

THE NOTION OF LITERACY IN SOCIOLINGUISTIC THEORY AND IN STUDIES OF PHONOLOGICAL VARIATION IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DISCUSSION OF LITERACY AND EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

A NOÇÃO DE LETRAMENTO NA TEORIA SOCIOLINGUÍSTICA E EM ESTUDOS DE VARIAÇÃO FONOLÓGICA NO PORTUGUÊS BRASILEIRO: CONTRIBUIÇÕES PARA A DISCUSSÃO SOBRE LETRAMENTO E ESCOLARIZAÇÃO NO BRASIL

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Abstract: This paper aims to discuss the use of the notion of literacy in different proposals of sociolinguistic analysis and in studies of phonological variation in Brazilian Portuguese. It adopts methodological procedures of bibliographic research (ECO, 2002 [1977]) and follows the notion of literacy by Kleiman (1995) as well as labovian sociolinguistic theories (LABOV, 1972) to select and critically appreciate the proposals of Kroch (1978), Finegan and Biber (2001), Milroy (2001), Preston (2001), Irvine (2001), Eckert (2004, 2012), Coupland (2007) and the studies of Vieira (2002) and Link (2018), among others. The study shows that literacy explains the linguistic conservatism of groups of higher social *status* in their lower proportions of application of processes occurring below the level of social consciousness. Literacy also defines a certain type of register that may be subject to variation and gives rise to certain *personae*. Education, like literacy, plays a role in the frequency and diffusion of linguistic variables and influences the valuation of variable forms used in stylistic practices and in the construction of social identities.

Keywords: Literacy; Sociolinguistics; Phonological Variation

Resumo: Este artigo discute em que medida a noção de letramento é contemplada em propostas de análise sociolinguística e em estudos de variação fonológica no português brasileiro. Emprega procedimentos metodológicos da pesquisa bibliográfica (ECO, 2002 [1977]) e fundamenta-se tanto na concepção de letramento de Kleiman (1995) quanto na perspectiva sociolinguística variacionista laboviana (LABOV, 1972) para selecionar e apreciar criticamente as propostas de Kroch (1978), Finegan e Biber (2001), Milroy (2001), Preston (2001), Irvine (2001), Eckert (2004, 2012), Coupland (2007), além dos estudos de Vieira (2002) e Link (2018), entre outros. O estudo mostra que o letramento motiva o conservadorismo do dialeto de grupos de maior *status* social a processos que ocorrem abaixo do nível da consciência social, define um certo tipo de registro passível de variação e compõe certas *personae*. A escolarização, como o letramento, tem papel na frequência e difusão das variáveis e responde pela valoração social das formas variáveis usadas em práticas estilísticas e na construção de identidades sociais.

Palavras-Chave: Letramento; Sociolinguística; Variação Fonológica

1. INTRODUCTION

Literacy (*letramento* in Portuguese), here understood as “conjunto de práticas sociais que usam a escrita enquanto tecnologia e enquanto sistema simbólico, em contextos específicos para objetivos específicos” (KLEIMAN, 1995, p. 19)¹, is not a central notion in Labovian sociolinguistics (LABOV, 1972).² In English, literacy is generally defined as the ability to read and write. That is what literacy means when the term is used in relevant sociolinguistic proposals (KROCH, 1978; FINEGAN; BIBER, 2001) specially when authors attempt to explain processes of linguistic variation and change in relation to social class. This paper aims to discuss those proposals considering the notion of literacy by Kleiman (1995). The discussion will evaluate to what extent literacy as a set of social practices mediated by writing can explain certain sociolinguistic results and behaviors.

The paper assumes that literate practices exert some influence over the abstract representation of a language as well as over the metalinguistic ability of the subjects. Abaurre (1999) claims that “a modalidade escrita é autônoma com relação à modalidade oral mas, em certas circunstâncias, pode haver uma interação entre os fatos da oralidade e as formas que assume a escrita.” (ABAURRE, 1999, p. 174).³ Abaurre’s claim predicts “leakages” of oral traits to written forms. This paper follows this hypothesis in the opposite direction: writing and social practices mediated by it may, to some extent, inform speakers how phonetic forms should be realized, as suggested by certain results of a sociolinguistic study (LINK, 2018) that conforms to the socio-anthropological tradition of investigation (ECKERT, 2000).

