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National languages as flags of allegiance; or the linguistics that failed us: A close look at emergent linguistic chauvinism in Brazil

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on what appears to be the emergence of linguistic chauvinism in Brazil. Large-scale influx currently under way of foreign words (mostly from English) into the country's national language, Portuguese, is being eyed with suspicion and distrust by large segments of the population. The current crisis was kick-started by a federal deputy in the House of Representatives who presented a controversial bill aimed at curbing the use of foreignisms by the use of law. Critics have however been quick to point out that the bill is a covert attempt to advance a political agenda. The paper examines the role of linguists in the unfolding national debate. After noting that they have by and large been set aside and have failed to bring the weight of their expert opinion to bear on the whole issue, I advance the claim that it is they themselves who are largely to blame. I conclude by making a plea that it is high time we as linguists did some soul-searching and asked ourselves whether, in our single-minded effort to theorise about language in total disregard for what the lay people think and believe about it, we have not isolated ourselves from them and rendered ourselves largely inconsequential. I suggest that Critical Linguistics may turn out to be one way of regaining some of the lost ground.

Key words: politics of language, national language, Brazilian Portuguese, English in Brazil, linguists and language planning, folk linguistics

English in Brazil: a highly marketable commodity

Maceió. The capital of the north-eastern state of Alagoás, Brazil. The inhabitants of this tiny and somewhat provincial city, far away from the hustle and bustle of the more affluent southern and south-eastern states of the country, wake up one fine morning to be accosted by giant-sized hoardings strategically placed all over the town that announce in aggressively bold characters: "*Aprenda inglês com quem ensinou o mundo a falar*" (in English: 'Learn English from the one(s) that taught the world to speak').

The city of São Paulo. A sprawling metropolis and capital of the homonymous state, the industrial and financial hub of the country. In January 2001, a prime-time television commercial shows a young man suspended upside down by a rope tied to his ankles, gagged and with his hands tied behind his back, and a bundle of dynamite sticks right underneath on the floor of what looks like a disused warehouse. All of a sudden, there emerges from nowhere Arnold Schwarzenegger—yes, that's right, the incontrovertible idol and role model for thousands of body-conscious Brazilian adolescents and, as rumour has it, California's gubernatorial hopeful—and says to the man: "Do you speak English?". Upon receiving no affirmative sign, the muscle-man repeats, this time in Spanish: "*Tu hablas Español?*". As the agonizing victim continues to stare in silence, apparently unable to communicate in either of the two languages, the hero turns away in disgust, tossing behind him a lighted match-stick. (The viewers are expected to supply the parting words that are left unsaid: "*Hasta la vista, baby*")

English language is big business in Brazil, as indeed it is all over the rest of South America and, come to think of it, the whole world. English, one may say, is not just a language; it is a commodity around which is building up a truly powerful fetishism that the mavericks of the marketing world have been quick to exploit. The demand for learning the language has been rising in geometric proportions, as evidenced by the astonishing number of language schools that keep mushrooming all over the country just about as fast as the chain of MacDonald's fast food outlets. Knowledge of English is simply taken for granted as a pre-requisite by multinational corporations as they announce job vacancies. And the public at large have long been resigned to the fact that English provides them with the passport to professional success.

Yet the advance of English in Brazil (and possibly elsewhere) has not been without its own problems (Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1994, 1998, Skutnabb-Kangas 1999, Rajagopalan 1999a, 2000). More and more people are understandably becoming uneasy as they come to recognise that the spread of English and the way it is being marketed has an arrogantly wayward and aggressive dimension to it. What the Maceió hoarding tells the passers-by point blank is that either they learn English or they are going to be left behind for ever and barred from access to the world at large. The São Paulo TV commercial, with all its Hollywoodian overtones and markedly farcical humour, makes essentially the same point by saying in effect that you are no good as a world citizen unless you learn a foreign language, preferably English.

The extent of linguistic “invasion”

Indeed, so arrogant and aggressive has been the triumphant march of English into Brazil’s cultural scenario in the recent past that it is not uncommon to find people—mostly from the middle class and the so-called *nouveaux riches*—dropping English words every now and then as a constant reaffirmation of their bourgeois or petit-bourgeois status. Until, say, the end of World War II, it was French that held absolute sway—a bygone reality still nostalgically mourned by the educated elite in Brazil and elsewhere and, in a concerted fashion, by successive French governments ever since (Weinstein 1989). Indeed, it is no exaggeration to suggest that English words and expressions have found their way to practically all walks of life especially in the major urban centres, accentuating the already existing yawning gap between the urban cultural elite and the vast rural population which, except in the richer regions of the south, lives in abject poverty and cultural deprivation. English is present everywhere—on neon-signs, shop windows, television commercials, popular magazines and newspapers, and even on T-shirts worn by ordinary people, including many who speak little or no English, on beaches and other holiday resorts. All too often one comes across adolescent kids romping about with complete abandon on one of Brazil’s thousands of beaches, their skins tanned by long hours of exposure to the blazing tropical sun, proudly (and unsuspectingly) sporting T-shirts with wordings such as “I am the son of a beach.”¹

As noted already, advertisers and marketing specialists have

¹ Unlike English, Portuguese does not use vocalic length as a marker of phonemic distinction and most Brazilian learners of English have great difficulty with minimal pairs with vocalic length as the point of contrast.

been quick to cash in on this powerful trend. A cursory glance at any daily newspaper will reveal the presence of literally hundreds of English words—in news reports, leading articles, adverts and so forth. “Shopping centers” (the spelling is invariably American, as indeed is the model), “drive-thru”, “self-service”, “newsletter”, “delivery” are but a handful of examples. A new high-rise building complex for commercial use being announced for pre-construction sale in the central-spread of the major dailies in São Paulo is called “Continental Square Faria Lima” and the selling points being touted include a “Triple A building” (whatever that means), a “Continental Office Tower” and a five-star hotel that will be, or so the advertisement proudly proclaims, the “flagship” of the particular international chain in charge of running it. It is not uncommon to come across newspaper advertisements where estate developers offer special mortgage conditions for apartments in skyscrapers under construction where the projected buildings take on such fancy names as “Manhattan Tower,” “Beverly Hills Mansions,” “Hyde Park Housing Estate”, etc. By the way, the English word “apartment” is often preferred to the already available Portuguese equivalent “*apartamento*”—a clear indication that the use of the foreign word lends an additional aura to the product being offered for sale. Apartments and houses are announced for sale with “bay window”, “balcony”, “kitchen garden”, “laundry”, “cellar”, “closet” and so forth as added attractions. Hardly anyone refers to the “*sala de estar*” except through its English equivalent “living room”, often abbreviated as “living” and a “kitchenette” is often spelt as “kitnet”.

