

Articles



NATIONAL LANGUAGE AND POST-COLONIAL LITERATURE IN BRAZIL ¹

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ABSTRACT: *Far from being only a matter of interest to grammarians and rhetoric masters, the issue of the national language was part of the program of Brazilian writers in the nineteenth century. We will try to identify in their voices – and in the context where they wrote their works – the first formulation of ideas that will later be defended not only by poets and novelists, but also by language scholars.*

KEY WORDS: *national language; post-colonial Brazilian literature*

It is part of our cultural legacy to believe that nationality is a natural birthright to those who are born in a certain land, have the same ancestry and speak the same language². In fact, it is a long-term legacy: the term *nation* has been associated with language

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² The notion of nationality as inherited identity assumes that nationality is a birthright granted to those who are born in a specific land, belong to a determined ethnic group and speak a certain language. Consequently, individuals are believed to acquire the spirit or soul of the people they belong to by birth, independent of their own will. The scholar often associated with this nineteenth century point of view is Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), although he published and lived most of his life in the 18th century. For a more in-depth look at this topic, see Jobim, 2003.

since the 17th century, as is registered in the entry in *Dictionnaire universel, concernant generalement tous les mots françois, tant vieux que modernes, et les termes des sciences et des arts* (1690), published by the French Academy during the reign of Louis XIV:

“Nation. Terme collectif. Tous les habitants d'un même Estat, d'un même pays, qui vivent sous les mêmes lois & usent du même langage &c.” (Furetière, 1690)

In the 21st century, when we consult *Webster's Concise Dictionary of the English Language* (2000), we see that nation and language have had a long-lasting association:

“Nation. 1. A people as an organized body politic, usu. associated with a particular territory and possessing a distinctive language and way of life. 2. A race or tribe having the same ancestry, history, language, etc.; a people.” (Landau, 2000)

Much of the emerging nationalism in Europe – both past and present – was focused on language, often to question the association between language and nation, especially in contexts where the imposition of an “official language” was involved (at the cost of the disappearance or demoting of other languages to the category of “dialects” or the like). The situation was quite different in Brazil.

In this paper, we intend to discuss the question of language and nationality from the point of view of 19th century Brazil. The paper is organized in three parts. The first aims at circumscribing the issue in Brazil, considering the distinct linguistic ideas in circulation in the field of jurisprudence, grammar production and in literature; the second deals with details related to two of Brazil's most representative 19th -century writers (José de Alencar and Gonçalves Dias); the third develops the topic of the permanence of a set of colonial references, even in post-independence Brazil, examining the position taken by José da Gama e Castro, a Portuguese

author who uses linguistics-based arguments to express his opposition to the very existence of Brazilian literature.

I

Constituting itself in relation to political-historical transformations since the early days of colonization, the Portuguese language in Brazil was the object of innumerable discussions among philologists, grammarians, politicians and writers during the 19th century, after Brazil's Independence. At the beginning of that century, the political effects of the king's edict – the *Diretório dos índios* – inspired by Marquês de Pombal in 1757, still prevailed. According to this edict, no language other than Portuguese could be used in the entire colony. The linguistic policy formulated in the *Diretório* clearly and objectively states that in order to civilize the Indians, they must use the “Language of the prince who conquered them”³.

At that time, there was no controversy about the denomination or the nature of the official language spoken in the Brazilian colony, nor about the fact that it was the Portuguese King's language. The Portuguese language had always been firmly intertwined with the Catholic monarchy, symbolically representing Portugal's sovereignty. The Catholic Portuguese kings had made the Portuguese language the idiom of the State and of the nobles. Simultaneous to the grammatization process that had fully begun in the early 16th century with the publication of the first grammars, writers contributed to reinforce and legitimate literary writing as the language of culture and civilization. As such, the language presented as the grammatical standard for the court elite is a literary, written model.

The Brazilian colony – especially the city of Rio de Janeiro – underwent deep transformations in the early 19th century. The arrival of the Royal Family (1808) not only significantly increased the number

³ MARIANI, 2004, p. 146.

of Portuguese language speakers in the capital of the Empire in America, but also allowed the foundation of institutions such as the Academy of Fine Arts, the National Library and the Royal Press. These institutions were responsible for the consolidation of the Portuguese language, mainly in its written form, as the language of culture in the colony. As such, the language of the Prince occupies a crucial position regarding the law and its effects on Brazilian and Portuguese subjects – producing strong imaginary contours of unity and homogeneity in the colony through the royal instrument for the distribution of rights and duties for these subjects.