2. LITERACY IN SOCIOLINGUISTIC THEORY

In Labovian sociolinguistics, literacy is invoked in the discussion of variable phonological processes when social class and prestige play a role in dialect differentiation. This is what Kroch (1978) does in order to explain the mechanisms of social dialectal variation.

According to Kroch (1978), Labovian sociolinguistic studies show that social *status* (social class) and style (formal/informal) have an effect on linguistic variation, sustaining the idea that there is a relationship between linguistic innovation and prestige, whether overt or covert. Variable forms peculiar to an overtly prestigious dialect, such as the elite⁴ dialect, can spread to vernacular⁵ varieties precisely because of their prestige. Likewise, a vernacular variable can gain local (covert) prestige and be widely used in the vernacular, even if it is condemned by school language norms. Kroch (1978) points out, however, that Labovian sociolinguistic studies do not explain the fact that vernacular varieties are more susceptible than the elite dialect to phonetically conditioned processes, which generally occur below the

¹ “the set of social practices that use written language as technology and as symbolic system in specific contexts to reach specific goals.” (KLEIMAN, 1995, p. 19).

² Labovian sociolinguistics (LABOV, 1972) is oriented to the analysis of speech data to clarify the linguistic and social forces that drive variation and linguistic change. Research in this line statistically tests the relationship of a linguistic variable with structural and extralinguistic factors.

³ “the written modality is autonomous with respect to the oral modality but, in certain circumstances, there may be an interaction between the facts of orality and the forms that the writing assumes.” (ABAURRE, 1999, p. 174).

⁴ Kroch (1978) assumes the vagueness of the term ‘elite’ in ‘elite dialect’. For him, ‘elite’ seems to refer, if not to the characteristic dialect of a dominant economic and/or political class, to the dialect of professional representatives of the dominant culture, that is, of the elite, in professional areas such as business administration, medicine and the media.

⁵ In sociolinguistics, ‘vernacular’ corresponds to the variety of speech first acquired by individuals, “therefore, the most deeply embedded and easily accessed of all the varieties speakers have at their command.” (PRESTON, 2001, p. 302).

level of social consciousness. In Brazilian Portuguese, consonantal simplification, vowel reduction, assimilation of foreign phonemes to a native pattern are examples of this type of process, as in *jogando-jogano* “playing”, *pra-pa* “to/for”, *nome-nom[ɪ]* “name”, *marketing-[makʃi]* “marketing”, *Facebook-[fejsi'buki]* “Facebook”), respectively.

Kroch (1978) then proposes the hypothesis that the elite dialect differs from the dialects of other social strata (working class and others) by resisting phonetically conditioned processes. Such a resistance is motivated ideologically: speakers of the prestige dialect seek to mark themselves as distinct as possible from other speakers, taking literary language as model. Patterns of writing are usually more conservative, inhibiting variable oral forms that would motivate divergent written forms. Consequently, according to Kroch (1978), linguistic practices in the dialect of prestige would require special attention to speech, depending on those with whom one speaks, a linguistic behavior evidenced by psycholinguistic research done at the time.⁶ Another implication of the ideological commitment to gain distinction would be the speaker of the prestige dialect spending more energy to speak than the speaker of the vernacular.

The hypothesis by Kroch (1978) has been extended to linguistic variables other than the phonological ones in some rather criticized proposals, as the one by Finegan and Biber (2001). It is interesting to review this proposal not only because it is comparable to the enterprise around the cult dialect held in Brazil (PRETI, 2000), but also because it helps clarifying facts of linguistic variation that can be related to literacy.

