



ONE LANGUAGE AMONG MANY, MANY LANGUAGES IN ONE: MONOLINGUALISM, LINGUISTIC PREJUDICE AND LANGUAGE POLICY IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this article is to analyse the Brazilian linguistic scenario and to discuss the relationship between Portuguese and the other languages spoken in the country, historically and today. It focuses on four points: the historical process of language unification towards Portuguese; two recent official language policy initiatives (the Orthographic Accord and the anti-foreign-words law); the correlation between social stigma and linguistic prejudice; and the correlation between language change and linguistic prejudice.*

KEY WORDS: *language policy in Brazil; Brazilian Portuguese; language unification; monolingualism; linguistic prejudice.*

1. AN ENORMOUS LINGUISTICALLY HOMOGENEOUS GIANT? ¹

*Minha pátria é a língua portuguesa.*²
(Fernando Pessoa)

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² Bernardo Soares, *Livro do Desassossego*. Vol. I – Fernando Pessoa. Lisboa: Ática, 1982.

*A língua é minha pátria
E eu não tenho pátria
Tenho mátria
E quero fráttria.³
(Caetano Veloso)*

Which language is spoken in Brazil? – This is the question that we Brazilians normally pose concerning our language. We never ask, for example: *how many* languages are spoken in Brazil?, because the perception we have of our country is that people here speak just one language: Portuguese. To be Brazilian and to speak (Brazilian) Portuguese are synonymous, in this sense (Oliveira, 2000: 83).

Although it is true that the vast majority of Brazilians are indeed monolingual, it is not true that Brazil as a whole is a monolingual country. Following a recent estimate, there are about 200 different languages that are spoken in Brazilian territory, of which approximately 170 are indigenous languages, while the other ones are mainly of European or Asian origin. Therefore, we are a multilingual nation, like 94% of the countries in the world.

Today, in Brazil, there are about 345,000 indigenous people, distributed in 215 indigenous societies, that represent about only 0.2% of the population. These data refer only to those individuals who live in *aldeias* (Indian villages), but it is possible to estimate that, besides these, there are between 100,000 and 190,000 Indians living outside the *Reservas Indígenas* (Indian Reservations), including urban areas.⁴ Even today, many Indians speak only their own language, not knowing Portuguese. Others speak Portuguese as their second language. And there are others who speak only Portuguese.

³ Língua. CD: *Velô* – Universal Music, 1984.

⁴ Information available in Funai's (*Fundação Nacional do Índio* - The National Indian Foundation) homepage, <http://www.funai.gov.br/indios/conteudo.htm> (accessed on 01 February 2003).

The linguist Aryan Dall'Igna Rodrigues established a genealogic classification for Brazilian Indigenous languages (gathering in the same category languages that have a common origin in an ancient extinct language), that is until today the most respected in the scientific community. He grouped those languages in families, considered as belonging to three different linguistic branches: Tupi, Macro-Jê and Aruak. There are families, however, that could not be identified as related to any of the three major branches: Karib, Pano, Maku, Yanoama, Mura, Tukano, Katukina, Txapakura, Nambikwara and Guaikuru. Besides these, there are languages that can be subdivided in different dialects: for example, the language spoken by the groups Krikati, Ramkokametrá (Canela), Apinayé, Krahó, Gavião (Pará), Pükobyê and Apaniekrá (Canela) are dialects of the Timbira language.



Figure 1. Map of the distribution of indigenous populations in Brazil today (<http://www.unicamp.br/iel/cedae/cedae-flib-mapa.html> - access in 03 October 2004)

When we observe the distribution of indigenous populations in Brazil today, it is possible to see reflexes of the historical movement of political and economic expansion. The majority of indigenous societies that preserved their languages live today in North, Centre-

West and South regions. In other regions, they were pushed back as urbanisation advanced.

Concerning this subject, the question to be asked is: what is the reason for the lack of visibility of this very rich linguistic scenario? Following Oliveira (2002: 83), three possible answers can be considered: ignorance of the truth; overlooking the truth as a result of an intentional policy of building a monolingual country; or simply pure linguistic prejudice.

