How to talk about the bases of the linguistic variation pedagogy in a context without a reference standard?

In this review, we will talk about the video conference entitled “Bases for a Pedagogy of Linguistic Variation” given by the author Carlos Faraco, which took place on May 8, 2020. The author addresses several points of extreme importance, which need more and more attention by Portuguese language teachers. He explains his teaching vision through the so-called “Pedagogy of linguistic variation” and how it should be present in the classroom in a scientific way. Faraco also mentions the importance of working with the students’ sociocultural background and the need to break common sense and myths of language, which end up being reproduced by generations of teachers. Thus, we show our point of view according to the author’s speech.

RESUMO
Nesta resenha, iremos falar sobre a vídeo conferência intitulada “Bases para uma Pedagogia da Variação Linguística” ministrada pelo autor Carlos Faraco, que ocorreu em 08 de maio de 2020. O autor aborda diversos
pontos de extrema importância, que necessitam cada vez mais de atenção por parte dos professores de língua portuguesa. Ele explica sua visão de ensino através da chamada “Pedagogia da variação linguística” e de como ela deve estar presente em sala de aula de forma científica. Faraco cita também a importância de se trabalhar com a bagagem sociocultural dos alunos e a necessidade de quebrar o senso comum e mitos da linguagem, que acabam reproduzidos por gerações de professores. Mostramos, assim, nosso ponto de vista de acordo com a fala do autor.

KEYWORDS
Norm. Teaching. Linguistic variation.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

On May 8, 2020, at the Abralin ao Vivo⁰ event, Carlos Faraco approached, in sociolinguistic studies, linguistic variation and challenges for teaching Portuguese, in a conference entitled “Bases for a Pedagogy of Linguistic Variation”.

Carlos Alberto Faraco, professor (retired) of the Federal University of Parana, has several publications, among which Norma culta brasileira: desatando alguns nós and Para conhecer norma linguística, this co-authored with Ana Maria Zilles.

In this review, we intend, in addition to commenting on the main points highlighted by Faraco, to reinforce the urgent need for a renovation in Portuguese classes (as L1), since, as the mediator, Raquel Freitag, emphasized, there are old reflections on the topic that unfortunately still are very current.

The professor begins the speech by explaining that the pedagogy of linguistic variation must be correlated to the pedagogies of orality, reading, textual production, grammar etc. When assuming them, the teachers must treat them clearly and consistently. Faraco also mentions the danger of dealing with variation in a folkloric and cosmetic way, claiming that this reinforces common sense. Variation, like all linguistic aspects, must be worked on scientifically.

We agree with this point of view, as we believe that the scientific perspective contributes to the students' knowledge, as well as creativity and interpretive ability, since, with scientific contact, they will be much more resistant to common sense.

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To work with linguistic variation at school, Faraco determines three objectives: (i) to know and to understand the variation; (ii) to understand and to respect the variation and; (iii) to understand and to move safely through linguistic heterogeneity.

To the first objective, he adds that understanding the language we speak is understanding the society we live in. This opens space for transdisciplinary work with subjects such as Sociology and History. In our perspective, work with linguistic variation is also applicable in disciplines that do not necessarily incorporate the humanities, such as mathematics, for example, if we think in a sociolinguistic research work in which the data appear illustrated in graphs or tables.

The second objective approaches the view that the way each person speaks reflects their sociocultural background. Therefore, working with respect in linguistic terms also helps to the development of respect in other areas.

Achieving these two goals, however, is not an easy task. We know that many teachers are not able to talk about linguistic variation, which may be the result of a lack of personal open mind to the topic. Some teachers defend common sense that there is a right way to speak and that everything that is different from it is not language. The view of language as a science is also ignored by some university professors, which may be related to the fact that a part of our courses, instead of awakening to systematic criticism, has served more to reinforce the worst in the common sense. Faraco points this issue as a possibility for future debate. A most urgent debate, we believe.

It is common to hear Portuguese language teachers reproduce speeches in which they feel sorry about the “murder of the Portuguese language”. Bagno (2007) calls this type of manifestation “tradição da queixa” (tradition of the complaint) and emphasizes that the belief in this pattern, very distant from the reality of the uses, foments this tradition in all countries and historical moments. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that the mention of linguistic heterogeneity is severely criticized by the school, parents and the media.

