and respect those variations;

iii) to understand and use them interchangeably. Still according to him, due to socio-historical factors, these objectives face barriers to their realization and a pedagogy that recognizes variability as legitimate is looked at as utopia. To explain what he means, he mentions the famous controversy surrounding the textbook "Para uma vida melhor" ("For a better life"), in which he recognizes linguistic variants not as socially prestigious or functional and states, from a scientific perspective, that it was legitimated and there is no "error" in using them.

Commonly, there is a false understanding that sociolinguists, when defending a teaching based on scientific evidence and not on a normatist view, are in favor of something like "anything is possible". That premise is untrue, because what is proposed is a non-artificial linguistic norm of reference, which does not lead Brazilians, including the literate ones, to a low linguistic self-esteem motivated by the perception of an anachronistic grammatical norm that does not reflect the actual use, either in speech or in monitored writing. The linguistic standard of reference that should be taught in Basic Education would have to be related to the Brazilian cultured linguistic norm, that is, to the linguistic uses established by the traditional media vehicles of the country. In a society marked by written literacy, schools have the role of getting students to know and to use this prestigious variety safely.

About linguistic research aimed at guiding the teaching of Portuguese language in Brazil based on a real reference standard, Professor Faraco cited the works of Professor Silvia Rodrigues Vieira, professor at UFRJ, with emphasis on her recently published book "Variação, gêneros textuais e ensino de Português: da norma culta à norma padrão" ("Variation, text genres and Portuguese teaching: from cult linguistic norm to the standard one"), in which she gathers results of scientific works developed by her and members of her research group (VIEIRA; LIMA, 2019). In the compendium, she accounts for the necessity of not considering speech and writing as a dichotomous reality. Otherwise, she supports in the book the fundamental consideration of the existence of several genres, both speech and writing ones. In this sense, two priorities are highlighted in her work: on the one hand, the systematization of the behavior of varieties according to the speech-writing composite continuum and stylistic monitoring; and on the other, the development of methodologies approaching rules of variability in the classroom.

By listing the aforementioned continuum and mapping morphosyntactic phenomena in various contemporary speech and writing genres precisely, it is possible to achieve generalizations that allow for a better description of variants in the spaces of two language modalities in their various genres, making reflections that allow to comply with the linguistic norm of reference used in various styles. Thus, the qualitative leap relating objectives listed in the Norma Culta Urbana Project (Project NURC) is evident, which, although it also sought to detect the linguistic norm actually used by highly educated people in Brazil, did not consider the diversity of styles in both language modalities.

With the dissemination of the conference, on an open and interactive digital platform such as YouTube, ABRALIN offers to its partners and the general public one of the best reflections on the problems that involve teaching Portuguese to native speakers in Brazil, especially with regard to aspects that involve the mastery of the linguistic norm of reference. Although the theme occupies the agenda of educators and linguists in Brazil, it remains at stake on academic debates and still

needs attention at the theoretical and methodological level. The contribution given by Professor Faraco was very significant, for two main reasons: it placed the issue on solid socio-historical-cultural grounds and drew attention to the need for the linguistic norm of reference to be based on empirical results, which, after more than forty years of sociolinguistic research in Brazil, can already be considered reasonable, especially with regard to urban linguistic uses.

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