If the special jargon of such discursive domains as economics is already notorious for its “other-worldly” flavour no matter what language one is talking about, in a country like Brazil, the ordinary man has an additional complicating factor to contend with. Many of the key terms are straightforward borrowings from English, with seldom any attempt to “vernacularise” them in spelling or in pronunciation i.e., absorb them into the phonological or orthographic matrices of Portuguese, the language of the vast majority of the people—there are, in addition, some 180 or so native Indian languages (Rodrigues 1993) and entire communities where languages such as German and Russian are still spoken by the local people, a fact recognised *de facto* by the National Census Board which sends special bilingual enumerators to interview them. The constant use of “treasury bonds”, “hedge funds”, “prime rate”, “spread”, “Federal Reserve”, “exchange rate”, “debentures”, and so forth only help fuel suspicion in several quarters that the academics at the helm of the nation’s economic affairs are more attentive to the interests of their counterparts in North-America and Europe than the plight of large sectors of the country’s workforce, toiling

under dismal conditions of under-employment or downright unemployment. Small wonder that these swash-buckling self-styled economic wizards that strut about the corridors of power all over the continent and form a class unto themselves are often pejoratively referred to, in Spanish, as "*los perfumados*" (English translation: 'the perfumed ones'), a sly reference to their Harvard, Princeton or Stanford academic upbringing, pin-stripe suits, Mont-Blanc fountain pens and, of course, their impeccable English.

No doubt, in many other discursive domains marked by large scale infusion of loan words, the process of slow and steady vernacularisation has taken place over the years and words that long resisted Portuguesisation or replacement by easy translation-substitutes have slowly been edged out of popular usage and their places taken up by home-grown coinages. A case in point is the vocabulary relating to football (spelt, "*futebol*" in Portuguese and pronounced accordingly). While most Brazilians are quick to admit that the game was originally imported from England, few would deny that it is just as Brazilian today as the samba and the carnival. Terms like "corner kick", "penalty", "off-side", "centre-forward", "goal-keeper", and "back" have been replaced by "*escanteio*", "*penalidade máxima*", "*impedimento*", "*atacante*", "*goleiro*" and "*zagueiro*", respectively. Football has 'gone native' in Brazil, both linguistically and as a national sport.

But other discursive domains have been literally invaded by loan-words from English that, from the looks of it, seem obstinately resistant to substitution by vernacular equivalents. This is the case of the vocabulary associated with the internet and computer technology in general. While "computer" has been nativised as "*computador*", "web-site" has been simply abbreviated as "site" (with practically the same English pronunciation, notably the diphthong, retained—something totally alien to the Portuguese spelling system; the only innovation being the addition of an epenthetic vowel at the end, as warranted by local phonology) and an entire array of words such as "mouse", "e-mail", "attachment", "download", "upgrade", "browser", "hardware", "bookmark" and so on simply incorporated wholesale, with no attempt to alter either the spelling or the pronunciation.

An even more curious phenomenon is the emergence of a new set of lexical items such as "*printar*", "*startar*", and "*deletar*" (adaptations of "print", "start" and "delete", respectively) with the interesting result that the already existing native equivalents "*imprimir*", "*iniciar*", and "*apagar*" tend to be increasingly reserved for all contexts except that of desktop publishing.

Public feeling in regard to the spread of English

A number of Brazilians, especially those belonging to the younger generation, are apparently at ease with this increasing use of English words in everyday Portuguese—most of the children, especially from the middle classes and upwards, are already familiar with random words from English, thanks to the incredible penetration of American and British—well, now Canadian and Australian as well—pop music in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America; besides, many have had some years of English at one of the hundreds of language schools mentioned earlier. But many others are increasingly getting alarmed by what they see as a veritable “take-over” of their language by English. These fears are no doubt not without some *prima facie* justification, but a closer look at their genealogy will show that the linguistic issue is but the tip of a much larger iceberg (Rajagopalan 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Rajagopalan and Rajagopalan, forthcoming).

And the ice-berg in question is the difficult North-South relation, to which the Brazilian middle class have by and large been demonstrably highly sensitive. On the one hand, with the successive waves of European immigrants (Dutch, Spanish, Italian, German, Polish, Russian, Ukranian and so forth, who emigrated to Brazil mostly from the second half of the 19th century onwards—the first two in the list have a presence in Brazil dating back to earlier days) swelling the numbers of the original Portuguese settlers and colonisers and the slaves they brought from Africa, Brazil’s upper and middle classes have tended to pride themselves on their European origins (at bottom, this is also indicative of deeply ingrained racial prejudices at work, since statistics belie such claims—according to recent studies based on DNA sampling, even on a conservative estimate, as many as 70% of the country’s population may qualify as the progeny of miscegenation).

On the other hand, it is hardly a state secret that Brazil is very much in the area of direct influence of the “Big Brother” in the North. As a matter of fact, the U.S. has jealously guarded its “backyard” against possible overtures from the rest of the world. Brazil elected to adopt a “neutral” stance at the outbreak of the Second World War—historians have nevertheless registered that the then President Getúlio Vargas not only permitted spies, secret agents, propagandists and even potential saboteurs from Nazi Germany to freely carry out their missions in the country, but secretly contributed to the pretensions of the Third Reich

(even deporting some Jewish citizens to meet their fate in concentration camps), and only joined ranks with the Allies at the behest of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and a little arm-twisting from the then American president in the form of a veiled threat of military intervention. At this precise moment, there is, beneath the placid surface of diplomatic smiles and handshakes, an unacknowledged tug of war going on between the Bush administration on the one hand and the European Union on the other as to who would first establish a viable free-trade agreement with the Merco-Sur (the South American common market, with Brazil and Argentina as its major partners).

Caught between their much cherished "European origins" and their painfully acknowledged subservience to the U.S.A., most middle and upper class Brazilians are prone to evince a rather ambivalent attitude when asked to position themselves in relation to the unrestrained spread of English (which many equate with the muscle-power of Uncle Sam) and the possible threat it poses to the very survival of their national language and, with it, their very national identity. On the one hand, they not only welcome the trend but are happy to send their children to special language schools with suggestive names such as "*Cultura Inglesa*", "*União Cultural Brasil-Estados Unidos*", "*Centro Britânico*" etc. that offer courses in English (and bankroll expensive advertising campaigns using hard-sell tactics of the kind looked at in the beginning of this paper). Those who can afford it dream of sending their children to the U.S. or some other English-speaking country as a sure guarantee of their future professional success.