Nevertheless, after the return of the royal family to Portugal (1821) and the declaration of Independence by a Portuguese prince (1822) the political panorama underwent many changes to promote and enlarge debates about nationalism, in general, and about linguistic nationalism as a form of expressing national identity. From a historical viewpoint, it is worth remarking that innumerable political battles were fought between Brazilians and Portuguese, as in the case of the so called “*noite das garrafadas*” (the battle of the bottles, Rio de Janeiro, 1829)⁴. D. Pedro I's abdication (1831) consolidated the independence of Brazil from Portugal, but this independence did not substantially transform the power structure. After the Emperor's abdication, the Regency began and several revolts broke out in the entire country. People's discontent with government, with the rural aristocracy and with the owners of local power structures promoted fights that merged slaves and peasants in riots against the Portuguese and against plantation owners. Among those revolts are the *cabanagem* (Pará, 1833), the *sabinada* (Salvador, 1837), the *balaiada* (Maranhão, 1831 to 1841), and the *farroupilha* (Rio Grande do Sul, 1835). Later, under Dom Pedro II, there was an effort to control

⁴ See RIBEIRO, Gladys Sabina. *A liberdade em construção; identidade nacional e conflitos antilusitanos no primeiro reinado*. Rio de Janeiro: FAPERJ/Relume Dumará, 2002.

those revolts and maintain national unity, but other socio-political issues emerge through the century, above all the problem of slavery.

Therefore, a feeling of freedom and nationalism in relation to Portugal was consolidated during the 19th century. Although the first vestiges of independence had resulted from political agreements made by the Royal family, the process triggered by this entailed a slow and gradual separation between the two nation-states. It is mainly in Rio de Janeiro, capital of the Empire, that great intellectual debates were staged about the directions of Brazilian-style nationalism. But what about the language? Would have been possible for the politicians and intellectuals of those days to state that in an independent Brazil there would be another linguistic form to be considered a language of culture and civilization? It is worth remarking here that the expression *language of culture* is usually associated with a language that is a depository of a literary tradition, whose historical legitimacy seems to be unquestionable. And a *language of civilization* is that language that guarantees access to and the circulation of cultural and scientific information.⁵

The linguistic issue that emerged right after Brazilian independence referred mainly to a controversy that was not always explicitly expressed. This controversy had many aspects: the appropriateness of using the language in the way it had been used in Europe; either the need for or the impossibility of using the language of the former metropolis – that is, a language with a writing system, grammar, prosody and literature somehow imposed by the former colonizer – as the national language of an independent nation; the acceptance or not of traits of Indian and African languages in the Portuguese language spoken in Brazil.

As the moment was politically convenient for getting rid of the idea of an absolute linguistic unity, since an incipient autonomy was already underway, some questions must be posed: To what extent

⁵ Cf. Baggioni, 2004.



would the language of the colonizer be appropriate to express the specific aspects of a recently created nation? Does the State engender the language and the nation or, conversely, does a *language-nation* emerge before the existence of a corresponding nation-state?⁶

In the context of the intense debate about linguistic nationalism in the former colonies – which had started a century before, under the influence of American independence – the discussions that took place in the 19th century set up a polemic discursive space around what was imagined to be a language, and would sometimes focus on the differences in the way people talked and the lexical items they used, while at other times focusing on the similarities in the way people wrote the language. Either way, there were arguments in favor of or against the linguistic unity between Brazil and Portugal, but one of the elements that comes into play in defining one's position in favor or against the linguistic autonomy of Brazil is the very name of the language: the “Brazilian” language to some; the “Portuguese” language, to others.

According to the historical periods Guimarães (2005) has proposed for the Portuguese language in Brazil, these discussions integrate the fourth historical period, when the systematic grammatization of Brazilian Portuguese started. According to the author, this occurred precisely in 1826, when representative José Clemente applied the expression “*linguagem brasileira*” to designate the language that should be used in the wording of medical certificates.

It is worth remarking, though, that José Clemente uses this expression without any legal support, for the Constitution that had been granted in 1824 did not mention the language spoken in Brazil; the law did not define the official name of the language. In this Constitution, the definition of the Empire of Brazil is stated in the first Article – “The Empire of Brazil is the political association of all

⁶ Baggioni (*op. cit.*) presents a long discussion about this issue, making specific reference to the situation in France and Germany.

the Brazilian citizens. They form a free, independent Nation (...)"'. The definition of Brazilian citizens is stated in the sixth Article – "Brazilian citizens are those either emancipated or free who were born in Brazil (...)"⁷ –, but there is no definition or even mention of the language spoken by the citizens of this empire. Was the language such an apparently obvious fact that it was not mentioned in the Constitution, itself written in this very language? This legal absence of a definition (strategically) proves to be very productive in terms of denomination: even though it is not stated, the Portuguese language becomes the official language of this recently independent nation. It should be emphasized that this first text of our constitutional history was in force until the Republic was proclaimed, that is, it lasted 65 years.