Finegan and Biber (2001) seek to integrate social dialects (linguistic varieties of certain groups of speakers) and registers (linguistic varieties characteristic of certain particular situations of use) in a single model of sociolinguistic analysis. They oppose oral records to literate registers, and argue that the standardized distribution of certain linguistic features in social dialects results from the different access individuals have to linguistic practices that emerge from distinct registers. The authors compare the results of (quantitative) analyses of linguistic variables of different nature (lexical, morphosyntactic, phonological) in various languages, including Brazilian Portuguese, carried out from 1969 to 1991. Finegan and Biber (2001) find out that linguistic variables investigated in the different analyses comprise economy features (reduction of consonant, deletion of segments, omission of agreement marks, less lexical variety) as well as elaboration features (rich vocabulary, marks of agreement, full segment realization and consonant clusters). Finegan and Biber (2001) conclude that there is a correlation between economic features and lower status social groups, and between features of elaboration and higher status social groups. According to the authors, the correlation between features of elaboration and higher status social groups is due to the fact that speakers belonging to these groups have greater access to literate records, that is, they perform more practices mediated by writing. However, Finegan and Biber (2001) do not explain what mechanisms would transfer the features of the written records to oral dialects, although the authors suggest that transference would happen in *praxis*. They claim: “It is also widely recognized that differential access to *praxis* can profoundly influence the speech patterns of social groups.” (FINEGAN and BIBER, 2001, p. 256). And, referring to Kay (1977, p. 31), they add: “when a society develops writing and differentiates into social classes, literate persons will usually have more occasion to speak explicitly and will tend to develop a speech style more attuned to explicit, technical, context-independent messages.”

The assumption of transference of features of literate records to social dialects seems

⁶ Kroch (1978) refers to the experiment by Mahl (1972), published in the paper “People talking when they can’t hear their voices”. According to Kroch (1978), Mahl (1972) subjected research participants to four experimental conversations (conditions) with an interviewer, combining hearing or not hearing their own voices with seeing or not seeing the face of the interviewer. The results showed that, in abnormal conditions (not hearing their own voice, nor seeing the face of the interviewer), participants tended to use vernacular forms.

to be the basis of the characterization made in Brazil of the so called cult dialect. (PRETI, 2000). Chart 1 brings examples by Finegan and Biber (2001) of economic and elaboration features. Chart 2 opposes the cult dialect to the popular dialect according to Preti (2000). One can see that oral and written features intertwine in both typologies.

Chart 1: Examples of linguistic features investigated by Finegan and Biber (2001)

<i>Economy features</i>	<i>Elaboration features</i>
Third person pronouns: <i>she, him, it</i> , etc	Type/token ratio
Contractions: <i>innit, cos, can't, I'm</i> , etc	Relative clauses
Third-person singular do: <i>it do, it don't, she don't</i> , etc	Subordinators and conjuncts
Pro-verb DO	Phrasal AND
Subordinator THAT omission	Prepositional phrases
	Word length (measured in letters per word)
	Nouns

Source: Adapted from Finegan and Biber (2001, p.258-259)

The approach to oral and written records in these proposals is criticized because of inaccuracies in the use of terms and categories of analysis. According to Milroy (2001), Finegan and Biber (2001) use the term *functional* to refer to contextually situated communicative work and the indexing process of belonging to a social category, but not to characterize changes in grammar (system/structure of language) due to use. According to Milroy (2001), this terminological inaccuracy adds to the fact that the distinction between oral and written records by Finegan and Biber (2001) does not recognize that records, especially oral ones, may present stylistic variation, despite of their relative stability. See what Milroy (2001, p. 270) states about conversation, specifically:

[...] conversation needs to be distinguished from other spoken styles. For it is plain that differential access to literacy will feed back into many varieties of spoken language, particularly those used in institutional or work discourse, which are demonstrably parasitic on the written language. However, it is an open question just how far this is true of the casual peer conversation of speakers of any social class. (MILROY, 2001, p. 270)

Another critique of proposals such as Finegan and Biber's (2001) concerns the mixture of categories (phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic) in the characterization of dialects. Kroch's (1978) hypothesis that higher status social groups would apply fewer certain processes or would be less affected by changes promoted by lower status groups explains only phonetically conditioned processes that apply below the level of social consciousness (which are not socially salient or valued). Literate practices, according to Kroch (1978), would curtail phonic changes that could affect the graphic record of language units. Certainly, this relation between literacy and phonological processes does not explain, for example, the preference to use some syntactic forms as simple phrases or periods formed by coordination in certain oral practices. Therefore, one cannot extend Kroch's (1978) argument to features concerning every level of grammar.

According to Preston (2001), both the imprecision in the use of operational terms such as "functional" and the mixture of analytical categories originate from the "direction" one follows in language investigation. The direction, by its turn, relates to models of analysis and to language variation factors that each model takes into account (Figure 1).