From several points of view, all these reasons stand together. The acceptance without discussion (as if it were natural) that Portuguese is Brazil's unique language has been in the past and is still now fundamental to obtaining a consensus to the repressive policies towards the languages of minorities in Brazil (Oliveira, 2002: 83).

When we look at the Brazilian linguistic past (a very recent one of 500 years, in terms of surviving documents – we must remember that all of indigenous languages spoken in Brazil only recently began to be written), it is possible to see that we were, much more than today, a multilingual territory. According to Rodrigues (1998:5), there were more than one thousand native indigenous spoken languages when Cabral arrived in Brazil in the year 1500. But, in 2000, only 170 remained (15% of the total amount), and, even so, most of them are already dying, being spoken by very small populations and with almost no chance of surviving because of the advance of Portuguese.

In opposition to the trend of replacing native languages with Portuguese, it is possible to see today a revitalisation process whereby the oral language is reinforced with written language in a few Xingu villages, that began with the adoption of a bilingual literacy methodology in schools located inside the *aldeias* (cf. Fargetti, 2002, on Juruna, and Monte, 1996, on Kaxinawá). In fact, bilingual education is seen today as the only way of preserving native languages in Brazil, especially by indigenous teachers (cf. Kahn, 1994; Monte, 1996; Midlin, 1997; Aiwá, 1997). But we must be cautious about the

concept and the introduction of bilingual education in this context, since, in Grupioni's (1997: 184) opinion, all attempts in the past aimed to "integrate" Indians, but in the sense of "to transform them into something different from what they were". On the other hand Grupioni also recognizes that only a specific, differentiated, intercultural and bilingual" school can become an "instrument of affirmation of different identities", instead of being an "instrument of imposition and assimilation".

2. MOVEMENTS OF LANGUAGE UNIFICATION

Our colonial history was not made of linguistic unity – not even of dominance by Portuguese. Until the middle of the XVIIIth century (therefore, 250 years after 1500), the Portuguese language was spoken only in the coastal areas. In São Paulo and in the territorial area of expansion resulting from the *bandeirantes'* action (that were hunters of native slaves and gold and precious stone prospectors), the spoken language was the *Lingua Geral*, an indigenous language, with *tupi* origins. This was the language spoken by the Jesuits and described by José de Anchieta (1595). In the Northeast there were indigenous tribal languages that survived extinction, African languages that resisted slavery, in addition to Portuguese and Creole varieties derived from Portuguese (for example, *Papiamento*, a Portuguese based Creole, taken to Curaçao and Aruba with the slaves that belonged to the Dutch, after they were expelled from Recife by the Portuguese). In the North, other indigenous languages were spoken and another type of general language, the Amazonian *Lingua Geral*, or *Nheengatu*, also originated from an indigenous language, spread over the region (Zilles, 2002: 151-152).⁵

⁵ Concerning South-American *Linguas Gerais* and structural changes common to all of them, see Rodrigues (n.d.).

In Brazil, since colonial times, every initiative of language policy was based on *repression* (Bagno, 2002b: 54). The most important initiative from those times was the Marquês de Pombal's "*Directorio dos Índios*", written in 1757. It established Portuguese as the one and only language of Brazil, prohibiting the use and teaching of any other language, especially the *Lingua Geral*. The imposition of Portuguese as the obligatory language was made at a time when that language was practically an exclusive domain of white people, who were responsible for the administration and territorial exploration, and who constituted a very small sector of the population. To impose Portuguese on African and native slaves without guaranteeing the means for its effective learning (if slaves were not even considered persons, then how could they have rights to a formal education?) was, since those days, the first step in the direction to use Portuguese as an instrument of social exclusion. It takes only a short step from this situation to the linguistic prejudice that stigmatizes the popular use of speech until today.