In the strict extent of the law, there is a change from something that was not said – the official name of the language – to the use of the expression "national language" as a way to designate the name of the language spoken in Brazil. As such, the expression "national language" first appears in a general law related to education, granted in 1827, determining that "teachers shall teach how to read, to write (...) the grammar of the national language."⁸ At least for some intellectuals and writers the lack of legal definition points to a semantic ambiguity: Which is the national language? What does the expression "national language" refer to?

Within the scope of intellectual and academic discussions, the Visconde da Pedra Branca is said to be the author of the text that opens up and systematically mentions the differences between the Portuguese language in Portugal and in Brazil.⁹ Written in French and published in the Introduction to the *Ethnographic Global Atlas* (1824-25) by Adrien Balbi, this text uses the expression "*idiome*

⁷ According to the reproduction made by Nogueira (1997), p. 79 e 80.

⁸ About the meaning of the national idiom, see Dias (1996).

⁹ This is what E. P. Pinto (1978) argues based on her research about this theme between 1820 e 1920.

brésilien” as well as descriptions of aspects of the Brazilian pronunciation and a word list.¹⁰ But this type of comparison – word list and prosodic description aspects – had already been included in the dictionary (1813) and grammar (1802) written by lexicographer Antônio de Moraes Silva under the title “... notes naturally suggested by the language used in Brazil.”

In these early years of independence, which correspond to the beginning of the fourth historical period of the Portuguese language in Brazil, one can perceive meaning production processes that will guide subsequent discussions about the name and nature of the Brazilian language. Would it be an autonomous language, the expression of an independent people or an inherited language, and thus still subservient to the Portuguese norms? The 19th century debates bring up socio-historical positions that reveal, in a certain way, a meaning transformation process of a colonization language in contact with other languages.

From a discursive viewpoint, it is understandable that, by crossing the Atlantic to enter the colonial territory, the Portuguese language would undoubtedly undergo modifications in its linguistic structure, but, above all, it would be subject to new and different historical conditions, becoming a language whose memory is not only related to Portuguese history. In contact with other languages and being spoken by subjects born in the colony, the language used in Brazil would become impregnated with feelings of identity of the other, no longer Portuguese. Therefore, its legitimacy as the national language of Brazil went through circumstances that engendered a different history for the Portuguese language: it was no longer the very same language that remains in use in Portugal. On the other hand, there is no way the Portuguese memory can be completely

¹⁰ The lists of words – Indian and African as well as Portuguese words, which have had their meaning transformed in Brazil – were present since the early days of the linguistic colonization either in the Jesuits’ letters, or in the historians’ chronicles, as well as in the bilingual dictionaries designed for catechism.

erased, which generates a contradictory effect: the same language is spoken and at the same time, another language is spoken. According to Orlandi, as we are in Brazil, there is a movement that generates different contexts for speech:

"There is a change in the universality regime of the Portuguese language that starts having its own reference in Brazil. If, empirically, we can say that some of the differences are the accent, syntactic aspects, a list of lexical items, from a discursive point of view, though, the differences are incommensurable in the way the language engenders its history: we speak in a different way; we produce different discourses." (Orlandi, 2005: 30)

During the 19th century, in these historical linguistic processes in which the *same* and the *different* play their part in the language spoken in Brazil, there are at least three important spaces of meaning: the first one, as we have already mentioned, refers to the law and its lack of definitions; the other two refer to the position taken by some philologists, grammarians and historians, and the position of writers.¹¹ In spite of their internal heterogeneity, these two spaces may be depicted through the following scheme: on the one hand, there are those who speak about languages – namely the grammarians and the philologists – believing they master the knowledge of languages and ascribing to themselves the right to classify, model and evaluate the literary and non-literary uses; on the other hand, there are the writers who speak the language they use, committed to their contemporary literary production, often engaged in historical and aesthetical projects that oppose the hegemonic knowledge in circulation.

These two also stand for opposing, occasionally allied positions all through the 19th century, and interestingly enough, they often give opinions about each other's practice and knowledge. In rough

¹¹ Cf. Mariani e Souza, 1994.

terms, the first group (comprising some philologists, grammarians and historians) can be named “purists”, that is, those who support the idea of a unit in the Portuguese language between Brazil and Portugal. The second group (literary writers) defends a nationalism that would be expressed not only in the language – designated as the *Brazilian language* – but also in the literature – named *Brazilian literature*. It reaches its climax during the romantic project.¹²

In spite of their disagreement on the possibility of the Spanish language conquering Brazilian territory, Varnhagen (1847) and João Francisco Lisboa (1854) – representatives of the first mentioned position – both defend the close relationship between the written language in Brazil and the Portuguese language and literature. They also reject the assumption according to which the Indian (native Brazilian) is the central, relevant character in the constitution of the history of the independent nation. Taking up Varnhagen’s arguments, Lisboa states: “...In fact, the European element constitutes primarily and essentially our current nationality.” (*apud* Pinto, 1978: 29).

