TOWARDS A FLEXIBLE STANDARD IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT
CONTRIBUTIONS FROM LINGUISTIC STUDIES

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Considering the several Brazilian researches on the teaching of linguistic variation, the article aims to approach the stablishing of the standard norm, assuming the proposal that the its parameters should reflect those of the standards practiced in varieties/modalities. This proposal implies admitting natural flexibility and adaptability of the standard norm to the socio-communicative context. Based on this premise, the text systematizes and expands the assumptions that must be made for school normative guidelines to be productive, namely: (i) in the sociolinguistic sphere, it is a didactic aim to make the student capable of recognizing and/or producing as many linguistic variants (in speech and writing activities) as possible, promoting the expansion of the linguistic repertoire; (ii) alternating forms of language should be developed not only for the textual production scholar activities, but also for the reception ones (reading/listening); and (iii) in light of these assumptions, two priorities should be developed by Educational Sociolinguistics (BORTONI-RICARDO, 2005): (a) to describe, systematize and disseminate the use and evaluation of variable rules in the speech-writing *continuum*, in several textual genres, considering also stylistic textual profiles, in several socio-interactional situations; and (b) to develop, experiment and evaluate didactic activities that promote the recognition and/or production of language variants.

In theoretical-descriptive terms, it is evident that the description of variable rules in a variety of textual genres (of speech or writing) is absolutely necessary. The results concerning only two linguistic phenomena – the alternation of *ter* versus *haver* and the expression of future – are sufficient to demonstrate (i) the productive internal variability to the so-called educated varieties and (ii) the consequent impossibility to propose a single standard norm given the premise that it should reflect the norm practiced by educated people. In other words, if the educated norm comprises a variable set of forms (ranging from very low to very high indexes depending on the textual context/genre), it would be absolutely unproductive to propose uniform pedagogical guidelines for all situations of educated expressions/instances.

As for the Brazilian pedagogical proposals for the teaching of variable rules, the researches assure that it is possible to work with the extension of the variable uses in the diversity of textual genres, without denying the social value of the language and the prestige of certain forms. Such studies develop:

(i) linguistic activities: in tasks of reading and textual production, they promote the intense contact with texts of different genres, in which the alternating forms are naturally employed;

(ii) epilinguistic activities: in progressive stages of learning, conducted in an inductive way, they aim to construct the necessary knowledge for the identification of the variants, their semantic effects and the linguistic and extralinguistic contexts favorable to its realization, besides of social value (stereotype, marker, indicator, according to LABOV, 1972) supposedly attributed to the variants; and

(iii) metalinguistic activities: by means of an "intelligent work of grammatical systematization" (FRANCHI, 2006, p. 98), they aim to make aware the knowledge acquired through the reflections and conclusions to which the activities lead in theoretical and descriptive terms.

Finally, the following basic situations for the definition of normative orientations are formulated:

1. If there is a productive use of a certain variant in several spoken and written texts (*indicator*), no school guidance on standardization is necessary.

2. At the other extreme, there is the situation in which a particular variant is closely related to the speech of certain communities, such as the so-called popular varieties. In this case, the variant is interpreted as a kind of

discontinuous linguistic trait with recognizable indexical value (*stereotype* of "not schooled" or often supposedly "not intelligent", for example). In this situation, explicit guidance on the social value of variants in terms of prestige or discredit will be required.

3.   If there is a productive use of a variant almost exclusively in written (or highly controlled speech) of more monitored genres (*marker*), such as those produced in professional and academic circles, explicit guidelines for textual production will be required (specially for professional reasons or for need of stylistic variation) and for the reception of the variants (in terms of reading / interpreting texts).

4.   If there is no use of a particular variant in contemporary speech and writing (*archaism*) or if it is used only in a given community of practice, the conduct in pedagogical terms also needs to be particular. Thus, the guidelines should be restricted to the field of data reception (recognition by reading / listening, at religious or literary domain, for example). The production of this variant will only be feasible, in fact, if it is linked to a need of a specific group (religious, writers, lawyers, for example) or if it functions as a stylistic marker for the construction of a *persona* (according to ECKERT, 2006).

This set of situations – articulated to the knowledge of the variable rules of the Portuguese language, in the speech-writing and stylistic monitoring *continua* – may contribute to normative guides effectively reflect the norms practiced in the complex network of varieties, modalities and styles. It is necessary, therefore, to develop researches that, in dealing with variable rules, dedicate themselves to the construction of a "pedagogy of linguistic variation" (FARACO, 2008). In other words, it is necessary to deal with not only the mapping of phenomena in textual genres of speech and writing, according to different degrees of formality, but also the construction of didactic strategies that promote – from linguistic, epilinguistic and metalinguistic activities – the knowledge of language as a system at once systematic, interactional and also heterogeneous.

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