On the other hand, more and more people are, as already mentioned, also becoming increasingly alarmed by the prospects of Portuguese losing its identity through relentless anglicisation, massive borrowings, and indiscriminate use of English where the use of the vernacular might just as well do the job. And in what may well be developing into a mass hysteria in some quarters, this feeling is being constantly aided and abetted by the news-hungry media and a handful of well-intentioned but ill-advised enthusiasts.

The role of professional politicians

As only to be expected, politicians have not been slow in responding to these widespread apprehensions amongst their electorate. In March 1999, a Federal Deputy by name Aldo Rebelo tabled a bill in the lower house of Brazil's legislature. This bill, with the serial number

1676, is claimed to address the issues of the “promotion, protection, defence, and use of Portuguese language”. After declaring that Portuguese is “the official language of the Federal Republic of Brazil”, and “the form of spoken and written expression of the Brazilian people, both in its standard variety and in its popular variants,” the text of the proposed bill goes on to assert that it “constitutes an asset of immaterial nature, [yet] part and parcel of Brazil’s cultural heritage”. It also establishes that the language should be seen as a key factor in national integration. Furthermore, it stipulates that it is the bounden duty of the State to “promote, protect and defend the Portuguese language”.

Rebello’s proposed bill also stipulates that “[A]ny and every use of foreign words or expressions, with the exception of special cases mentioned in this law, will be considered detrimental to Brazil’s cultural heritage and as such punishable in accordance with the law of the land”.² Among the cases punishable under the proposed law will be the use of foreign words where there already are Portuguese equivalents, as well as their use in contexts where it may induce “error or illusion of any sort” or be otherwise harmful to Brazilian culture by “misrepresenting some aspect of it”. The bill stipulates a grace period of 90 days in which foreign words already in use will have to be replaced by their native equivalents. If, as and when it comes into effect, the countdown will also start for foreign residents in Brazil who will have, from then on, exactly a year in which to learn the language with enough proficiency to use it in their workplace and a host of other environments—with stiff penalties for failure to comply.

Although Rebello’s bill does not single out English as the chief culprit for the alleged “deformation of the Portuguese language”, it is pretty much clear what his prime target is. In a section explaining the *raison d’être* for the proposed bill, the deputy—who, by the way, was elected on a ticket from a rump party on the radical left called the *Communist Party of Brazil*—ponders as follows:

In point of fact, we are witnessing a veritable deformation of the Portuguese language; such is the indiscriminate and unnecessary invasion of foreignisms—such as “holding”, “recall”, “franchise”, “coffee-break”, “self-service” and such portuguesisations of dubious taste, in general without

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Here as well as throughout the rest of this paper, all passages quoted from their Portuguese originals are presented in the form of my free translations of them into English. For syntactic and stylistic reasons, I often sacrifice the letter in order to remain faithful to the spirit.

justification, such as "startar", "printar", "bidar", "atacar" and "database". And this is happening with such breathtaking speed and voracity that it is no exaggeration to suppose that we are about to jeopardize oral and written communication with the ordinary person in the street who is unaccustomed to the words and phrases imported, generally from North-American English that rule our daily lives, above all the production, consumption and marketing of goods, products and services, not to mention those foreign words and phrases that come to us through information technology and through the media of mass communication and popular trends and fashions.(Rebelo, 2000: 13)

Popular responses to the proposed bill

Given its long history of uneasy relationship with its mighty neighbour in the northern hemisphere, Brazil's population is especially vulnerable to conspiracy theories involving the "Big Brother" who has his prying eyes watching its territory 24 hours a day from stationary and rotating satellites, routinely scanning everything from troop movements to illegal logging in the rain forests. The average person in the street is frequently heard affirming that many of the important decisions by Itamaraty, Brazil's foreign office, are actually taken in Washington. Many are convinced that the U.S. holds all the cards and are fully resigned to the idea. Many believe that all the South American countries will soon have no alternative but to adopt the U.S. dollar as their currency and let Washington decide what is in their best interest. But there are also those who deeply regret the fact that their country has been historically pushed over to the status of a U.S. satellite and that, it is only a matter of time before the NAFTA (the U.S. dominated North-American Free Trade Area) engulfs their state, snuffing out whatever autonomy they currently enjoy in the economic sphere. "The entire continent [of South America]," writes sociologist Emir Sader (2001: A3), "is under the threat of becoming a free trade zone for North-American corporations."

It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the current debate over the need "to protect the national language against an invading foreign power" has generated a lot of public interest, galvanising a good deal of support for the proposed bill. The "Letters to the Editor" columns of major daily newspapers bear constant testimony to the growing public reaction and interest.

Writing for the national daily newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, columnist Claudia Antunes wrote:

That language is power, no one doubts. Centuries before Hollywood and the internet, the bishop of Avilla was affirming it. "It is the perfect instrument of the empire," he told Queen Isabel of Spain, with respect to the conclusion of the first grammar of Spanish, in the same year as the discovery of America by Columbus. (Antunes, 2000: 17).

And the author went on to remind her readers of the decimation of native populations, along with their native languages, by the blood-thirsty Spanish *conquistadores*. In an article published in the newspaper *Jornal de Brasília*, José Luiz Oliveira (2000) expressed a view which belongs to the more restrained ones among the thousands of similar reactions from the public at large. He said:

If the society as a whole gets involved, certainly we will find a way to free the Portuguese language from these injurious attacks. We now have a first draft [of the bill]. Radical postures, although fully deserving of the right to be expressed and respected, seem to be out of the question. To veto foreignisms in the spirit of xenophobia is as squint-eyed as to adopt it indiscriminately in the name of a globalised world, with no frontiers for the language that is the medium as well as the guardian of a nation's culture.