Among those who contest this position are the so-called Indianists, among them Gonçalves de Magalhães, according to whom “it is the land that grants nationality to those who are born in it, not to the foreign races that live in it; this nationality cannot exclude those who were born here before the children of its conquerors.” (Magalhães, 1860: 62-63) But when he makes comparisons, this author himself is not so generous with the Indians:

“Concluding my notes, we should say that by comparing these savages to the eminent man among the educated and middle-class people, the latter are certainly in an advantageous position, but if we compare the savages to the huge unschooled and uncivilized population in Europe, where the routine of

¹² Pinto (1978) divides the 19th century in four moments. We have privileged the circulation and reformulation of ideas all through the century.

misery, obedience, bondage and the tough, restless work on the land, the meager income to provide them with food gradually extinguish their noble feeling and the very idea that they are men; the advantages are with the savage, whose independent character, iron will, proud spirit and elegant bearing preserve every beautiful attribute of humankind.” (Magalhães, 1860: 64-65)¹³

But the grammarians are the main defenders of the linguistic unity. Describing the language from a static viewpoint, in the space of the Portuguese memory, the Portuguese grammarians deny the possibility that another language history starting with the crossing of the Atlantic can exist. Some authors among them Carneiro Ribeiro (1890) define the language spoken in Brazil the “Lusitanian-Brazilian idiom”. Others only refer to the language spoken in Brazil when they want to point the deviations made from “good Portuguese”, as, for example, in the words of Gomes:

“PROVINCIALISMS”

- corruptions in the “generalized way of speaking peculiar to provinces or countries where a language is spoken.
- slow utterance of words; **imperfections among Brazilians in general**, and, in especial among those in the North of Brazil.”

BRAZILIANISM

- **terms or expressions peculiar among Brazilians**: “vi ele, encontrei ela, se disse que ele não apresentou-se, para mim comer, vatapá, capoeira, quilombola.” (Gomes, 1895: 196)

According to him, “stress and intonation” and the use of “terms or expressions peculiar among Brazilians” are “linguistic corruptions”, “Brazilian flaws”. A certain derogatory way of talking about the past of the colony is produced, for the words that have Indian and African origin are classified under the heading of “brazilianisms”.

¹³ For further details, see Jobim, 2003a.

For those who represent the other group, quite differently, the oppositions between the spoken language in Brazil and the spoken language in Portugal are a matter of pride, and they are also a consequence of the linguistic activity itself, as stated by José de Alencar (1870) in his long divergence with Pinheiro Chagas' position.

"Mr. Pinheiro Chagas accuses **us, Brazilian writers, of the crime of insurrection against the grammar rules of our shared language.** In his opinion we have the bad habit of making the *Brazilian* a language different from the Old Portuguese! The tendency in Brazil not to foster Portugal's idiom deeply is a clear fact. (...) The revolution is irreversible and unavoidable. (...) We are just repeating what the wise philologist N. Webster has said and proved: - "As soon as two races of men from the same ancestry separate and move to regions far apart, each group's language starts diverging in different ways." "(...) It must not be forgotten that the New World's children inherits the traditions of the Indian races and live in contact with practically every civilized race that is brought by immigration and arrives in this territory". (Alencar: 314)

As a writer, Alencar challenges Pinheiro Chagas by contesting his knowledge of the language. To support his arguments, he resorts to N. Webster (1758-1843), the North-America lexicographer, who intended to standardize the spelling rules and grammar of the English language. He was the author of *Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (1783-5), which became the main reference for spelling issues in the United States for many generations. Later he wrote the *Compendious Dictionary* (1806), which antecedes the *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828).

In 1783, after the Independence of the United States of America, Webster defended the need of a linguistic independence. In 1789, in his *Dissertation on the English Language: with notes, historical and critical*, he advocated the creation of a literary academy that could contribute to the standardization of this American language, the national language of the American people, arguing that American



political harmony was related to a uniformity of language and that there should be a national language in the USA.

As for Alencar, he takes the side of a linguistic nationalism specifically constituted in an independent nation. And he is emphatic in stating: "The revolution is irreversible and unavoidable."

II

Language was one of the problems the writers of the ex-colony had to cope with in the post-colonial days. What attitude should they adopt in relation to the European language that arrived in the continent, brought by the conqueror, but was already, in the 19th century, the daily language for most of the population in countries like Brazil?

As the norms established for the use of idioms were exclusively dictated by the metropolis – and the new countries already registered significant variations in relation to these norms – there was a question in the air in the 19th century: should the European norm be accepted as correct standard – and, as a consequence, should all linguistic practices that did not comply with these norms be labeled as "*wrong*" – or else should a new standard be established, with norms that would take into account the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the emerging nations?

As José de Alencar is one of the most outstanding names relevant to this issue in Brazil, we shall reevaluate the discussions engendered by him.

