REVIEW

For a sociolinguistic oriented teaching of Portuguese

Victor Renê Andrade SOUZA
Federal University of Sergipe (UFS)

Vitória Lais Santos SILVA
Federal University of Sergipe (UFS)

Lucas Santos SILVA
Federal University of Sergipe (UFS)

ABSTRACT

This text presents a critical and collaborative review of the lecture Bases towards a pedagogy of linguistic variation given by the linguist Carlos Alberto Faraco (UFPR) and mediated by Professor Raquel Meister Ko. Freitag (UFS) at the ABRALIN AO VIVO – LINGUISTS ONLINE, which was held by the Brazilian Linguistics Association, Abralin. Faraco argued for the bases towards a pedagogy of linguistic variation (FARACO, 2008; ZILLES; FARACO, 2015). The lecturer discussed basic sociolinguistic concepts as the notion of linguistic norms. He approached the principles and objectives of this pedagogic proposal, pointing out the difficulties of implementing it in the teaching of Portuguese language at elementary education. He also highlighted the advances in the pedagogic proposals based on a pedagogy of linguistic variation.

RESUMO

O conferencista discutiu conceitos sociolinguísticos basilares, como a noção de normas linguísticas; abordou os princípios e objetivos da proposta pedagógica, apontando as dificuldades da implementação no ensino da língua portuguesa na educação básica; e destacou os avanços nas propos- tas pedagógicas baseadas numa pedagogia da variação linguística.

KEYWORDS

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Studies about linguistic variation are not in their early stages of development in Brazil, and a teaching proposal towards linguistic diversity is not new. Brazilian Sociolinguistics has a great amount of descriptive studies that systematize and explain variation (cf. PAIVA; SCHERRE, 1999; SCHERRE, 2012; ABRAÇADO; MARTINS, 2015; FREITAG, 2016). Linguistic diversity is already present in the official documents of public educational policies (cf. FREITAG, 2015; ANDRADE; FREITAG, 2016; CONCEIÇÃO; PEREIRA, 2018). However, the great gap is to make the understanding of the linguistic variation go beyond the academic environment and effectively reach the Portuguese classrooms. As an alternative to this challenge, Professor Carlos Alberto Faraco proposes the basis for a pedagogy of linguistic variation (FARACO, 2008; ZILLES; FARACO, 2015), theme of his lecture that happened on May 8th, 2020 at ABRALIN AO VIVO – LINGUISTIS ONLINE held by the Brazilian Linguistics Association.

The pedagogy of linguistic variation supported by Faraco is close to the Educational Sociolinguistics proposed by Professor Stella Maris Bortoni-Ricardo (2004). It is Sociolinguistics for educational purposes as the one first developed by Labov (1972), in the book Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular. According to Faraco, it means thinking about a teaching of Portuguese that is sociolinguistically and empirically well informed, which presupposes a “non-folkloric” and “superficial” approach to variation.

There are no languages out of the human societies. The linguistic diversity is a reflection of the social organization. Faraco argues that understanding the heterogeneity of the language is understanding the society we live in, its history, its socioeconomic and cultural face, as remarks Dante Lucchesi (2015), in the book Language and Divided Societies: the polarization of Sociolinguistics in Brazil (Língua e Sociedades Partidas: a polarização sociolinguística no Brasil). Only from this understanding is it possible to develop pedagogical practices which catch students’ attention and guide
them towards an attitude of linguistic respect as they acquire the social history, the miscegenation of peoples and the impact of these factors on linguistic structure.

In this sense, according to Farraco, it is Portuguese Language teachers’ responsibility to develop a pedagogy of linguistic variation integrated with the other dimensions of language teaching, aiming at three broad objectives: i) knowing and understanding linguistic variation; ii) understanding and respecting linguistic variation; and iii) understanding and walking safely through the linguistic variation universe.

However, Faraco recognizes that taking this path is not easy and indicates the intrinsic challenges in the attainment of these objectives. The consistent knowledge of linguistic variation is shortly spread among Portuguese language teachers and among students of Letters, since they often graduate without sufficiently understanding about linguistic variation or even critically overcoming social stigmas, going against the third of the objectives. Since the Abralin ao Vivo – Linguists online has a specialized target audience, questions made in the chat during Faraco’s live lecture signals a sort of failures in the teacher education towards the teaching of mother tongue: “When an adult speak ‘I listen* (eu ouvo) can we consider it as linguistic variation?”; “Could you explain if an adult wrongly uses a word (in grammatical and semantic sphere), even when having access to grammatical norms, is it deviance or variation?”; “Is it correct when a student wrongly speaks in classroom and is immediately corrected by the teacher?”