About this, Faraco recalls the controversy that occurred in 2011 about the textbook "For a better life" that approached linguistic variation. This controversy gave way to normative grammarians to defend that the discussion about linguistic variation should not come out of the universities. Bechara gave an interview in which he says that "the defense that was made of this book stems from a mistake. They are confusing a problem of a pedagogical order, which concerns schools, with an old theoretical discussion of sociolinguistics, which recognizes and values popular language (VEJA, 2011, p. 21, our translation). This position reveals inconsistency, since at school there is social heterogeneity (therefore linguistic) that must be known, understood and respected. The defense of a standard norm, as Faraco points out, is flawed, as we do not know the characteristics of this norm.

To support his discussion, Faraco returns to Bakhtin, who calls "Galilean consciousness" what perceives heterogeneity as a fact and "Ptolemaic consciousness", which does not perceive heterogeneity. Faraco explained that it is necessary to overcome Ptolemaic consciousness and adopt, in the pedagogy of linguistic variation, Galilean consciousness. However, adopting a pedagogy of linguistic variation is a radical revolution that is only possible in very specific socio–historical situations.
Currently, doing this seems like a utopia. Gradually, we must use scientific contributions for counterpoint and debate, as there is a common belief that, by showing support for science and defending work with linguistic variation, we are defending that in the language “anything is possible”.

To respond to this thought, Faraco takes up the third objective and adds reflections on linguistic monitoring, which concerns the way in which each speaker adapts to communicative situations. He proposes to build, inside the pedagogy of linguistic variation, a pedagogy of the reference language norm (a term to escape from the terms norma culta – ‘cult’ norm – and norma padrão – related to standard language).

Faraco defends that the reference language norm (standard language) should be related to the Brazilian standard spoken Portuguese (spoken ‘cult’ norm), but unfortunately it is not a reality in Brazil. The reference standard is still artificial and anachronistic.

According to Faraco, there is no conflict between respecting differences and promoting the teaching of the reference standard. Thus, resuming the three objectives mentioned initially, he concludes that the first two are in the domain of utopia. It is also not easy to give conditions of access and mastery of standard Brazilian Portuguese and, therefore, to the standardized variety of monitored writing, as it is not possible to work with the reference standard without placing in the framework of linguistic variation. The student needs to understand the varieties and want to appropriate the reference standard.

Faraco quotes some researches about linguistic variation in textbooks and ENEM (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio) done by Marcos Bagno. In these researches, he verifies 21 different terms to refer to the same phenomenon of normalization of language. If there is no agreement about norma de referência/norma padrão, what should be taught then? How to build a pedagogy of the reference language norm if we do not even know its characteristics?

To enlarge a little bit the talk and start answering some of audience questions about Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC), it is important to mention that this terminological confusion is seen in this official document, as in the following quote, in which it is possible to see that “standard language” is considered a linguistic variety: “[...] studies in theoretical and metalinguistic nature – about language, literature, standard language and other linguistic varieties – should not, at this level, being taken as an aim itself” (BRASIL, 2019, p. 71).

This lack of an agreed normative direction ends up giving space to the normative quackery that results in huge losses. The terminological confusion creates impediments to achieve the scholar goals, so, Faraco points as an urgent task to universities the undoing of this confusion.

2 An interesting conception is “camaleão linguístico”. You can see more in Faraco and Zilles (2017).

3 To a better discussion of this terminology of norma-padrão, norma culta, norma popular e norma curta, we recommend the following texts: Faraco (2008), Bagno (2007), Faraco and Zilles (2017).

4 National Highschool Exam – An annual test that high school students have in Brazil.

5 A document that guides regular teaching in Brazil.
He suggests that a development of a flexible concept of reference norm is taken into account, such as the building of an empiric agreement to fill the insurance of the usage of terms, that bother linguists and teachers.

Finally, Faraco highlights the purpose of the book “Variação, gêneros textuais e ensino de Português: da norma culta à norma-padrão”, organized by Vieira e Lima (2019). The researches show the importance of working on language through the continuous speech-writing, rural-urban and the linguistic monitoring through textual genres that contextualize the language. Doing it is an advance because it reveals the stylistic diversity inside the ‘cult’ norm and gives us parameters to the creation of the reference language norm that is sustainable and does not disdain the variation.

The normative tradition in schools is based on the mistake culture and to escape of this is a utopic dream, but Faraco instigates us to keep dreaming and working to achieve the goal!

The conference is available online. We recommend it to researchers, teachers and students that, like us, dream with new ways to the mother language classes.

REFERENCES


6 To a better discussion about continuous of stylistic monitoring, urbanization and oral literacy, see Bortoni-Ricardo (2004).