Often questioned on his "incorrectness" and "carelessness" as a writer, he always attempted to make it clear that he did not accept the assumptions according to which his writing was considered "incorrect" or "careless". He believed that behind every "purist" argument about the use of the language – claiming that it was advocating "correction" – there was, in fact, a proposal to submit to the linguistic patterns prescribed by the Portuguese grammarians

and/or by a certain interpretation of the corpora of Portuguese writers invested with the authority of “classical” authors”. That was the reason why he did not accept this “purist” line of argument and claimed the right and duty of every Brazilian writer to assert his difference in relation to the Portuguese standards. In order to support his position, the author, born in the Brazilian northeastern state of Ceará, adopted several strategies to justify his writing options as the conscious fruit of a choice that aimed at attending the characteristics of the Portuguese language in Brazil. Among these strategies were: 1) to make long analyses of the accusations of grammatical incorrectness made at his work, justifying his writing options as a conscious choice to follow the characteristics of the Portuguese language in Brazil, which would feature differences in relation to Portugal; 2) to bring into discussion the opinion of foreign linguists; 3) to present the nationalist reasons current in Romanticism to give a foundation to his attitudes; 4) to justify his linguistic choices in his novels by producing counter examples of what is criticized by the “purists”, finding examples similar to his use of the language in the “classical” writers’ works themselves.

The northeastern writer was probably one of those who left the greatest number of testimonies of the issue on the national language, including the annexes to his novels: the postscript to *Iracema* and *Diva*; the introduction in *Sonhos d’ouro*, significantly entitled *Benção paterna*; and the notes in *O gaúcho* etc.

In his texts, Alencar reiterates well defined positions: the differences in the use of the language found in the works by Brazilian writers are not the exclusive creation of the authors, but instead, they mean the incorporation of the linguistic practices in force in the way our people talk. The analogies and the differences between the Portuguese in Brazil and in Portugal must be credited, among other causes, to the similarities and differences in the environment and race between these two nations; the literary language is not a mere reproduction of people’s ways of talking; it is rather the

elaboration of literary writers, which attempts to improve and enrich the national, popular linguistic asset.

Whenever Alencar's attitude to national linguistic identity is approached, one quotes the emblematic sentence in the postscript to *Diva*: "The language is the nationality of thoughts as the motherland is the nationality of the people." (Alencar, 1959: 559) Isolated, this sentence may suggest a certain appropriation of a Herderian-oriented thought. Nevertheless, there are many Alencarian specificities, about which it is worth making a few remarks. To start with, it is good to remember that, instead of adopting the classical equation of nationalism as inherited identity¹⁴ (a language + a race + a territory = a nation), Alencar prefers to formulate another one.

For the author of *Iracema*, the Portuguese language, the first term in that equation, could not suit the nationalistic purposes of writers in a former colony, for the idiom originally belonged to the former metropolis, and evoking the affinities and intersections of the Portuguese-speaking community would certainly not be appropriate when emphasizing the peculiarity of the Brazilian nation. So, fighting against those who adopt the ideology of the *purity of the idiom* – inevitably related to its Portuguese origins –, Alencar often highlights the differences in the Brazilian Portuguese.

As to the second term in that equation (race), he is far from proposing the idea of a single exclusive one to build up our nationality. In fact, he proposes the opposite: calling the attention to the intermingling of several races. The mixture of races, not the "pureness", would characterize us as a nation, and this unique mixture would generate linguistic contributions that could make the national idiom different from the language spoken in Portugal. The spirit of the Brazilian people would be something acquired in

¹⁴ For a more detailed development of historical concepts of *nationalism as citizenship* or *inherited identity*, see JOBIM, José Luís. Nacionalismo e globalização. In: —. Formas da Teoria – sentidos, conceitos e campos de força nos estudos literários. Rio de Janeiro: Caetés, 2002.

our territory by those who stemmed from this racial amalgamation and contributed to the formation of a national idiom, different from the Old Portuguese.

The participation of Alencar in controversies, in which the linguistic issues were also debated, was also elucidative. Maybe the most interesting among them was the controversy against Joaquim Nabuco¹⁵, but it is also important to remember the polemics he had with José Feliciano de Castilho and Franklin Távora.

Between 1871 and 1872, under the pennames of Semprônio (JFC) and Cincinato (FT), those two writers made a duet against Alencar. José Feliciano de Castilho, Antônio's brother, concentrated on linguistic objections, summarized by João Ribeiro as follows:

"In sum, José Feliciano's critique may be divided in two general arguments: one of them, the unreasonable censorship of images, tropes and often acceptable neologisms; the other, the issue of the Portuguese treatises on grammar, treatises that, for him, must not be challenged, thereby leading to an inflexible position towards any linguistic difference outside Portugal."¹⁶

It must be highlighted that João Ribeiro quotes Pinheiro Chagas, a Portuguese writer who disapproved in his review of *Iracema* what he (Pinheiro Chagas) saw as "the bad habit of rendering Brazilian Portuguese into a language that diverges from Old Portuguese by using daring, unjustifiable neologisms".¹⁷ João Ribeiro, nevertheless, many decades later, declares that the neologisms are "acceptable."