The disappearance of *Nheengatu* was gradual. It was accelerated by the death of 40,000 speakers of this language, native and Africans, in the revolution called *Cabanagem*, from 1834 to 1841 and completed with the arrival of between estimated 300,000 to 500,000 *nordestinos* (North-Easterners), monolingual Portuguese speakers, in Amazonian region. It happened between 1870 (when the *ciclo da borracha* - rubber cycle - begins) and 1918 (end of the First World War) - Oliveira (2002: 86). Although the replacement of *Nheengatu* by Portuguese continues, it still survives in the region of Manaus and *Alto Rio Negro*, in an area of approximately 300,000 km². There, *Nheengatu* is the language of day to day communication among the resident populations and it is the language of trade (Bessa Freire, 1983: 73 - *apud* Oliveira, 2002: 86).⁶ A proof of its survival in the area is the existence of election propaganda, written in *Nheengatu*:³

⁶ On November 22nd 2002, three indigenous languages (*Nheengatu*, *Tukano* and *Baniwa*) were declared official languages in São Gabriel da Cachoeira, state of

Table 1. Election Propaganda in Nheengatu with Portuguese and English translations.

<p><i>Alto Rio Negro Miraitá Arã</i></p> <p><i>Sé Muítá</i> <i>^Mbuessara Aloysio Nogueira candidato</i> <i>Deputado Estadual arã</i> <i>Aé mira Katu, ti mira puxi.</i> <i>Aé yané anama.</i> <i>Deputado Estadual yawé,</i> <i>^Mbuessara Aloysio Nogueira ussu yané maramunhangara kimbawa kuri.</i> <i>Aé ussu Alto Rio Negro miraitá nheenga kuri Assembléia Legislativa upé.</i> <i>Ixé ayumana penhé, sé anamaitá.</i> <i>^Mbuessara Auxiliomar Silva Ugarte sui.</i></p>	<p>Aos povos do alto Rio Negro</p> <p>Meus irmãos: O Professor Aloysio Nogueira é candidato a deputado estadual. Ele é gente boa. Ele é nosso amigo (parente). Como deputado estadual, o professor Aloysio Nogueira vai ser o nosso valente guerreiro.</p> <p>Ele vai ser a voz dos povos do Alto Rio Negro na Assembléia Legislativa. Eu vos abraço, meus parentes. Professor Auxiliomar Silva Ugarte.</p>	<p>To the people of <i>Alto Rio Negro</i></p> <p>My brothers: Teacher Aloysio Nogueira is <i>candidato</i> to <i>Deputado Estadual</i>. He is a good person. He is our friend (relative). Acting as <i>Deputado Estadual</i>, Teacher Aloysio Nogueira will be our brave warrior.</p> <p>He will be the voice of <i>Alto Rio Negro's</i> people in the <i>Assembléia Legislativa</i>. I embrace you, my relatives. Teacher Auxiliomar Silva Ugarte.</p>
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But not only indigenous people were victims of the policy of linguistic unification of the Portuguese and (lately) the Brazilian State: immigrants (who arrived in Brazil from 1820) and their descendents were also victims of a violent linguistic and cultural repression. In the South, especially in the states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul (but even in some cities of São Paulo, in the Southeast), the structure of small agricultural properties and homogeneous colonisation provided suitable conditions for the maintenance of German and Italian languages in some areas. In an estimated national population of 50 million inhabitants in 1940, 644,458 (Brazilian citizens, born in Brazil in the majority) used to speak German at home, and 458,054, Italian (Oliveira, 2002: 88). German and Italian

Amazonas, in addition to Portuguese. It was the first time in the history of Brazil that an indigenous language (in this case, three) obtained official status by law (Gilvan Müller de Oliveira – <http://www.ipol.org.br>, accessed on 14 February 2003).

⁷ Example collected and presented by Gilvan Müller de Oliveira (2002: 86). The translation to Portuguese is also his. The English version is mine. (Words originally in Portuguese remain untouched in both Portuguese and English versions).

immigrants and their descendants eventually became victims of the policy of linguistic unification. They came under violent linguistic and cultural repression during Getúlio Vargas' *Estado Novo* (1937-1945), because of the juridical concept of *crime idiomático* (= idiomatic crime). From 1941 to 1945, the government took over control and ownership of the schools of German and Italian communities. The government also closed down the presses that published newspapers in German or Italian and persecuted, imprisoned and tortured several individuals, purely because they had spoken their maternal languages in public or in private (Oliveira, 2002: 87-88).