Mauro Chaves, a noted syndicated columnist, lamented both the "excess of indispensable foreignisms (of the sort "delivery", "drive-thru" etc.)" and what he referred to as the "bewitchment by the foreign accent (while speaking Portuguese), alongside a sense of shame about Brazilian accent (when speaking other languages, especially English)". And having full recourse to the pungent sarcasm for which he is well-known, added:

[Radio and television] newsreaders twist and roll their tongues in their efforts to pronounce words from the English language the way the Americans do (or *think* they do). At the same time, down here even those who could otherwise speak our language reasonably well seem to make a point of exaggerating on their own accent, to

enhance their charm—[as in] the case of the likeable “American” Henry Sobel (an excellent public figure). (Chaves, 2001)

The “likeable” American referred to by Chaves is a U.S.-born Jewish rabbi who has lived in Brazil for several years and is frequently in the news for making common cause with public demands for putting an end to corruption and tougher police action on organised crime, drug-trafficking and dope-pushing, curbing police violence in the streets and state penitentiaries and so forth. What makes him specifically vulnerable to such sly remarks as the one in the passage just quoted is the rather curious fact that, after several years in Brazil, he still retains his strong North-American nasal twang although his Portuguese is grammatically near perfect—inviting the suspicion that the whole thing may well be a “put-on” or a publicity stunt.

In an editorial article that appeared in the daily newspaper *O Povo* (August 15th, 2000), one reads:

With regard to the polemic, which is just beginning, the most conciliatory position and certainly the one most level-headed is probably that of the ex-president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, the educationist Arnaldo Niskier, for whom the proposed bill could not have come at a better time: “It was necessary to somehow get the ball rolling. This bill provides for a healthy means to contain excess, but it is absolutely necessary that there is a large-sale campaign starting with the schools”

That campaign, it seems, is already under way. The federal deputy Aldo Rebelo, the man who kick-started it all, has a home-page (although it is doubtful if he himself would call it precisely that, given his anti-English fervour) which is visited by hundreds of interested internet surfers. So too are the dozens of chat rooms where educationists, language teachers, students, parents anxious about their children’s education and future, and literally hundreds of others vie with one another to air their views on what is perceived to be an imminent threat to the national language.³ There is a popular saying in Brazilian Portuguese that goes: “Of the medicine man and the lunatic, everybody has a wee bit” (often remembered in the context of talk about the high

³ In an article published recently, Aldo Rebelo, the Deputy currently spearheading the crusade against the English language in Brazil vents his fury in the following words: “Grossly repugnant is the readiness with which are being incorporated into Portuguese words of alien physiognomy that only help corrupt the language.”(Rebelo, 2001).

incidence of self-medication in the country). Thanks to Rebelo's bill, it seems, it may soon become appropriate to add a third figure to the duo: the linguist. For every professional linguist in the country closeted in their study or doing their field-work in remote and mostly inaccessible regions, there are literally thousands of amateur ones out there on the streets, clamouring to be heard and as convinced of their views about language as their institutionally authorised counterparts on the campuses.

In Rio de Janeiro, a group of youngsters, mostly college students, have got together and formed an association with the express mission of "combating foreignisms". Called the "Movement for the Valorisation of the culture, language and riches of Brazil" (MV-Brasil), the group is presided over by a certain Wagner Vasconcelos, aged 34, who spent several years of his life in Canada and the U.S. and is currently a law undergraduate at The Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Insisting that that America is "umbilically bound" to its essential "Latinness" thanks to having taken its name from Americo Vespuccio, members of this movement hasten to add that what they are against is not foreign people as such but the idea of "globalisation".

As a matter of fact, the concept of "Latinness" has been frequently invoked as an antidote to the advance of English. Arnaldo Niskier, a former president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters (and mentioned in the newspaper editorial quoted from earlier), invoked it as part of his contribution to a series of seminars entitled "*Idioma e Soberania – Nossa Língua, Nossa Pátria*" (Language and Sovereignty – Our Language, Our Fatherland), organised by Aldo Rebelo in order to drum up support for his bill. One should note here *en passant* that the dangerous similarity between the second half of the name of the event and Hitler's spirited slogan "*Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer*" seems not to have been perceived by the honourable deputy himself who, let us not forget, calls himself a communist—nor for that matter by the hundreds of supporters of his bill who presumably act on the strength of their conviction that, by espousing the cause of their mother-tongue in its unequal fight against the rapacious pretensions of imperialism as represented by Uncle Sam, they are serving a leftist cause and speaking on behalf of the wretched of the earth. Be that as it may, referring to a speech delivered at a Paris encounter on "Latinness" by the Minister of Education of France, Claude Allègre, Niskier summed up and endorsed the Latinness thesis in the following words:

.... French has 170 million speakers and is one of the official languages of the UN; Portuguese, 200 million

speakers and Spanish, with its 400 million. The English speaking world comprises 500million. If we join the whole Latin world, our 200 million with the 400 million who speak Spanish and the 170 million Francophones, we will surpass the English language. This is the conclusion of the French government. (Niskier, 2000)

Incidentally, neither the French government nor the Brazilian man of letters apparently found it necessary to add the millions of Italians and, why not, Romanians, to their already swelling statistics, but the fact remains that the French example is frequently cited with approval by sympathisers of the proposed Rebelo legislation.

In the same encounter organised by Rebelo, Alain Rouquié, a French diplomat who had presented his credentials to the foreign office in Brasília barely the day before, declared that he was delighted to be able to speak to his audience in his admittedly rickety Portuguese and made a point of stressing that "the French language and the [other] Romance languages, as representatives of an undeniable cultural unity, ought to make a common effort, since they all are being exposed to the same peril."

Another invited speaker at the encounter was Fernando Segismundo, a member of the Academy of Letters of Rio de Janeiro, who declared his Latin affinities in no uncertain terms:

It is admitted that the Spanishisms, Frenchisms, and Italianisms present in our national language were and will be well received, thanks to their common origin shared also by Portuguese, all derived from Vulgar Latin. But the Germanic lexicon and the English vocabulary derived from it, are far too alien to our traditions and our reality, considering, especially, the orthography and the pronunciation. Whereof the conclusion: the foreignisms to which the announcement of the present symposium refers are confined to those of an English origin, through its North-American variety (Segismundo, 2000)

It may be worth pointing out here that it is a widely attested fact that the arguments used in defence of linguistic purism often discriminate among the different sources of foreign influence. Thus, as pointed out by Thomas (1992: 87), the German efforts in the 19th and early 20th centuries—largely as a result of a "rebellion against the dominating influence of French culture in the eighteenth century" (Henningsen, 1989)—to eliminate such words *Nase* (nose), *Ohr* (ear),

and *Auge* (eye) were justified on the allegation that they are Latinisms and, conversely, the efforts to rid Hungarian of foreign influences by and large ignored words of Slavic origin for the reason that their foreignness was phonologically and orthographically almost imperceptible.