¹⁵ Originally published in *O Globo* (1875): Alencar wrote on the 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th of October and on the 4th, 11th, 18th of November; Nabuco wrote on the 3rd, 5th, 8th, 10th, 17th, 24th and 31st of October and on the 7th, 14th and 21st of November.

¹⁶ THREE studies by João Ribeiro about José de Alencar. *Jornal do Brasil*, 2/05/1929. Archives of the Academia Brasileira de Letras (Brazilian Academy of Letters) 10.b.94

¹⁷ Apud ALENCAR, J.de. Pós-escrito a *Iracema*. In: —. *Obra completa*. Rio de Janeiro: José Aguilar, 1958. p. 309-320. p. 313. It is important to say that Pinheiro did not condemn only *Iracema* for this, but "all the Brazilian books".

Neologism is an interesting topic, because, if it was pointed as a negative element in the nineteenth Century – maybe in an attempt to mark the language from Portugal as the “official language” or the “*mother tongue*”, reducing the Brazilian variety to the category of “dialect” – it will later end up by constituting an integrating part of another linguistic argument, according to which Brazil and Portugal speak the same language, with differences in the lexical dimension only.

In 1864, in a letter to Antonio Henriques Leal, Gonçalves Dias very appropriately expressed how the issue of neologism would be pragmatically framed: “If these [students in Brazil] want to say things that do not exist in Portugal, that are not registered in their dictionaries, how the hell will they express themselves?” (Dias, [1864] 1998: 1.132). According to this poet, “we have an immense number of Indian or African terms, which will even be introduced in the dictionaries, but most of the time they are used only in conversations – food denominations, fishing, plowing terms etc., which are not classical, but essential” (p. 1.133)

It is worth observing that, while Alencar justifies the linguistic difference between Brazil and Portugal through, among other things, the distance, Gonçalves Dias highlights the differences within the national territory itself, as a consequence of our internal dimensions.

“It also happens that at such enormous distances, as those in Brazil, the essence of life changes and men who adopt one or another way of living have made up their own way of speaking, also expressive and variegated. The cowboys, the miners, the fishermen, the river navigators are among them. Is it possible that the Brazilian novel cannot portray any of these characters because classical Portuguese lacks the appropriate terms?” (Dias, [1864] 1998: 1133)

For Gonçalves Dias, Brazilian authors must employ all the terms because if another lexicographer such as Moraes turns them into entries in his dictionary, they may become “classical” in the

future”: “[...] write everything, because it is all good, – and as soon as another Moraes comes up, it will all become classical.” (p. 1.133)

It is obvious that Alencar and Gonçalves Dias are not alone in their position. In a text published in 1860, Joaquim Norberto Sousa Silva states his opinion according to which, if in European languages there were radical differences in style and way of speaking or writing – that is, if in one language, even when it is spoken by people under the same sky, at short distances and with secular relations, there were diverse forms of literature –, why wouldn't it be allowed to people who lived at distances as far as two or three thousand leagues away, with far from identical customs, laws and uses, to define their own nationality? (SILVA, p. 76) In the postscript to *Iracema* in 1870, Alencar insists on the argument that difference is increased by distance.

“When people of the same race inhabit the same region, their political independence alone constitutes their individuality. But if those people live in distinct continents, under different climates, not only are their political binds broken apart, but their ideas, feelings, customs are also separated, and, consequently the language, which is the expression of these moral and social facts.” (Alencar, 1964: 314)

That is the reason why Gonçalves Dias poses the crucial question for the post-colonial situation: “Will 8 or 9 million Brazilians be entitled to enlarge and enrich the Portuguese language and to accommodate it to their needs just like the 4 million people who live in Portugal?” (Dias, 1998, p. 130) And, although Dias somehow points to a radical separation between Portuguese and Brazilian literature, he also seems to look for the approval of the former metropolis, when he tries to emulate Old Portuguese in the “Sextilhas de Frei Antão”, or when he expresses his high esteem for Garret and Herculano¹⁸.