With Independence and (lately) with the Republic, linguistic unification processes in favour of Portuguese have been continuously reinforced. Officially, Portuguese was always considered the unique language of Brazil. With economic development after the Second World War, means of communication (newspapers, radio and television) began to reach every part of the Brazilian territory and reinforced the dominance of Portuguese, even in boundary regions. As it has been said previously, today, Brazil is often viewed as a gigantic "aldeia global" (global village), inasmuch as the influence of TV Globo, the most powerful and popular Brazilian TV network in the formation of general opinion is striking, and also in the creation and maintenance of a language standard.

3. AN ORTHOGRAPHIC ACCORD AND AN ANTI-FOREIGN-WORDS LAW

In spite of everything, topics related to linguistic policy are always approached in Brazil today by the most important newspapers and magazines as mere "issues of cultural interest" (Schmidt, 2002: 88), maybe because the most recent two initiatives in this respect are less "violent" (in the sense that no one is supposed to be killed because of their language). But they are still highly questionable.

The first one concerns the *Acordo Ortográfico* (Orthographic Agreement) among lusophone countries; but, in practice, it involves an agreement between Portugal and Brazil, because the African Countries tend to adopt the Portuguese spelling. First of all, it is necessary to say that an agreement of this nature, referring to the way by which the words will be written in Portuguese on both sides of the Atlantic, does not involve a linguistic question in a strict sense, since changes in orthographic system do not affect the grammar of the language. In this respect, even if Brazil and Portugal could reach a common understanding and consequent agreement about the subject (what has been attempted since the 1980s), differences concerning the language spoken in these two countries would not be reduced. In fact, the problem is not a question of linguistic science, but of diplomacy and of juridical order, since orthography (spelling) is an object of law, in both countries, and, being so, it is official only in its country of origin. Since differences in the orthography adopted in Portugal and Brazil are very small, it would be more practical to solve this quarrel at a legal level, giving official status to both ways of spelling in both countries (concerning the very few words in which traditionally there are differences in spelling).

The most recent initiative of language policy in Brazil is the *Projeto de Lei nº 1676 de 1999*, proposed by Deputado Aldo Rebelo (Partido Comunista do Brasil – São Paulo). It is known by the name *Lei dos Estrangeirismos*, because it proposes the prohibition of the use of foreign words in Brazil, including legal sanctions with fine to those who use “abusive” (sic!) foreign words (that is, words that have “equivalents” in Portuguese). According to Deputado Rebelo, Portuguese needs to be “defended” from the invasion of foreign words (mainly from English origin) and “promoted” in the national territory.

In this scenario, this Project is based on the promotion of nationalism against international globalisation. First of all, it worth noting that this legislative initiative surprisingly comes from a *deputado* who believes that he is from the left (he is communist),

since History shows that these kind of initiatives of idiomatic defence are always proposed by the right. This was the case of *Toubon's Law*, in France (1994 – cf. Judge 2002). Similar laws were approved in Iceland (Vikør, 2002) and Italy (during the fascist period – cf. Ruzza, 2002), for example. However, purist manifestations against loans are not always codified into law, although they persist as a prescriptivist force (concerning German, see Barbour, 2002; Mar-Moliner 2002 analyses this problem in Spain).

Apparently aiming to protect humble people that do not know how to speak English against “harmful North-American intruder words”, Rebelo’s projected law imposes the use of Portuguese in public spaces, including work places, on any foreigner who has been living in Brazil for more than one year (which therefore includes immigrants). Although the projected law alludes to regional peculiarities of speech and writing and recognizes that languages change with time, it is in fact based on a homogeneous and aesthetic conception of language, because the language is considered mainly in its unity. This supposed possibility of equal communication at all levels is nothing more than a myth, an idealisation (Fiorin, 2002a: 113)

If *desire* is the force that moves language users towards borrowing words from foreign languages (many times, unneeded ones), then *fear* is probably the feeling that generates the aversion to loans - fear of invasion that threatens control, that threatens the supposed language purity and the monolithic nationality, and lastly, fear of plurality and diversity (Garcez & Zilles, 2002: 34).