In June 2000, the Brazilian Academy of Letters, with its headquarters in Rio de Janeiro, organised under its auspices a series of talks entitled “*A Língua Portuguesa no Brasil*” (The Portuguese language in Brazil). Of the six invited speakers, only one was a linguist—or considered herself a professional linguist. Evanildo Bechara, author of several books of traditional and pedagogic grammar and one of the “immortals” of the academy, preferred to be referred to as a grammarian and a philologist. Defending the importance of having a norm for any national language, Bechara (2000) conceded that the very concept of norm has undergone significant changes, thanks to important theoretical work done principally in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. And he made a point of sending a subtle message to those from whom he had received systematic attacks for championing standardisation—professional linguists. Here is what he had to say in regard to the work of language theorists, generically speaking:

We are here speaking of theories [of language] that contribute to a reformulation of the concept of norm, of the standard variety—be it from a purely theoretical perspective or from a pedagogical point of view—of languages in general and of Portuguese in particular. *I leave aside those linguists who believe that the prescriptive interests of the traditional grammar are inconsequential from a scientific point of view and hence of no interest to linguistics and inoperative as far as the independent life of languages is concerned—for which reasons, they recommend that the grammarians ought to leave their language alone.* (Bechara, 2000) (italics mine)

The author duly (and disparagingly) credits the last turn of phrase to the title of a famous book by Robert Hall Jr. (1950) but stops short of dismissing all of modern linguistics by cleverly bringing out of the treasure-trove a passage from Joaquim Mattoso Câmara (1904 – 1970), a pioneering Brazilian linguist who had studied under Louis Gray and Roman Jakobson in the early 1940s thanks to a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation (Castilho and Altman, 1994: 22) and who is, by now, something of a cult figure in Brazilian academic scenario (Bechara refers to him as “our first linguist”)—to the effect that “normative grammar has its own place and is not made untenable by scientific,

descriptive grammar; but it is a place apart, forced upon the society by impositions of a practical nature". What is worse, adds the philologist, still quoting his illustrious mentor the linguist, "[i]t is a profoundly disturbing error to confuse the two disciplines and, worse still, do synchronic linguistics with normative interests." Incidentally, what Bechara judiciously found it in his interests to forget was the fact that the doyen of Brazilian linguistics had also insisted in no unequivocal terms that

Before everything else, a normative grammar is *dependent* on synchronic linguistics or descriptive grammar if only so as not to be capricious and counter-productive. (Câmara, 1970: v) (emphasis added)

Reactions from linguists

Rebello's bill has predictably attracted a lot of attention from linguists in particular and the academic community in general. At their annual meeting during the prestigious encounter of the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Sciences (SBPC) in Natal in July 1998, a group of leading Brazilian linguists, meeting under the auspices of the Brazilian Association of Linguistics (ABRALIN), anticipated the prevailing mood in the country and foresaw the possibility that legislative initiatives might be forthcoming. The linguists assembled on that occasion debated what future course of action to take. A draft proposal had already been made available to its members on the web. The proposal included a number of vaguely-worded demands such as increased presence and more active participation of linguists in the various decision-making bodies. In July 2000, the Brazilian Association of Applied Linguistics (ALAB) brought out a special bulletin which carried reproductions of Aldo Rebello's proposed bill and also another bill by a state deputy by name Jussara Cony, currently under discussion in the legislative assembly of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, which practically endorses its federal precedent but stipulates additionally that the use of Portuguese will be compulsory in a wide variety of socio-cultural domains such as classroom teaching, workplace, law, official communiqués, advertising and mass communication (Luckily, the bill treats as exceptions to the rule "intellectual, artistic and scientific activities", "foreign language teaching", and—refreshingly significantly—"communication with the members of indigenous communities in Brazil", among others). The texts of the two proposed bills are followed by articles by some of Brazil's most renowned linguists.

In an article published in the literary supplement to one of Brazil's most important national newspapers, *Folha de São Paulo*, the author, Carlos Alberto Faraco, a prominent linguist and a former rector of a major federal university, lamented that "40 years after its introduction as a discipline in Brazilian universities, linguistics continues to remain invisible and inaudible to the society as a whole" (Faraco, 2001: 30). Faraco's reasoning in the rest of his paper is typical of the attitude assumed by many Brazilian linguists in their immediate reactions to language standardisation defended by Rebelo and others. Indeed, as we shall see later on, it is very much of a piece with the attitude of linguists from elsewhere in the world, as they are all too frequently caught napping and faced with legislative measures imposed from the top that in their view show complete ignorance of what human languages are and how they work. Their reactions usually betray a sense of exasperation at the thought that, with all the giant strides made by Science, ordinary people can still be so immune to reason and unimpressed by the achievements of a genuine science like theirs. Commenting on a remark by a certain Marilene Felinto, in an article published earlier on in the same newspaper, to the effect that "Portuguese has here [i.e., in Brazil] been transformed into a vernacular with no logic or rules", Faraco rebuts:

[Felinto's] observation is a total absurdity, given that no human language exists under these conditions, that is to say, without a logic of its own and without rules. The journalist in question does put her finger though on a fact that undoubtedly calls for lengthy discussion. *However, she attributes it to a cause that is totally misplaced, and muddle-headed to begin with. At bottom, what this reveals is the familiar mistake of thinking that, if certain forms of speech do not manifest the very same rules as are explicated in rancid compendiums of grammar, it should follow that they have no rules or logic.* (Faraco, 2001: 31) (emphasis added)

José Luiz Fiorin, another renowned linguist, rejects outright all attempts at linguistic engineering and standardisation such as the ones by Rebelo and Cony and argues as follows:

Variation is inherent to [human] languages, because human societies are divided into groups: there are the young and the elderly, inhabitants of different regions, people who have different professions, people that belong

to different social classes and so on to know a language is to know its varieties. A good speaker is a "polyglot" in their own language. To know Portuguese is not to have learned rules that belong to the artificial language used by the schools. (Fiorin, 2000: 67)

Fiorin wraps up his paper by concluding that

As can be readily seen, the conception of language on which the [Rebello] bill is based is mistaken. The linguistic problems that he identifies are far from real. It now remains to discuss the ideological foundation of the project which is based not on language considered as an instrument of communication but language viewed as a symbolic expression of one's nationality. What the project aims to do is to treat language as an arena for anti-imperialist struggle. (Fiorin, 2000: 71-72)

Faraco and Fiorin are representative of one sort of reaction to the ongoing debate about the use of "foreignisms" in Brazilian Portuguese. As linguists, they are essentially claiming, as indeed their colleagues in other parts of the world also frequently do, that if there is such a tremendous confusion among lay people, the federal and state deputies included, what is urgently needed is to make sure that the results of the scientific study of language, as carried out by professional linguists over the years, are made available to the masses. Faraco is eager to press home the political nature of the task ahead for linguists when he writes:

Linguists are faced with the challenge of approaching these questions as fundamentally political questions and think about ways of making their voices heard, thus contributing to the beginning of an urgently needed cultural war among contending discourses that address the language of Brazil. (Faraco, 2001: 31)

Other linguists like John Robert Schmitz (2000) have opted to take a different argumentative tack. They argue that the incorporation of foreign words into Portuguese must eventually turn out to be beneficial to the Portuguese language. Marcos Bagno, insisting along with the majority of other linguists that the proposed bill is based on a view of language that is completely outdated, makes the point that "foreignisms do no harm; on the contrary, they enrich the Portuguese language" (cited in Nunes, 2001). Elsewhere he confidently asserts,

rightly or wrongly, something that is most certain to act as a lightning rod for suspicion and criticism from grammarians like Bechara who have, as indeed their counterparts everywhere else in the world, looked upon themselves as the authorised custodians of the rules of their language. Here are his words:

The use of language needs no legislation. Language is a self-regulating system, it takes care of its own necessities. On its own, it absorbs what is useful to its needs and throws out what it can do without. ... A language does not need to be "defended", much less defended from its own speakers, who are its legitimate users and as such ought to have the liberty to do with it what it best pleases them to do. (Bagno, 2000: 61)

Writing in a similar vein, Sírio Possenti (2000: 85) argues as follows:

In a matter of several years, say, a century, the language analysts of that time will perhaps say that Portuguese was immensely enriched during the period of globalisation, thus becoming a language even more adequate to the needs of its speakers. This was clearly what happened in England. It was invaded by Normans who obviously did not speak English and forced upon the language a large number of lexical items, mostly technical and having to do with governance and culture in general—of which no Englishman today complains, for reasons of [linguistic] purism or on the grounds that there already were equivalent words of Anglo-Saxon origin before the invasion.(Possenti, 2000: 86)

But Possenti also concludes by saying that, despite its great appeal, the case against foreignisms, as defended by the deputies, rests on a gross misunderstanding about language that has survived through the centuries. In his own words,

Any [Brazilian] citizen interested in such topics as national culture, national wealth etc., who has not been won over by the facile discourse of globalisation, will be favourably disposed towards the motives behind the proposed bill. *The problem is that it introduces some of the patent untruths about language that have been repeated time and time again since centuries ago.* (Possenti, 2000: 87) (my italics).

Others have argued along the lines that Brazilian culture is quintessentially foreign all the way through and there is little point in trying to get rid of something that is of the very essence. Thus Maria José Finatto vigorously defends the idea that Brazil has always been a melting pot of multifarious ingredients and that the voracious incorporation of foreign elements has been the hall-mark of Brazilian national history when she writes:

.... as argued by Gilberto Gil [a famous Brazilian singer and widely admired symbol of resistance during the days of the military regime], it is necessary not to lose sight of the fact that our culture is historically anthropophagic and, ever since we emblematically devoured a bishop called Sardinha⁴, we continue devouring all that comes to us or is imposed upon us from the outside. (Finatto 2000: 78)

Still others have taken a line of reasoning that says that, if anything, violence exists not in what happens to a language along its normal course of history but in what some self-styled pundits do to their language in the name of an authority whose legitimacy is highly dubious. The idea that standardisation of language is such an act of outright violence, perpetrated by a handful of self-styled 'experts' on the vast majority of the speakers of that language clearly surfaces in the reactions of many a Brazilian linguist to the bill currently being debated in the national congress. At the end of an article summing up the achievements of geo-linguistic surveys in Brazil, the author Suzana Cardoso (1999: 32) writes as follows:

.... knowledge of regional variation, of the varied kinds of usage of the Portuguese language in Brazil, of the non-

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The reference is to a gruesome episode in Brazilian history known as the "anthrophagic banquet". On June 16, 1556, a Portuguese ship carrying Pedro Fernando de Sardinha, nominated by Lisbon to be the colony's first bishop with the express mission of converting the native Indians, wrecked on the coast of Alagoas. The bishop who survived the wreck along with the 90 crew members were eaten by members of the *Caetés* tribe in a macabre cannibalistic ritual. The tribe was later annihilated by the Portuguese rulers during a war of reprisal that lasted 5 years. This episode was metaphorically exploited by Oswald de Andrade, a man of letters of considerable prestige in the early part of the 20th century in a landmark text called "The Manifesto of Anthropophagy" (Andrade 1928) where he wrote:

Only anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically. The only law of the world. A masqueraded expression of all individualisms, of all collectivisms. Of all the religions. Of all peace treaties.

"Sardinha" is a common Portuguese surname and the word translates into English as "sardine"—whereof the idea of 'emblematic devouring'.

unity of Brazilian Portuguese, as accumulated through geo-linguistic studies, will perforce result in the formation of a new mentality that will refrain from discriminating regional usages, avoid prioritising certain local norms and contribute towards undoing myths about one or another variety “being the most correct Portuguese”.

A slightly variant version of the same line of reasoning is that the whole case for protecting Brazilian Portuguese against the onslaught of English is based on the false assumption that there is such a thing as a monolithic Brazilian Portuguese to begin with. Thus, Paulo Guedes argues that the two proposed bills, far from addressing the real issues, actually end up “steering clear of them, by taking for real the myth of Brazil’s linguistic unity [and thus, in the ultimate analysis, actually contributing to] a veritable deformation of the Portuguese language” (Guedes, 2000: 35). In a note released by Leonor Scliar-Cabral (1999), the then president of the Brazilian Association of Linguistics (ABRALIN), once again, the idea of non-unity and internal variation was stressed. At a certain point in this note one reads:

Erroneous ideas beef up the position that, if a child first learns to read and write in a language other than Portuguese, Brazil is in serious danger of losing its national integrity. Ignorance as to how individuals develop their oral and written competencies leads to the supposition that rote learning of a set of rules spelt out in a reference book of the grammar of Brazilian Portuguese is all that is needed in order to be able to communicate with proficiency [in the language] (Scliar-Cabral, 1999: 16)

Linguists and their relative political isolation

One thing that has become increasingly clear to professional linguists in Brazil in the midst of the whole episode involving the Rebelo bill is that they have been completely kept away from the decision-making processes and have been dismally wanting in their ability to make their voices heard by the powers that be. They recognise that not only are they being set aside in the whole discussion, their views are either ignored by those whose opinions matter or, worse still, are simply being traded in for those of the traditional grammarians—their arch rivals— who have long been held in high esteem in the Brazilian society