¹⁸ “Don't you know that while Garret and Alexandre Herculano point to Brazil as

As to race, José de Alencar is far from proposing a single exclusive one, and points out to the mixtures between several of them: mixture and not purity would characterize us as a nation. For the Cearense writer, the *spirit of the Brazilian people* would be something acquired in our territory by those who have stemmed from this racial amalgamation and helped contribute to the formation of a national idiom, now different from the Old Portuguese.¹⁹

Alencar's writing was often attacked through his entire career. Most of the time, these attacks claimed that he was a careless writer and repeatedly made mistakes ("mistakes" according to Portuguese grammarians' standard norms, which presumed a certain degree of purity in the language and opposed innovations). "My opinions concerning grammar have either granted me the reputation of an innovator, or blemished me as an incorrect and careless writer." (Alencar, 1958: 312)

Nevertheless, he did not fail to reply to the attacks, seeking to demonstrate that they always stemmed from assumptions that he questioned systematically. Alencar made use of a certain line of arguments in several texts. We will highlight below some of these topics.

As he was often accused of introducing unacceptable modifications to the "pure" Portuguese idiom in his texts, Alencar sought to defend himself from this charge not only by attacking "purity", but also by attributing the origin of linguistic transformations to the people rather than to the writer. However,

the promised land, the land that shall guard the treasure of Portuguese glories and traditions, the literary scum in Portugal starts biting us because we have promised something more than they did along the best six centuries in modern history, and even in old history, for literature, science, arts, discoveries and inventions?" (Dias, 1998: 1070).

¹⁹ "The craftsmen of the transformation in our languages are these representatives of so many races, from the Saxons to the Africans, who operate in this land the exuberant amalgamation of blood, traditions and languages." (ALENCAR, 1964: 314).

there is nothing exclusively positive in this figuration of common people's language. Quite to the contrary, the Cearense novelist refers to the "common people's gross dialect" ["grosseiro dialeto do vulgo"] (Alencar, 1958: 313). For him, the writer's greatest contribution is not to reduplicate the "mere routine or use entrusted to the mob's ignorance" (Alencar, 1958: 313), but rather elaborate the language aesthetically. The good writers are the ones who "chisel and polish the common people's rude dialect, like the sculptor molds the rough piece of marble to shape fine carving" (Alencar, 1958: 313).

Alencar believes that writers, "in this special and ambiguous period of the formation of a nationality" are the "craftsmen in charge of polishing the figure and features of the individuality that starts being sketched from the people's way of living":

"The word that the crowd invents, innovation that adopts the use, caprices that emerge from the spirit of the inspired idiot, all this is what the poet tosses in his melting pot to purify it from the feces that may have contaminated it on the ground where it was, in order to perfect it to fine gold."²⁰ (Alencar, 1959: 700)

Maybe the text in which Alencar expresses most synthetically and expressively his ideas about the relationship between the writer, literature and national language is the letter dated November 26th, 1874, in which he states:

"We, Brazilians, have been completely careless about the major problem of nationality in our literature, and because we are unforgivably shy, we have succumbed to the ferule of Portuguese pedagogues, aimed at the monopoly of science and the polishing of our language.

²⁰ "Palavra que inventa a multidão, inovação que adota o uso, caprichos que surgem no espírito do idiota inspirado; tudo isso lança o poeta no seu cadinho, para escolmá-lo das fezes que porventura lhe ficaram do chão onde esteve, e apurar o ouro fino."

I have reacted against this literary tyranny, and not out of any feeling of resentment but for a natural drive of the Brazilian genius that I find in myself and in the country around me, so much different from the Portuguese, although this genius is the Portuguese's brother in origin and language.

Let us place side by side two samples from several Portuguese and Brazilian classes, from the bottom to the top of society. After one hour of practice and observation, anyone could perfectly tell the difference between them. They are distinct because of their mutual excellence and defects as well as for their own ridiculousness and ways of behaving.

Insisting on denying this undeniable fact, pretending to destroy reality in order to replace it by an impossible convention labeled "classicism" is the insane task performed by Sisyphus." (*Apud* Menezes, 1977: 334-335)

Fighting against the "Portuguese pedagogue's lessons", which attempted to impose an "impossible convention" on Brazilian writers, Alencar marked a well-defined search for a national linguistic identity. There was no way back on the road that lead Brazilian writers away from the "impossible convention" the Portuguese purists wanted to impose. If they had transformed a certain corpora of writers into classics, into models of language and style that should be followed, Alencar emphasized this would not be possible in Brazil.

III

One of the issues that most confronted the intellectuals who built the foundations of Brazil was the attempt to produce a discourse whose meaning, notwithstanding the fact it was elaborated in the language of the former metropolis, would mark the distance that was politically necessary. Nevertheless, as the Brazilian writers used a language that came from Portugal, it is no surprise this would become an issue itself, having even produced, among the adepts of a late colonialism, some arguments that denied the possibility of

existence of a Brazilian literature. This was the case of José da Gama e Castro (1795-1875), an expatriate supporter of D. Miguel de Bragança who had a relevant role in Rio de Janeiro in the 1840s and in the pages of the newspaper *Jornal do Comércio*, defending the thesis according to which the national designation of any literature should derive from the designation of the language in which it is written.

