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Research Article

BANTO AND IORUBÁ INFLUENCES ON VERBAL AND NOMINAL AGREEMENTS IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this article is to present a reflection over two african languages, banto and iorubá, that resulted in changes involving nominal and verbal agreements in brazilian portuguese which shows a bigger context that involves cultural, economic and social issues. It is possible to notice that the agreement rules established in the formal spoken and specially written language are not followed by all native speakers. This happens because depending on the situation, social status or location, the absence of grammatically correct agreements indicates specific cultural traits from a certain group or population, often discriminated by this behavior. By investigating brazilian history, language planning and guideline laws, this article helps to comprehend better why several students are currently facing difficulties to learn the language and seeing it with a lack of interest, because the language taught in schools- the formal, elitist and normative portuguese variety- destined to writing and learning is constantly distant from their daily basis way of speaking and might provoke a form of discrimination. The text ends the discussion by trying to show how the analysis of the language historical context and the African languages' legacy might help to reduce prejudice and improve the learning process related to brazilian portuguese.

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INTRODUCTION

The correct use of language is, according to Zabala (2010), is the capacity of a person to intervene effectively in different fields of action in life by conceptual, behavioral and procedural components. To Mainguenu (2013), a competent speaker of language has to master 3 competences in order to communicate properly: firstly, the generic competence, which involves the ability to identify the discursive genders and adapt the speech to an appropriate situation; secondly, the encyclopedic competence, that activates the acquired references the speaker has about that certain reality and motivates the generation and comprehension of sentences; and lastly, the linguistic competence, related to the language domain.

After explaining the notions of competence, it is also possible to infer that, based on the concepts, the notions of wrong and right speaking become extremely flexible, because even if a person does not speak using the standard language norm, depending on the situation or context, the individual still is a fluent speaker- the communication may not be appropriate in

terms of grammar, but transmits its message successfully and hence, works as language. And it is also to be imagined why currently there are so many students who speak in Portuguese "nóis vai" (translating to English, "we goes"), or "nóis acaba a lição" ("we finishes the homework") and so on, and have their informal, spoken Portuguese variety related by teachers to professional failure or intellectual gap.

Interpreting this way of speaking by a linguistic perspective, the students speaking this variety of portuguese are fluent speakers. They do not fail in their daily activities and personal relations. Their way of speaking cannot be considered wrong, but inappropriate inside the school context, where the formal variety prevails. It is not appropriate, but does not mean incapacity or ignorance. The ways of speaking indicate several elements about the speaker, including culture, personality or social position. And this shows the first conflict between school and students: they have the duty of learning of types of portuguese, however, lots of them feel unprepared and inferior when confronting their own way of speaking with the formal

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variety, which overwhelms them because of the social exclusion that it has been implying through the years.

To Bagno (2015), the standard formal variety of Brazilian Portuguese is actually related to what is called the "cultured norm". It is taught in schools and prevails in most types of written texts and in some daily conversations. However, it is commonly mistaken as the right and only way of communication, putting as inferior the other spoken varieties, generating disrespect and prejudice situations specially in the school environment. Specially because, still according to Bagno (2015), most part of the students in Brazil come from popular classes who do not follow the cultured norm, related to wealthier classes who could afford better education, and have entered the labor market later than others. Even the name cultured norm, implies segregation: it is applied for those who can speak and properly become related to higher culture.

Starting from the fact that the informal, popular variety represents a very important part of Brazilian culture for being widely spoken and that it does not represent stupidity or incapacity- but traits that indicate a socioeconomic condition- it is to notice that the students who speak this variety in the classroom do not need to be despised, but need help to understand simultaneously that learning the formal variety is as important as understanding the reasons to speak the other informal variety, that represents a historical background that needs to be embraced. This background cannot be ignored by the teachers, that need to comprehend the reasons and ways of speaking in order to get closer to the student's universe and context.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

In order to investigate the origins of the informal variety spoken by the students, the research done in the article demonstrates a qualitative and analytic method. It uses relevant authors in the Brazilian educational environment that establish connections between culture, prejudice and language and grammar learning processes. The authors are: Bagno (2015), Yoshino (2004), Fausto (2001) and Pessoa de Castro (2015).