In the same direction, it is not easy to face the ordinary representations of linguistic norms based on a prescription from traditional grammar books. Faraco brings to the debate the dispute of the didactic book Towards a better life (Para uma Vida Melhor) which approached linguistic variation and was a target of criticism by the majority of means of communication in Brazil, and it gave rise to an intense debate about the teaching of Portuguese language in all spheres (LUCCHESI, 2011). In the episode, Faraco remarks that at that time a renowned grammarian stated that linguistic variation should be restricted to the academic universe because the school’s only function is to teach the standard norm. This statement is one more sample of the challenge that involves the application of a pedagogy of linguistic variation.

Faraco also criticizes the strong social imaginary that stigmatizes part of the linguistic varieties and states that our society is extremely polarized. Because of that, it is likely that the pedagogy of linguistic variation is rejected at schools since school boards, teachers, parents, and even students are immersed in the social imaginary that admonishes both linguistic and social variations. This authoritative imaginary defends that the language is homogeneous and that everyone should speak in the same way, turning the linguistic difference into an inferior feature. Thus, assuming a pedagogy of linguistic variation requires a political commitment, a sociolinguistic activism for the construction of a fair, democratic and plural society.

No variety is linguistically superior to the other, but despite not having hierarchy between these varieties based on linguistic criteria, there is a historically and socially built hierarchy between these variants. Realizing this social-historical construct is an evaluative and conceptual revolution which enables us to question and deconstruct this hierarchy. Also, it is inside this frame that Faraco defends
that it is possible to understand the existence of the reference norm suitable to certain linguistic situations and it is important to know this norm as part of the domain of the respective practices and traditions in which it is relevant. Faraco argues that there is no conflict in adopting a pedagogy of linguistic variation and the teaching of a norm. Inside the very pedagogy of linguistic variation, the professor proposes the development of a pedagogy of the reference norm – a term adopted as an alternative to the expression cult norm – in order to openly say that there is no denial of the reference norm. Therefore, the defenders of the pedagogy of linguistic variation should ensure that students, besides learning and respecting the linguistic variety, have access to the reference norm, knowing and dominating its functions and characteristics mostly in relation to the monitored writing.

However, the linguist claims that this reference norm should relate to what he calls standard spoken Portuguese, i.e., to the cult spoken norm. Faraco stresses the terminological and conceptual confusion that affects the issue of the reference norm, assuming that it is an urgent task for the universities to clear up this confusion. In addition, he signals that it has not been built a general agreement about the reference norm so far, which leaves the teachers without a safe direction to what norm must be followed and taught. For the linguist, the contradictions between the normative instruments are barely noticed by the teachers, the media, and the general public, and, this lack of a relatively consensual normative direction leaves room for what he calls “short norm”, which is an authoritative, dogmatic, inflexible discourse which has no empiric basis about language, resulting in social evaluative labels such as “this word does not exist in language X”, “it is incorrect to speak like that”. It is necessary to work towards a general agreement with basis in an empirically consistent study and to develop a flexible concept of the reference norm necessary, which means making it emerge from the practices of the standard Brazilian Portuguese.

Returning to the challenges of the Portuguese language teaching, Faraco says that the school must insure the mastery and the access to the standard spoken Brazilian Portuguese, and in this process, to the normalized variety, in other words, to the formal modality of written contemporary Brazilian Portuguese. Therefore, there is no way of working with the variety of standard Brazilian Portuguese without situating it in the wide frame of the linguistic variation.

In his final words, the linguist stresses the advances in relation to the pedagogical practices based on the pedagogy of linguistic variation, such as the proposals of Professor Silvia Rodrigues Vieira (UFRJ) (cf. VIEIRA, 2018) who jointly published with Monique Débora Alves de Oliveira Lima the e-book Variação, text genres, and the teaching of Portuguese: from the cult norm to the standard norm (Variação, gêneros textuais e ensino de português: da norma culta à norma padrão) (VIEIRA; LIMA, 2019), a book that demonstrates how it is fundamental to work with linguistic variations in the continuous proposed by Bortoni-Ricardo (2004), having different text genres as reference. Carlos Alberto Faraco ends his powerful talk claiming that the school tradition operates with rigidity and is supported by a culture of mistake and the horizon which we are opening is the one of the flexibility and of the adequacy culture.
REVISTA DA ABRALIN

REFERENCES