Despite its supposed nationalistic appeal that seduced politicians and journalists, Aldo Rebelo’s proposal was severely criticised by sectors of the media and mainly by Brazilian linguists (see the book edited by Faraco, 2002). Because of this reaction, the Rebelo bill has been set aside by Brazil’s Senate. Instead, a substitutive text was presented by Senator Amir Lando. It is a revised version that was prepared with the contribution of both Brazilian

Association of Linguistics (ABRALIN) and Brazilian Association of Applied Linguistics (ALAB).

The new version of the law was proposed in May 28th 2003. Although it continues to forbid the use of foreign words in official documents, in the media, in commercial advertisements and posters, and creates committees to translate the “needed” foreign technical terms, in several ways it is a declaration of “good intentions”. Among various measures, it proposes the creation of means for the renovation of Portuguese teaching in Brazil as well as the formation of Portuguese teachers; it also wills to strengthen relations between Brazil and the community of Portuguese-speaking countries. Whereas the anti-foreign-words project still continues to define the language of the nation as that which might be protected against the foreign menace, it legitimises the definition that the national language is restricted to the language of power, to the socially controllable written pattern, whose limits are defined by an elite (Garcez & Zilles, 2002: 28). In this context, when an external element is configured as a common menace, linguistic differences that mark internal divisions of society are shadowed (Garcez & Zilles, 2002: 27). Differences between Brazilians who speak differently and that mark their different identity precisely in the way they speak are simply erased.

It is interesting to observe that individuals that criticize the “scandalous” presence of foreign words in our “pure” Portuguese are the same that condemn popular, regional and informal Portuguese (Schimtz, 2002: 101). It is even more interesting to observe that these two manifestations of linguistic prejudice (against the external element and against the supposed inferior internal element) have a common origin: the myth that Portuguese language in Brazil is characterized by an amazing unity (Bagno, 2002a: 15) and the association between State (the Nation) and Portuguese as its official language (Silva & Moura, 2002: 11). On the one hand, the denial of multilingualism and, on the other hand, the exclusion of speeches and ways of speaking that are not in strict correspondence with this

idealized Portuguese are direct and concrete results of this prejudicial posture.

4. SOCIAL STIGMA AND LINGUISTIC PREJUDICE

Para mim, igual ou pior do que o preconceito de religião, raça, cor, sexo, classe social (entre outros), é o preconceito lingüístico, porque ele é sutil e, por razões históricas, corroborado pela maior parte da sociedade como algo natural.⁸

Scherre (2005: 77)

Recently, the debate about linguistic prejudice has returned to provoke discussions among Brazilian linguists, because it is impossible not to notice that prejudice is far from being defeated in the country. Two reasons have been pointed out: firstly, the perception that manifestations of linguistic prejudice persisted in our society, including official initiatives (for example, Deputado Aldo Rebelo's proposal), but especially in the media (for example, the enormous success of new media-friendly purist grammarians); secondly, the recognition of the fact that the symbolic power of language can lead to stronger interactions between language uses and social prejudice that could not be imagined by descriptivist language researchers (Silva & Moura, 2002: 10).

The linguistic prejudice in Brazil manifests itself with a stronger ferocity in relation to the speech of the poorer sector of the population, independently of geographic region. The serious differences in social status explain the existence of a true linguistic abyss between speakers of non-standard varieties (the vast majority of our

⁸ "For me, linguistic prejudice is equal or worse than religious, race, colour, sex, and social class prejudice (among others), because it is subtle and, because of historical reasons, supported by the majority of the society as something natural."

population) and speakers of a (supposed) standard variety in Brazil (Bagno, 2002a: 15).