Chart 2: Some morphosyntactic differences between popular and cult dialects pointed out by Preti (2000)⁷

<i>Dialeto popular</i>	<i>Dialeto culto</i>
Economia nas marcas de gênero, número e pessoa. Redução das pessoas gramaticais do verbo, mistura da 2 ^a com a 3 ^a pessoal no singular, uso intenso de <i>a gente</i> . Redução dos tempos da conjugação verbal. Falta de correlação verbal entre os tempos. Redução da subordinação em favor da coordenação e da frase simples. Maior emprego da voz ativa, menor emprego da voz passiva. Predomínio da regência direta ao verbo. Simplificação gramatical da frase, emprego de bordões (<i>ai, então</i>) Emprego de pronomes pessoais retos como objeto	Indicação precisa de marcas de gênero, número, pessoa. Uso de todas as pessoas gramaticais do verbo, com exceção, talvez, da 2 ^a do plural, relegada, praticamente, à linguagem dos discursos e sermões. Emprego de todos os modos e tempos verbais. Correlação verbal entre tempos e modos. Coordenação e subordinação. Riqueza de construção sintática. Maior utilização da voz passiva. Largo emprego de preposições nas regências. Organização gramatical cuidada da frase. Variedade da construção da frase.

Source: Adapted from Preti (2000, p. 31-32)

In the first line of Figure 1, one sees areas to which variables investigated in different kinds of sociolinguistic analysis are sensitive.⁸ In the second line, there are factors concerning each of these areas, connected to their opposite factors (third line). According to Preston (2001), the proposals of linguists such as Alan Bell, William Labov and Anthony Kroch go from I-language (natural grammar) to E-language (external language). On the contrary, Edward Finegan and Douglas Biber as well as Dino Preti go from E-language to I-language. Consequently, variables analyzed as well as motivating forces of variation conceived by the authors are diverse. In principle there would be no problem in proposing models of analysis that followed different directions. The problem is, for example, integrating “dialects” and “registers”, situated at opposite poles in this scheme of directions, into a single analytic entity, and explain dialectal differences as a result of the differentiated access of the subjects to “registral types” of practices. Dialects and registers are entities of an epistemologically

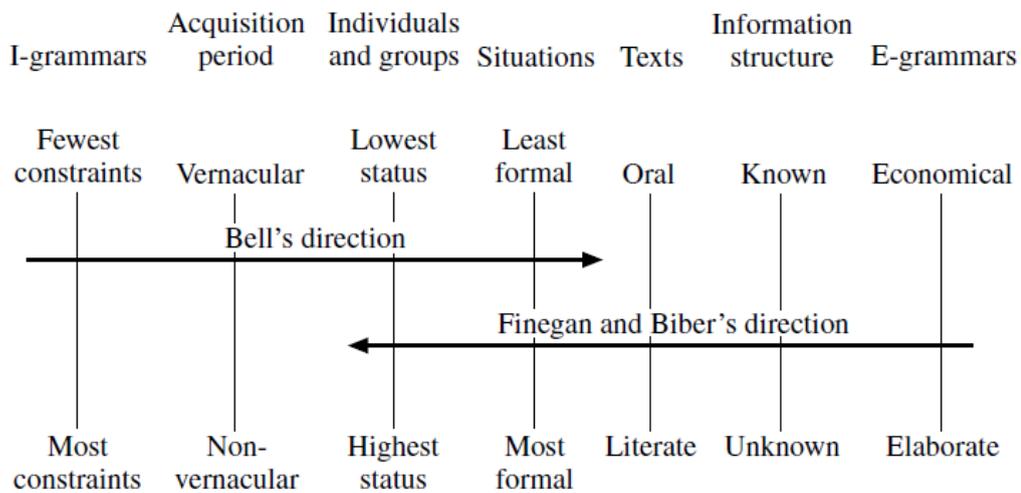
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<i>Popular dialect</i>	<i>Cult dialect</i>
Reduced use of marks of gender, number and person Reduction of the verb desinences, mixture of the 2nd with the 3rd person singular forms, frequent use of <i>a gente</i> ('the people') instead of <i>nós</i> ('we') Reduction of verbal tenses Lack of correlation between verb tenses Reduction of subordination in favor of coordination, frequent use of simple phrases Great use of the active voice, less use of the passive voice Predominance of direct regency of the verb Grammatical simplification of the sentence, frequent use of support items such as <i>ai, então</i> ('there', 'then') Use of personal pronouns as object	Accurate indication of gender, number, person Use of all grammatical persons of the verb, with the exception, perhaps, of the 2nd person plural, relegated, practically, to the language of speeches and sermons Use of all verb modes and tenses Correlation between verb tenses and modes Coordination and subordination. Rich syntactic construction Greater use of passive voice Ample use of prepositions Careful grammatical organization of the sentence Varied phrase construction