In fact, the thesis was formulated in the sequence of two articles this Portuguese writer published in the newspaper on the 19th and 21st of January, 1842, whose title was "Portuguese inventions". The content of the articles was patriotic and laudatory of his homeland. In his text, he pointed to Padre Bartolomeu Lourenço as an example of Portuguese talent and creativity. That remark received an adverse criticism from a reader, who argued that the priest – thought of as a glorious name in Portugal – was in fact Brazilian. In his reply, Gama e Castro says that, while the reader stated that the priest had Brazilian nationality, he, Gama e Castro, stated the priest was Portuguese, since "... from the time Bartolomeu Lourenço was born to the time of his death, and for a long time after that, there was not any qualitative difference between Brazilian and Portuguese" (Gama e Castro [1842], 1978: 123). And he uses his own comment to formulate his thoughts about the language/literature topic in the relationship between Brazil and Portugal:

"Literature does not take its name from the land; it takes its name from the language; that is the way it has always been since the beginning of time, and that is the way it will always be. Has anyone ever spoken about Hanoverian literature, Austrian literature, Saxon literature, Bavarian literature, or about Prussian literature, although each and every one of them refers to separate nations as independent and sovereign as Brazil? No, it is the same German literature as long as the authors have written in this language (...)." (p. 124)
"God forbid we should have a literature that would change its name according to the dependence or independence of the

people to which it refers. If such an absurdity were admissible, Greek literature would only start its existence now because until then it would have been Turkish literature, and for the same reason, if England were subject to France, English literature would be extinct for this simple fact.” (p. 125)

“Therefore, there isn’t a Brazilian literature, nor Argentine literature, nor Bolivian literature, nor Mexican literature; but there are no doubts that many pieces written by Brazilians constitute one of the most important ornaments of Portuguese literature. (...) And that is where the inaccuracy resides: the writers are Brazilian, but the literature is Portuguese.” (p.126)

This provocative text deserved many implicit or explicit replies through the 18th century. Committed to the thesis that both literature and language must be called “Brazilian”, in a text published in *O Guanabara* (1860), very appropriately entitled “The Brazilian language”, Joaquim Norberto de Souza Silva says:

“What has already happened to literature has not yet happened to the language because nobody remembered that it is not exactly the same as the Portuguese language, and that – as is the case with our literature –, it is a mistake to keep calling it Portuguese.” (Silva [1860], 2002: 341-2)

Roberto Acízelo de Souza has already called our attention to the fact that the issue of the Brazilian language was a usual topic in the introductory discussions related to the history of the national literature in the 18th century (Souza, 2002: 18). That is why the chapter in the *História da literatura brasileira* by Joaquim Norberto, entitled “Nacionalidade da literatura brasileira” (“The nationality of Brazilian literature”) explicitly resumes the theme, quoting Gama e Castro and reproducing his 1842 article as well as other authors’ arguments (Santiago Nunes Ribeiro, Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen) who made objections to the article. In this chapter, Joaquim Norberto echoes an opinion that brings the definition of nationality to another perspective:

“The language identity between two people will never put the nationality of their literature at stake, for the literature is not the representation or symbol of the languages; it is in fact the expression, the voice of intelligence of any people, the testimony of their inspiration, the mirror of their tendencies, the representation of their *zeitgeist*, either in progress or in decadence, according to their customs and uses, stemming from their character, laws and religion.” (Silva, 2002: 86)

So, it is not surprising that after independence was proclaimed, publication of works began in every field, seeking to justify our autonomy ideologically. The need to show that we also have a remarkable human asset – in part represented for example, in the *Biografia de Homens Ilustres nas Letras e Artes do Brasil*, by Antônio de Vasconcelos Meneses de Drummond – is parallel to the urge to mark differences and distance from the former metropolis in the fields of language and literature. Books in which the adjectives *national* or *Brazilian* feature an outstanding position, such as the *Compêndio de Gramática da Língua Nacional* (1835) and the *Compêndio de Ortografia da Língua Nacional* (1848), by Antônio Alvares Pereira Coruja, or the *Nova retórica brasileira* (1860) by Antônio Marciano da Silva Pontes.

However, as we have attempted to demonstrate, far from being only a matter of interest to grammarians and rhetoric masters, the issue of the national language was part of the program of writers in the post-colonial days. And in their voices we can often identify the first formulation of ideas that will later be defended not only by poets and novelists, but also by language scholars.

RESUMO: *Longe de ser um assunto que interesse apenas a gramáticos e retóricos, a questão da língua nacional era parte do programa de escritores brasileiros do século XIX. Tentaremos identificar em suas vozes – e no contexto em que escreveram suas obras – a primeira formulação de idéias que mais tarde serão defendidas não somente por poetas e romancistas, mas também por estudiosos da língua.*



PALAVRAS-CHAVE: língua nacional; literatura pós-colonial no Brasil

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