(and indeed elsewhere in the world). Rebelo himself on one occasion refers to Evanildo Bechara as the nation's number one linguist, notwithstanding, as we have seen, Bechara's own efforts to distance himself from "those linguists who believe that the prescriptive interests of the traditional grammar are inconsequential from a scientific point of view". As for the enormous prestige of the traditional grammarians, the following rather hilarious episode from recent Brazilian history may help clarify the point. After the constituent assembly specifically elected in the late 1980s to draft the country's new constitution had come up with a preliminary version, it was decided that the late Celso Cunha, one of the most respected grammarians at that time and author of several books on grammar and the question of standardisation, should be invited to go over the text with a view to detecting and weeding out possible solecisms and other lapses. As it turned out, to the embarrassing surprise of one and all, the grammarian did his job so well that the members of the assembly had a hard time redoing the text all over again because, as was reported by the newspapers in those days, so many corrections had been made in the original draft with the sole purpose of making the language stylistically and rhetorically elegant, with little regard for the content of the law, properly speaking—a strategy that only contributed to drastically changing the spirit of many of the articles.

To go back to the almost negligible presence of linguists in the ongoing debate, it is significant that their reactions have been mostly confined to speeches in scholarly encounters and occasional publications in learned journals and conference proceedings of limited circulation. Attempts to take their case to the wider public have been few and far between, notwithstanding individual exceptions. And even when they have had the opportunity to voice their concerns, their arguments have typically tended to take the line that it is they who know what language is all about and therefore it is high time that they were listened to more often. As we have already seen, a constantly repeated refrain is that the whole argument against foreignisms in Portuguese is based on a muddle-headed view of the nature of language.

Here is a case in point. Miriam Lemle, one of Brazil's most eminent linguists and a front-ranking researcher in generative syntax, happened to be the only linguist invited by the Brazilian Academy of Letters for their afore-mentioned series of weekly conferences in 2000 entitled "The Portuguese Language in debate". At the end of her lecture "Standard language vis-à-vis linguistic heterogeneity," a member of the audience stood up and asked her how exactly she viewed the question of linguistic heterogeneity. Here are the question and the answer:

Member of the audience: Good evening. Towards the middle of your talk, you made no secret of being an ardent generativist. So, for personal clarification, I would like to know more about this theory, how it views language variation ...uhm... if, as you said, [language is] so innate in the child before it is born, because of this principle that states that it is acquired biologically, physiologically and all the rest. And language variation, in general, language in its different forms that have common traits, ...uhm... but there is a lot that's different, and perhaps this whole question still remains a little unclear.

Prof. Miriam Lemle: I thank you very much indeed for your question. I don't know if you noticed it, but I seem to have planned a lecture much longer than time permitted. So there was a chunk that was left out, one that I didn't have time to develop. I shall now seize the opportunity offered by your question and present the part that was missing. Well, it was like this. To wrap up, I shall carry out my promise and speak about variation. The topic was reserved for the end of the talk because its conceptualisation depends on the linguistic theory from which we depart. The term "linguistic variation" covers a number of different things, such as: dialectal variation of accents, as for instance, the speech of the people from Bahia, from the state of Rio Grande do Sul, from Rio de Janeiro, are they variants of the same language or different languages? I am not in the least upset—rather, it helps me think linguistically with greater clarity—in saying that they are different languages, albeit very similar in their vocabulary and grammar, but differ from one another in regard to certain points of their phonological structure and the interface between prosody and syntax. *I don't see this way of putting things as a denial of national unity, given that the entity called nation is based on concepts pertaining to a module different from the phonological module.* (Lemle, 2000)(emphasis mine)

Several comments are in order here. To begin with, let us not forget that the speaker is undoubtedly one of the most renowned linguists in Brazil and whose capacity *qua* linguist is widely recognised both in the country and abroad. Yet, what we witness in this exchange is a public relations disaster. Lemle is talking to her audience in exactly the

same manner as she would if she were talking to her graduate students. At no moment does there seem to be any recognition of the fact that her audience this time consists of people who, while no doubt highly educated, have little or no background in linguistics and are not already at one with the fundamental "truths" of the discipline. Unlike her graduate students who most probably have in common with Lemle what Emmon Bach once appropriately referred to as a "meta-worry", that is an "inordinate tendency not just to think about language, but to think about thinking about language" (Bach 1974: 153), most of the members of the audience had no interest in sitting long hours and brooding over the right way to conceptualise language and so forth. Furthermore, Lemle also seems to disregard the fact that the majority of the people who sat through her lecture attentively listening to what she had to say, were looking for answers to a set of pressing questions relating to the future of their national language, the threat putatively posed by the unrestrained use of foreignisms, and the efforts to curb the possible degeneration of their language through tough legislation.

It should not come as a surprise, therefore, if Lemle's remark that it hardly mattered whether we regarded the different dialects of Brazilian Portuguese as merely different variants of one and the same language or different languages, each in its own right, produced exactly the opposite effect from what she had intended: that the linguists, with all their much-vaunted scientific training and wisdom accumulated over the years, have precious little to tell them and are mostly irrelevant when it comes to linguistic matters involving state policies. The people gathered at the Academy's auditorium in Rio de Janeiro that evening had no interest in and patience for listening to what probably struck them as pedantic and unnecessarily convoluted lines of reasoning being, as it were, sadistically pursued in order to arrive at conclusions that ran counter to their common sense beliefs. Not only are the masses easily roused to action by appeal to nationalism, they are also sensitive to the appeal of what Fishman (1968) has called "nationism", i. e., the need to legislatively intervene in the linguistic affairs of a nation so as to guarantee its integrity.

What the eminent linguist most certainly meant to drive home was that, purely from a theoretical perspective, whether we postulate a single language with several distinct dialects or a group of languages very similar to one another makes little substantial difference, since the very distinction between language and dialect is unclear to begin with. Now, there may not be a clear *linguistic* answer to when a dialect is entitled to be considered a language; but not to recognise that the difference has important *political* connotations is to commit a major

tactical blunder if one is addressing an audience whose interest in language is, perhaps unbeknownst to themselves, primarily political. A language is, after all, as the saying goes, a dialect with an army and a navy. By not recognising that elementary truism of folk wisdom, Lemle ended up addressing the wrong audience at the wrong place and at the wrong time.