⁸ I-language (internal language) and E-language (external language) are notions referring to generative linguistics (CHOMSKY, 1994 [1986]). Roughly, I-language corresponds to the linguistic knowledge of the speaker-listener and his ability to acquire and process linguistic information. E-language equals language in common sense. It is a socio-cultural, historical and political phenomenon that comprises a linguistic code. (KENEDY, 2013).

distinct nature, their integration is not possible.

Figure 1: A general characterization of language variation factors by Preston (1990)



Source: Preston (2001, p. 302)

Let us focus on the E-language→I-language direction, followed by Finegan and Biber (2001). Literate practices are the departure point of such route. We can affirm, with Preston (2001), that the variables investigated by those authors are precisely, or especially, sensitive to literacy, “sensitive to information structure and are much more likely, therefore, to be the product of text types and their information-structuring demands [...] and are not likely to be reflected in social structure.” (PRESTON, 2001, p. 301-302). However, if we focus on the I-language→E-language direction, the one Labov (1972) and Kroch (1978) follow in the study of linguistic variation and differences among social dialects, variables analyzed are sensitive to abstract structural features and are restricted by them. When social, situational, or communicative aspects play any role in the I-language→E-language direction, they explain the frequency, diffusion, and valuation of variable forms, not their emergence. In the I-language→E-language direction, therefore, literate practices, mediated by writing, cannot be at the origin of variation, they are beneficiaries of variation: subjects use variables in stylistic practices in the construction of *personae*, depending on socio-historically situated actions performed by/with speech.

It should be noted that, in the latter statement, “style” is used, not “register”, according to more recent tendencies in sociolinguistic studies (ECKERT, 2004; COUPLAND, 2007), resulting precisely from the problematic distinction between “dialect” and “register”. According to Irvine (2001, p. 28), the taxonomic distinction between dialect and register has fewer advantages than once assumed. The author reviews the (functional) notion of Halliday (1978) to problematize such a distinction, exploring the idea that different registers would have diverse formal properties. Irvine (2011) finds out that the tendency of registers to differ “semantically” from each other applies to some registers (especially to written texts), not to all of them.

Yet, even if such tendencies can be identified in some cases – *perhaps most particularly in types of written texts* [my emphasis], insofar as such types are conceived as registers (rather than, say, as genres) – they do not apply conveniently to all. The differences among registers are not actually limited to semantics, however broadly semantics is defined. There can also be grammatical, phonological and phonetic differences, and some registers may even be distinguished solely on

those bases. (IRVINE, 2001, p. 27).

A problematization like the one by Irvine (2001) explains the attention that style, not register, has received in recent sociolinguistic studies. These studies are more oriented to the (social) differentiation constructed with linguistic variation than to the search for (formal) features that would characterize and explain registers. Investigating variation and style, as third wave studies (ECKERT, 2012) do, means directing the research effort more towards the E-language pole, without neglecting another step, the quantitative one, taken by first wave studies (Labovian studies), which are more oriented to I-language. In such a “division of tasks”, the quantitative step theoretically commits itself to the study of variation and linguistic change, reveals linguistic variables that direct the processes and social variables to which the processes correlate. The (qualitative) style-oriented step is theoretically committed to the study of the semiosis, *i.e.*, the emergence of meanings or social values of variables, which in turn are crucial for performing social actions mediated by language, whether written or oral.

Where does “literacy” come into all this? What do investigations on linguistic variation and discussions of dialect, record, style say about literacy?