The most damaging point about the linguistic prejudice against the varieties of Brazilian Portuguese spoken in the poorer sectors of the population is the correlation linking poverty to cognitive and mental deficits. From this viewpoint, those who do not “speak correctly”, do not “think properly”. And, because judgements on language extend to those who speak it, speakers of non-standard varieties are automatically considered non-capable workers and, consequently, non-capable individuals.

In Brazil, this is the main reason that explains why linguistic prejudice against the speech of popular classes is so widespread. The separation of the rationality of the educated class, on one side, from the pre-rational spontaneity of the poorer, on the other, is a well-established dichotomy in the culture. Even those who consider popular language to be creative and spontaneous, although illogical, like for example the ex-President Sarney, fall into another kind of prejudice, disguised in an understanding appreciation of specific values of popular language and culture (Moura, 2002: 76-77).

Since all varieties of the language are equally efficient, whether they are prestigious or not, there is no scientific reason against the adoption of non-standard varieties of Portuguese by the education system. However, choosing the linguistic variety of the community as the language for education purposes, particularly in the case of non-prestigious stigmatised varieties, results in the confinement of the students to their own world, condemning them endlessly to poverty, preventing them from enlarging their horizons and from promoting themselves socially - education is still a powerful instrument of social promotion. In this sense, the education system is obliged to live in an eternal contradiction: the variety spoken by the students should not be discriminated against, because it is also an instrument of self-positioning and of individual affirmation as a member of a specific group inside the whole society, but the education system must promote the use of a standard variety, since the

advantages the students will gain from it are evident. A non-discriminative educational approach to the dialects spoken by the students must promote their use in adequate situations. In this way, the decision to teach standard Portuguese at Brazilian schools is not intrinsically discriminatory of the other varieties, if it is presented and treated as *one among many* varieties of the language. A good programme should teach how the non-prestigious varieties are structured along with the study of the descriptive grammar of a standard variety.

When a child begins to speak, he/she does not learn just one language: he/she learns the specific variety of the language spoken by his/her parents (Cagliari, 1989). The adoption of a specific linguistic variety has the function to mark the inclusion of an individual into the social group to which he belongs and to give identity to the members of this specific group. As native speakers of one language, we learn to distinguish variation. We may learn to speak just one variety, but we are hearers of all varieties of the language. Native speakers of Brazilian Portuguese know how to distinguish the *Paulista* variety from the *Carioca* variety, the *Gaúcha* variety from those spoken in the northeast and north, without mentioning all the other types of varieties of Portuguese in Brazil. A native speaker also knows to recognise differences in uses: for example, that some expressions belong to the speech of younger persons and that other ones can only be used in informal situations, etc. To know one language is also to know its varieties.

Native speakers are necessarily "polyglots" in their own language. To know Portuguese, in this sense, is **not** only to know rules that exist exclusively in the language used at school. Varieties are not ugly or beautiful, right or wrong, good or bad, elegant or inelegant; they are simply *different* - Fiorin (2002a: 114).

Bagno (2002a: 15) believes that the idea that Brazilian Portuguese is characterized by an amazing unity is the most dangerous and serious of the myths that compose the mosaic of linguistic prejudice in Brazil. This myth is harmful to education

because, not recognizing the true diversity of the Portuguese language spoken in Brazil, the education system tries to impose its linguistic pattern as if it were in fact the common language to all 175 million Brazilians, independently of their age, geographic origin, socioeconomic situation and educational level (Bagno, 2002a: 15).