To speak about language planning and execution policies, the article quotes Mira Mateus (2010), who relates language planning strategies to cultural impacts. The article briefly connects all authors to discover why the informal variety keeps so marginalized even spoken by so many people, and brings, after the conceptualization of linguistic competence, the historical Brazilian background that shows the marginalization of African languages, that despite the discrimination, managed to stay integrated with Brazilian Portuguese showing their presence inside the spoken variety- considered by many people the ignorant way of speaking the language.

Beyond the linguistic and brief historical analysis, the article also brings some examples of the spoken variety that is grammatically opposed to formal Brazilian Portuguese, and the interpretation of the Brazilian Law of Guidelines and Bases for education, to show if the language planning involved can be related to prejudice or not.

After analyzing all of those elements, the article ends bringing the discussion and final considerations about the need of

recognizing cultural contexts in order to reduce prejudice and discrimination at schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Brief History of language formation in Brazil: Portuguese as a segregation component

According to Fausto (2001), it is possible to divide the african population brought to Brazil in two groups: the Sudanese, and the Bantos, which composed a bigger group of several different tribes along Congo, Angola, Guinea and Mozambique. But to Yoshino (2009), the ones who had the biggest influence were the Bantos, who spoke Umbundo, and the Nagôs, from parts of Nigeria, who spoke Iorubá. During the colonial and empire periods, the learning of Portuguese was restricted to the wealthier or noble ones, in order to keep business relations with Portugal.

When the slaves started to come, Portuguese was forcibly taught as a second language to some of them, but rebuilt according to their own cultural references and experiences. But it was still an indicator of social differentiation. According to Castro (2015), Portuguese learning was used to differentiate slaves. The ones who learned how to speak Portuguese were called wily slaves. "Wily were the ones who learned soon how to speak Portuguese and could participate of two distinct sociolinguistically differentiated communities: the big house and the quarters [...]" (CASTRO, 2015:4).

Still according to Pessoa de Castro (2015), in the 17th Century the African influence in Brazilian Portuguese was already huge, In the 19th Century, 75% of the entire Brazilian population was made of slaves, who resisted to slavery with rebellions, protests, mutinies and also, through their own way of speaking the colonizer language. Developing a different way of speaking Portuguese which could still show their cultural background also represented part of a bigger resistance about the conditions they were being submitted.

Conforming to Bagno (2015), introducing their origins into the language was a response to the prejudicial and violent way they were treated by the elite, who did not recognize the slaves' social importance and considered only the Portuguese spoken in the colonizer ways. Hence, the slaves who spoke Portuguese as a second language or the ones already born in Brazil who spoke the language as their mother tongue were not considered legitimate speakers, being excluded from the civil rights reserved to citizens, especially because of the fact that, as reported by Fausto (2001: 31), " [...] there used to be a separation between people and non-people, in other words, free people and the slaves, considered legally as things". Gradually, the informal variety of Portuguese spoken by the slaves spread and persisted, but kept excluded and discriminated.

Grammar and cultural inheritance

To Yoshino (2009), the main influence given by the Banto and Iorubá languages to Brazilian Portuguese happened through changes in verbal and nominal agreements, with simplification or reduction of the contractions made. As reported by the author (2009), this can be noticed specially among popular layers, where people hardly ever use plural endings. The author (2009) also points the Brazilian Portuguese inclination to make

the consonantal omissions in words' endings, highlighting the last vowels through voice intonation. This might happen even in formal Brazilian Portuguese conversations. In words like "amar" ("ah-mahr", to love), "falar" ("fah-lahr", to speak), "comer" ("koh-mehr", to eat), or even Brazil ("Brah-zeel"), the sound of the last consonant is suppressed and the last vowel takes place as a pitch of voice determinant. The words are pronounced like "amá" (ah-mah), "falá" (fah-lah), "comê" (koh-meh), and "Braziu" (Brah-zeeo).

This makes every word to have a different intonation, causing Brazilian Portuguese speakers to talk musically, with several tones within a single sentence. Sentences in Banto or Iorubá never end with consonants. It is also considered as fruit of African influence the semivocalization of the phoneme "Lh", pronounced similarly to the Spanish phoneme "Ll". For instance, instead of saying "filho" (fee-lee-yo), some may say "fíio" (Fee-o). Also, hundreds of African words have been incorporated to the Brazilian Portuguese, making it distinctive by the African influence that becomes a stigma on those who show it more openly in the school environment by speaking.