(a) Concerning the hypothesis of Kroch (1978), theoretically committed to linguistic variation and change (I-language→E-language direction) and specifically related to phonological variation, literacy explains the conservatism of the dialect of the higher *status* social groups in processes that apply below the level of social consciousness. The stable, fixed use of letters in written texts (taken as a collective good, not as simple graphic records) contributes to the inhibition of linguistic variation and change in certain instances of social participation, particularly when oral utterances that mirror written language are expected.

(b) In studies of registers committed to analyzing variation in its functional aspects (E-language→I-language direction), oriented to the description of the distribution patterns of register variants, literacy defines a certain type of register (literate or written), which may itself be subject to variation, depending on the social situations and the communicational/informational purposes of the users.

(c) In the study of style (of *persona*, ECKERT, 2004; COUPLAND, 2007), theoretically committed to the meanings or social values of the variables (E-language→I-language direction), literacy construes⁹ certain *personae* (social identities) which are ideologically, socio-historically determined and interpreted.

Answers (b) and (c) seem to overlap, but overlapping is only apparent. For example, according to (b), one can study the written registers of a given subject and investigate the distribution of variants in those registers by social situation and communicational purpose. On the other hand, according to (c), one can investigate the linguistic variation attributable to different *personae* that the subject incorporates (politician in the National Congress and in the annual festive meeting of the Union of the Workers, for example). Thus, studies of registers and studies of style do follow the same direction (E-language→I-language), but they differ because their goals are distinct.

Regarding literacy in answer (a), it is possible to find examples of linguistic patterns related to literate practices in sociolinguistic studies carried out in Brazil. They control the variable Education in statistical analysis (VIEIRA, 2002; LINK, 2018) and invoke literacy to discuss the quantitative results obtained (LINK, 2018), as we will see in the next section.

⁹ Style studies in this perspective are recent. Although they prioritize the exam of oral practices, nothing prevents the idea that styles of *personae* can be construed in social practices mediated by writing as well.

3. LITERACY AND EDUCATION IN SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDIES OF PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLES IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE (BP)

Sociolinguistic studies on BP pursue the hypothesis that literacy explains the conservatism of speakers with higher degrees of education. For example, Vieira (2002) conducts a (first wave) study on the rising of mid vowels in postonic position (*gol[e]-gol[ɪ]* “sip”, *nov[o]-nov[ɔ]* “new”, *pêss[e]g[o]-pêss[i]g[ɔ]* “peach”) in BP (Brazilian Portuguese) spoken in southern Brazil with data from the VARSUL Project¹⁰. Discussing the results of social variables controlled in quantitative analysis, the author says:

Em diversos estudos sociolinguísticos, a escolaridade tem se mostrado relevante no comportamento linguístico dos falantes em relação ao uso de uma determinada variante. *Falantes com maior grau de escolaridade, pelo maior contato com a língua escrita, tendem a utilizar a variante padrão, enquanto falantes com menor grau de escolaridade tendem a usar outras variantes.* [grifo nosso] (VIEIRA, 2002, p. 132).¹¹

Vieira (2002) does not clearly explain what she takes for “standard variants”, but one infers that they are the non-elevated variants [e, o] in her study because [e, o] phonetically correspond to the “names” of the graphemes E and O in BP. Variable Education was controlled in the statistical analysis, but no significant results were obtained. In other words, Education has not correlated to mid vowel rising. However, Vieira (2002) finds that the process is influenced by geographical location: Porto Alegre, capital city of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) state, promotes vowel rising; Curitiba, capital city of Paraná (PR) state, inhibits the process. Inhibition of vowel rising is more frequent in speech communities where BP was or still is in contact with immigration languages – languages spoken by descendants of German or Italian immigrants, among others. It is precisely in these speech communities that Education plays a role of interest, explaining the geographical influence.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that the rising of postonic mid vowels, especially in the unstressed final syllable of words, is very advanced and generalized in BP (CARDOSO *et.al*, 2014). BP speech communities where mid vowel rising in unstressed word final position applies at low rates are exceptional today. That is why speech communities where BP was or still is in contact with immigration languages are interesting: they exhibit low rates of mid vowel rising. Vieira (2002) verifies 23% mid vowel rising in Panambi, RS (contact with German dialects), 18% in Flores da Cunha, RS (contact with Italian dialects), 25% in Chapecó, Santa Catarina (SC) state (contact with Italian dialects), 21% in Irati, PR (contact with Polish and Ukrainian dialects). Does education play a role in the low proportions of mid vowel rising in these communities?