Although it is indeed true that the teaching of standard Portuguese is frequently linked to the myth of linguistic homogeneity, many linguists still believe that it is important to study the grammar of the prestigious variety at school, as an important social weapon. This is the opinion of Scherre (2005: 93):

[...] não sou contra a gramática normativa. Não tenho como ser contra. Na maior parte das vezes, gramáticas normativas são produtos de grupos sociais de prestígio. Seu ensino tem, nas comunidades modernas, uma função da qual não se pode fugir. Não se pode furtar a ensinar uma arma de luta social. O que tem de ficar bem claro é que, quando o professor de português está ensinando gramática normativa, ele NÃO está ensinando língua materna, ele NÃO está ensinando língua portuguesa. Língua materna se adquire; não se aprende e nem se ensina.⁹

In the case of co-existence of different languages in indigenous communities and in groups of immigrants, bilingual schools have been seen as powerful weapons of affirmation and vitalisation of languages of minority groups. But it is not possible to propose the creation of bilingual schools, in the case of stigmatised varieties of

⁹ "I am not against traditional grammar. I have not got an argument against it. Most of the time, prescriptive grammars are products of prestigious social groups. Its teaching has, in modern communities, a function from which it is impossible to run away. One cannot refuse teaching a weapon of social fight. It is important to reinforce that, when a Portuguese language teacher is teaching prescriptive grammar, he is NOT teaching mother language, he is NOT teaching Portuguese language. A mother language is to be acquired; it is not to be learned and it is not to be taught."

Portuguese, because we are not talking about 'minorities' in a strict sense, since speakers of non-standard Brazilian Portuguese are the majority of the population. However, "the whole notion of language minority has more to do with power than with numbers" (Hornberger, 1998: 453).

Nonetheless, in both cases, the ideal educational system is the one that celebrates rather than tolerates the linguistic diversity. Since "the language policy of the school system is both a result of (...) pressures (...) and a source of pressure itself" (Spolsky, 1978: 64), it is possible to turn this powerful pressure to a positive direction.

5. LANGUAGE CHANGE AND LINGUISTIC PREJUDICE

Another prejudicial manifestation towards language, quite common in Brazil and all over the world, concerns the speech of younger people. This kind of prejudicial attitude denies inexorable and natural change of languages in time. As time goes by, languages do not evolve nor deteriorate, they simply **change** (McMahon, 1994; Campbell, 1999; Aitchinson, 2000).

Marina Yaguello (2001: 280) comments on this kind of prejudicial manifestation concerning French, interestingly relating fear of language corruption to an ancestral fear of death:

A nostalgia alimenta atitudes passadistas facilmente encampadas pela ideologia. Por essa razão, purismo parece rimar com conservadorismo. A língua envelhece, aparentemente, com aquele que a fala e que se identifica com ela. Mas o homem não quer envelhecer; ele lê na evolução da língua sua própria decadência. Assim, ele deseja conservar a língua na pureza, na integridade de sua juventude. Tal como se deseja transmitir aos filhos os valores e a cultura do passado intactos, assim também se espera transmitir-lhes a herança da língua. Mas, de um modo insuportável para o purista, são as gerações jovens que, apropriando-se da língua, a mudam.

A língua se encontra, assim, perpetuamente rejuvenescida e não envelhecida, ao passo que seus falantes, inexoravelmente, envelhecem. Aceitar a mudança é se sentir, de certo modo, despossuído, é perder um poder sobre e pela língua, ainda que a condenação seja formulada no mais das vezes sob forma de juízos estéticos: a língua tão bela e tão pura de outrora se tornou vulgar, feia, trivial, pobre e sem matizes. E é por isso que a língua é um desafio tamanho no conflito das gerações tanto quanto no das classes sociais. Pois o juízo sobre a língua se estende aos indivíduos que a falam. Um homem distinto fala um francês admirável, um marginal só poderia falar um francês deplorable.¹⁰

The myth of superiority of the past languages is probably the origin of prejudicial manifestations against the uses of language by younger people in specific situations, such as innovative writing forms linked to communication via internet. It is also the support to critical approaches to slang and jargon usages.