It is possible to note that the African influence remains specially in the spoken variety, and even being a major influence, it is still excluded from the school environment and usually seen as a barrier to the formal variety learning. According to Bagno (2015), 75% of Brazilians between 14 and 65 years old do not write in a satisfactory way - implying the precarious learning conditions and the little access to formal education.

Brazilian Language Planning: is it wrong?

After verifying the historical context of African languages, considered decisive influences in Brazil, we have to investigate the formation of the standard variant and work on the concept of Language Planning and Policy.

At first what governs the various social manifestations in Brazil is the federal law, in the educational scope the "greater law" is the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (hereinafter LDB) that is also known by Law 9394/96. In the LDB we find that there is no specific guideline for the teaching of languages of African origin, there is concern with the indigenous languages: "Regular basic education will be taught in Portuguese language, ensuring the indigenous communities use their mother tongues and own Learning." (BRAZIL, 1996). However, seven years later we see that Law 10639/03 is introduced and mandatorily determines that schools teach content about Afro-Brazilian history and culture in elementary and high school.

The necessity to create the above law was born of the absence of recognition of African countries in the constitution and consolidation of the Brazilian language and culture. We can assume that linguistic recognition is embedded in the areas of Literature and History, however if the wording were changed, including the word Language, the effect of meaning would be added and the concern would be to solve the linguistic prejudice present in society today.

In addition to the federal document, LDB, a gigantic movement was taking place in 2015, called the National Education Plan (PNE 2014-2024), which is a document that sets out twenty goals to be met within ten years. This document does not

address the concern with the language, since it is a structural document and medium / long term, allowing to state that linguistic issues are resolved at the national level and are not structural elements of the nation.

However, we know that the variants of the north and northeast of the country are the reasons for prejudice among groups from the south and southeast of Brazil. There are those who "learn to speak São Paulo accent" to cancel the marks of their native land to avoid discrimination. So we know that regional linguistic issues, for example, are not resolved.

To solve these issues, we can introduce the concept of linguistic planning and politician linguistic. According to Maria Helena Mira Mateus (1998:19)

Linguistic planning consists in a joint of activities that aim linguistic changes in a given community of speakers, and whose intention, at the level of the competent authorities, based on the maintenance of civil order, the preservation of cultural identity and improving communication. Linguistic policy, however, consists of a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices that aims to materialize the intended linguistic change in that community.

The author also explains that the planning activity can lead to the enactment of a language policy. The concept helps us to understand that the question of linguistic prejudice must be regarded as reprehensible, since the identity of a subject is also found in his language and his language carries a historical, social, encyclopedic course.

Therefore, thinking about planning and language policy in the context of teaching the tradition of Yoruba and Bantu languages means, at the same time, valuing the peoples who helped and helped to form Brazil - thus fulfilling law 10639/03 - and fighting the several forms of prejudice derived from accent, lexicon, prosody or any other linguistic manifestation

CONCLUSIONS

The informal variety of Brazilian Portuguese has spread amongst the popular classes, which were mainly composed by slaves and menial workers during the country formation. They brought their way of speaking the colonizer language, mixing it with their own. This made the Brazilian Portuguese a singular kind of language, distinctive from the European Portuguese even in the alleged cultured norm, that has several words and accents which belong to the Banto/Iorubá cultural legacy.

Those two, mainly contributed to make Brazilian Portuguese sound unique around the world and differ a lot from other varieties, even the ones who exist in the African continent, like Angolan and Mozambican Portuguese, still very close to the colonizer accent and way of speaking - even incorporating parts of the african languages residing in the region.

It is necessary to assume the African inheritance and embrace it. Being a variety mostly spoken by the popular classes, it carries a historical load that brings back Brazil's challenge for being a slave, colonial country which celebrated the european-like elite portuguese speakers and despised the poor, multicultural working class that still needs to have full access to education without being discriminated. Students, instead of being discriminated for using this variety in school, need to be

taught how to connect and integrate both, to make the access to all varieties possible.

Knowing the reasons why they speak informally, students can recognize themselves as individuals with an important historical background, as part of a group that carries a particular way of speaking that must *coexist* with the formal one. Our linguistic freedom was ironically given by slaves denied by society. Recognizing the context which involves a person's way of speaking is not only giving her value, but accepting the importance of the African people to the country as a whole.

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