Link (2018) reviews studies on the rising of /e, o/ in final unstressed syllables in various speech communities in Rio Grande do Sul (RS) where BP is in contact with immigration languages. The author verifies that higher levels of Education favor vowel rising in Roveda (1998), on BP spoken in Flores da Cunha, RS; in Mallman (2001), on BP spoken in Santo Ângelo, RS (contact with Spanish); in Silva (2009), on BP spoken in Rincão Vermelho, RS (contact with Spanish); in Mileski (2013), on BP spoken in Vista Alegre do

¹⁰ Information about VARSUL Project is available at <http://www.varsul.org.br/>. Access on 24 april 2018.

¹¹ “Several sociolinguistic studies show that education influences the language behavior of speakers concerning the use of certain variants. *Speakers with a higher level of education tend to use standard variants due to their higher contact with written language while speakers with lower educational levels tend to use other variants.* [my emphasis]” (VIEIRA, 2002, p. 132).

Prata, RS (contact with Polish dialects). The correlation of Education with vowel rising verified by these authors contradicts Vieira's (2002) expectation that higher levels of education would preserve /e, o/ from rising due to the possible intensification of literate practices.

Link (2018) himself studies the elevation of /e, o/ in final, unstressed syllables in BP. The speech community he investigates is Esquina Barra Funda, a rural neighborhood in the city of Novo Machado, RS (contact with German dialects). The results he obtains for Education seem to contradict the tendency captured by Roveda (1998), Mallman (2001), Silva (2009) and Mileski (2013) in bilingual communities, but confirm the hypothesis of Vieira (2002). The total rate of rising of /e, o/ in Esquina Barra Funda is low (9%). Link (2018) controls three levels of education (up to 4 years, 5 to 8 years, over 8 years) and finds out that speakers with higher education levels disfavor rising (Table 1), a tendency that is even clearer when considering the results on vowel /o/ only (Table 2).

Table 01: Rising of unstressed mid vowels /e, o/ in word final syllable: education

Variable	Factor	%	Relative weight	Application/Total
Education	05 to 08 years	9,7	0,524	426/4401
	04 or less years	9,7	0,522	361/3720
	More than 8 years	7,2	0,454	235/3242
Total		9,0		1022/11363
Input:0,089				Significance:0,000

Source: Link (2018, p. 68)

Table 02: Rising of unstressed mid vowel /o/ in word final syllable: education

Variable	Factor	%	Relative weight	Application/Total
Education	05 to 08 years	12,1	0,526	368/3042
	04 or less years	11,9	0,525	311/2615
	More than 8 years	8,7	0,449	201/2298
Total		11,1		880/7955
Input:0,089				Significance:0,000

Source: Link (2018, p. 72)

The results of Link (2018), therefore, seem to conform to Kroch's (1978) explanatory hypothesis that the intensification of literate practices promoted by more years of education inhibits linguistic variation and change. In Esquina Barra Funda, the increment of literate practices makes mid vowel rising less likely to happen. However, one should consider some relevant aspects before straight following this line of interpretation. One needs to associate the hypothesis with the local framework of social practices which, as far as language is concerned, relates to bilingualism and the contact of languages in Esquina Barra Funda. In the qualification exam of Link (2018), one of the examiners, Professor Cléo Vilson Altenhofen (UFRGS), a specialist in German immigration languages in Brazil, made the following statement about the statistical results of variable Education in bilingual communities like Esquina Barra Funda:

O processo de aquisição da escrita tem um papel nas realizações variáveis: se escreve com E com O, há marcas de plural (*as coisas*). Existem eventos de letramento como os da igreja, em português. O pastor, depois do ato litúrgico, fala alemão com a comunidade. No culto, o padre lê a liturgia em português: E Jesus disse [ênfase do Prof. Cléo]..., Pai nosso [ênfase do Prof. Cléo]...Qual é o papel da escrita, nessas comunidades, para a variedade de português ali falada? Sugiro

investigar eventos de letramento.¹²

The ethnographic study of Link (2018) confirms Professor Cléo's remarks. In Esquina Barra Funda, children acquire German at home and learn Portuguese at school. The learning of Portuguese takes place as both the alphabetical writing of Portuguese and the social practices potentially mediated by written Portuguese are acquired. This seems to impact on the representation of language and its oral realization. In communitarian social practices such as the religious ones, those of the *Clube de Bocha* ("Bowling Club") and those of the evangelical ladies, members read aloud written material in Portuguese – the liturgy, the announcements, the advertisements of parties, of commercial offers, among others – producing [e] and [o] in the end of words, without rising. They tend to reproduce this oral pattern in Portuguese even in practices that are not mediated by writing.