¹⁰ "Nostalgia feeds old-fashioned behaviour, which is easily incorporated by ideology. Because of that, purism seems to rhyme with conservatism. Language apparently gets old with the person who speaks it and who identifies himself with it. But people do not want to get old; they read their own decadence in the evolution of language. Therefore, they desire to conserve language in its purity, in the integrity of their youth. Just as one desires to transmit past values and culture intact to one's children, it is also desirable to pass on to them the heritage of language. But, in an unbearable way to the purist, younger generations take over the language and change it. In this way, language is perpetually getting younger and not older, while its speakers inexorably get old. To accept the change is to feel dispossessed in a certain way, to loose power over the language and through the language, even if the complaint is usually formulated in the guise of esthetical judgements: the language is not so beautiful and so pure as it was in the old times, it has become vulgar, ugly, trivial, poor and without nuances. And this is why the language is a great bone of contention in the conflict of generations as in social class disputes. Because judgements on language extend to those who speak it. A distinguished man speaks admirable French; a criminal could only speak appalling French."

Negative comments relating to the speech of younger generations or specific groups in society has always existed. And, considering Yaguello's words, they will probably never disappear.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the Brazilian linguistic scenario today, it is possible to conclude that, for Brazilian society in general, there is **not** a linguistic question; apparently no one is worried about these problems, in spite of their damaging consequences. It is also possible to conclude that the scientific speech on Brazilian linguistic reality has not yet been heard as a real question in the national agenda. In spite of all linguistic problems that affect us, only official and traditional discourses seem to be enough to Brazilian society (Faraco, 2002: 41).

It is possible to see that our intellectuality (at least those ones that appear in the media) ignores the scientific discourse about language. In consequence, people in general do not have access to a critical view about the traditional mythical misunderstanding approach to language. In terms of thinking about language, we still live in a pre-scientific dogmatic and obscurantist age (Faraco, 2002: 39).

If we remember that the linguistic question in Brazil is not only a linguistic problem but, first and foremost, a political one, in the sense that it trespasses directly on and deeply affects several social situations (through the negative effects of linguistic prejudice over social relations and, particularly, in the linguistic education we offer to children and youngsters), it is evident that it is indeed time to begin an indispensable debate between the multiple discourses about language in Brazil (Faraco, 2002: 39).

Only this debate will bring a consistent and coherent linguistic policy to Brazil, taking us away from attitudes, such as Deputado Aldo Rebelo's Law Project, that are inspired by myths, prejudices

and superstitions, although apparently well-intentioned. In this direction, we will be far away from attitudes of official repression, that represented in the past true spiritual massacres (when they were not accompanied by physical massacres) (Bagno, 2002b: 57), because the language each one of us calls *mother-language* is a constitutive element of our own identity, of what we really are. While we are not far from those mythic and prejudicial ideas, we will remain far from the *frátria* dreamed by Caetano Veloso, far from a nation of brother languages and varieties, where there is no competition and where not always the strongest is the winner.

A língua tem tudo: tristezas, alegrias, sentimento materno, amizade, corpos, almas, emoções, mundos diversos, realidades outras, possibilidades, verdades, seriedade, ironia, solilóquios de poetas, exposições de pensadores, amor... É muito pouco reduzi-la ao certo e ao errado, ao poder ser e ao não poder ser, ao dever ser e ao não dever ser... É triste fazer dela uma forma de exclusão, de discriminação... (Florin, 2002b: 37)¹¹

RESUMO: *O objetivo deste artigo é analisar o cenário lingüístico brasileiro atual, discutindo as relações entre o Português e as outras línguas faladas no território nacional, historicamente e hoje. O foco da discussão recai sobre quatro temas principais: o processo histórico de unificação lingüística em favor do Português; duas iniciativas oficiais recentes de política lingüística (o Acordo Ortográfico e a Lei dos Estrangeirismos); a correlação entre estigma social e preconceito lingüístico; a correlação entre mudança e preconceito lingüísticos.*

¹¹ "Language has got everything: sadness, happiness, maternal feeling, friendship, bodies, souls, emotions, strange worlds, different realities, possibilities, truths, seriousness, irony, poetic soliloquies, philosophical explanations, love... It is diminished if it is reduced to right or wrong, to what can be and to what cannot be, to what must be and to what must not be... It is a sad thing to transform language into a means of exclusion, of discrimination."

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: política lingüística no Brasil; português brasileiro; unificação lingüística; monolingüismo; preconceito lingüístico.

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