The language behavior observed by Link (2018) in Esquina Barra Funda seems to confirm the hypothesis (stated in the Introduction of this paper) that the phonetic realization suggested by certain graphemes and written records may influence oral patterns. The transfer of oral traces from German to Portuguese is not the only inhibitor of mid vowel rising. The city of Novo Machado has about 3,900 inhabitants; 300 of them live in Esquina Barra Funda, located in the rural area. In Esquina Barra Funda, the inhabitants form a dense and multiplex social network. This social configuration favors the strengthening of the local vernacular (Milroy 1987) which, as far as BP and vowel rising are concerned, is still poorly affected by the process. According to Link (2018), social practices mediated by writing affect the pattern of mid vowel rising in Esquina Barra Funda. The impact of literacy and education on variable phonological processes like mid vowel rising, by its turn, has to do with the socio-historical and cultural traits of the community. Thus, although the inhabitants of Esquina Barra Funda leave the community to study and interact with speakers of other varieties of Portuguese who apply mid vowel rising at higher proportions, local social practices exert a stronger influence on speakers and seem to affect their perception and production of linguistic forms.

Results like Link's (2018) suggest that one cannot generalize about the effect of literacy (and education) on processes of language variation and change. Prestige is not the only aspect that is at play when literacy is concerned. It is necessary to examine the system of local social practices to assess the impact of literacy and education on linguistic variation. As stated in answer (a) above (section 2), literacy explains the conservatism of the dialect spoken by groups of higher social status in relation to processes that occur below the level of social consciousness. Investigations such as Link's (2018) reveal that the conservatism of certain communities or groups of speakers can be motivated not only by the status of social groups, but also by the activities that subjects perform in their daily lives. Therefore, Kroch's (1978) hypothesis is valid, but one needs to deepen the investigation on the motives for the conservatism referred to in the hypothesis, moving beyond the search for prestige by higher status social groups. Such a deepening may explain the diverse effect of literacy and education in different speech communities.

¹² "The process of acquiring writing plays a role in variable realizations: you write with E and with O, there are plural marks (*as coisas*, 'the things'). There are literacy events such as those of the church, conducted in Portuguese. The preacher, after the liturgical act, speaks German with the community. In the cult, the priest reads the liturgy in Portuguese: *E Jesus disse* 'And Jesus said' [emphasis of Prof. Cléo] ..., *Pai nosso* 'Our Father' [emphasis of Prof. Cléo]... What is the role of writing, in these communities, in the variety of Portuguese spoken there? I suggest investigating literacy events." (tradução nossa)

4. FINAL REMARKS

The present discussion ends up referring to literacy and education once more. Although, as Rojo (2001) affirms, the two processes tend to occur simultaneously in modern societies since school is the main agency of literacy and circulation of written texts, one notion is not reduced to the other. The acquisition of the written form of public genres, which can inhibit processes of language variation and change, occurs not only at school, but also in the wider space of social practices. Controlling years of education in sociolinguistic analyses is therefore only a first step towards understanding the effects of literate practices on speech patterns. It is also necessary to investigate the socio-history and cultural patterns of the groups that perform literate practices, as suggested by current conceptions on the nature of linguistic variation related to style and the construction of *personae*.

The discussion has shown that, although literacy is not a central notion in Labovian sociolinguistics, it has been one of the social factors invoked to explain linguistic behavior in some sociolinguistic analyses. Approaching literacy in sociolinguistic studies of phonological variation implies reconciling the two directions of analysis, I-language→E-language and E-language→I-Language. Facing such a challenge is a matter of method, not a problem of the notion of literacy itself. It is about assuming the complexity of conducting interdisciplinary studies in order to explain the frequency and diffusion of variables, their social meanings, in a complex but potentially revealing enterprise.

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