Needless to say, one should stop short of making sweeping generalisations here. Many linguists like Maros Bagno and Sirio Possenti have done remarkably well in pressing home the message that the question of language is too serious to be left to the care of a handful of politicians and otherwise well-intentioned zealots. But the message that often does get across is stand-offish and seems to carry a sub-text that says: "Look here, you're playing with fire when you pass hasty judgments on linguistic matters. Leave such matters to us—the only genuine experts". Thus, in a text ironically entitled "The deputy and his tongue", Bagno writes as follows:

The text [of the proposed bill] deserves a lengthier treatment than space allows me to offer here. But, before anything else, to make clear the positions, it is important to stress that the project has already come up against *a high degree of rejection from the majority of linguists* and researchers involved in the investigation of linguistic phenomena in Brazil. Please note: I said linguists and researchers, that is to say, those who analyse language in accordance with consistent scientific theories, on the basis of data gathered from the language really used by Brazilians, data gathered using rigorous methods, tried and tested several times. I didn't say traditional grammarians, let alone TV talk show hosts who talk about correct and incorrect Portuguese, nor for that matter, newspaper and magazine columnists who give us "tips" on "good" Portuguese. (Bagno, 2000: 55)

The reference to the TV celebrity is to a certain Pasquale Cipro Neto, highly criticised by linguists and literally revered by thousands of non-linguists, who has a programme where he comments on what is and what is not correct to say in Brazilian Portuguese. While, no doubt, fellow linguists will gladly approve of such jibes at the traditional grammarians (used by the linguists as their sparring-partners ever since the discipline constituted itself as such), it is doubtful if such rhetorical ploys can have any effect but its exact opposite on their intended target readership. One might also wonder if such tactics would not actually

justify such equally dismissive remarks such as the one by the grammarian Bechara in his reference to “those linguists who believe that the prescriptive interests of the traditional grammar are inconsequential from a scientific point of view.”

Putting the Brazilian case in perspective

Before proceeding any further, it might be interesting to put in perspective the ongoing row over the pros and cons “protecting” Brazilian Portuguese from foreignisms. To begin with, it is important to recognise that what is happening in Brazil is by no means unprecedented in the rest of the world. Language chauvinism has always been around and individual languages have often served as powerful flags of allegiance and clever politicians, eager to fish in troubled waters, have frequently raised the bogey of foreign invasion on their nation’s language as an infallible means to rally masses of electorate—“the blunt monster with uncounted heads; the still discordant, wavering multitude,” as Shakespeare once uncharitably described them. As Fasold put it,

To overstate the case a bit, a national language can be compared to a national flag. A country’s flag functions almost entirely as a symbol. (Fasold 1988: 181)

Recent cases of exploitation of language loyalties for political purposes include the case of Croatia where the late President Franjo Tudjman single-handedly helped introduce some 10% of neologisms into the basic vocabulary of Croatian with a view to driving a wedge of mutual incomprehensibility between the people of Croatia and their erstwhile Siamese-twin brothers, the Serbians (Treanor, 1997: 67).

This may happen because of a perceived need of a new sense of nationhood or the remodelling of an already existing one. The “re-invention” from scratch of modern Hebrew by the newly independent state of Israel in mid-20th century and the efforts in the 1920s by Turkey’s Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the Atatürk, to Europeanise his country and its language by, among other things, adopting the Roman script and by Mahatma Gandhi in India to literally invent a new linguistic entity called “Hindusthani” are among the most well-known and glaring examples. At the other end of the spectrum are efforts by dictatorial regimes to uphold the banner of linguistic unity and purity as a pretext for crushing minority groups. The Franco dictatorship in Spain imposed a ban on minority languages and, around roughly the same period, in Brazil, the dictator Getúlio Vargas, who until then had silently rooted for

the Germans, suddenly switched sides and instituted strict penalties for the several thousands of monolingual or barely bilingual German and Italian descendants living in enclaves in the southern states of Brazil caught speaking in any language other than Portuguese on the streets and other public places. The Fascist Italy under the leadership of Mussolini (Klein 1988) and Germany under the Nazis (Bramsted 1965) were also quick to realise the importance of exploring the potential appeal of language to further their own ends. In the words of Buck (1916),

Of all the institutions which mark a common nationality, language is the one of which a people is most conscious and to which it is most fanatically attached. It is the one conspicuous banner of nationality, to be defended against encroachment, as it is the first object of attack on the part of a power aiming to crush out a distinction of nationality among its subject peoples. (Buck 1916; cited in Greenfield 1998: 635)

More recently, under the banner of democracy and all the much-celebrated principles of free speech etc. that go with it, the French government introduced restrictions on the use of English in such spheres of public life as radio and television transmissions (many in Brazil, as we have seen, look up to the French as their principal inspirational source) and the U.S. adopted the “English only” policy, alarmed by the widespread prestige of Spanish and the growing ascendancy of “Spanglish”. The “English only” demand in U.S. was spearheaded by private organisations such as the “U.S. English” which boasts, among its advisory board members, the presence of none other than Arnold Schwarzenegger—yes, the same Hollywood celebrity who appeared on the commercial in Brazilian television referred to in the beginning of this paper and who, apparently, has no qualms about possible duplicity of standards concerning commitment to language policy at home and in his “backyard”.

It has long been known that the banner of language is raised as an affirmation of one’s nationhood and national integrity every time there is a perceived threat from the outside. In Europe and the U.S., this threat is usually identified with the rising influx of immigrants (Giles et al. 1995, Ricento 1995, Sullivan and Schartz 1999). It is not at all surprising that the rising popular demand to contain the use of English in many developing countries is also, as we have seen, a reaction against what is perceived to be the growing presence and interference of the U.S. in their domestic affairs, through agencies such as the IMF and

the World Bank. Interesting case studies in this respect include those of Iran (Karimi-Hakkak 1989) and Sri Lanka (Jernudd and Uyangola 1987).

It has been observed by a number of scholars that those who join forces to promote a national language against perceived threats from the outside often make claims on behalf of the language that fly in the face of established evidence. Thus, after a failed attempt to purge the Turkish language of all loan words from Persian and Arabic that it had accumulated over centuries, the Atatürk and his language lieutenants had to content themselves with the fiction that Turkish was the source of all languages, thus justifying the more lenient attitude from then on (Heyd 1954: 33-4; cited in Jernudd 1989: 2). Similarly, Munidasa Kumaratunga, "an exceptionally gifted scholar" who, in the 1950s, launched the "Hela Havula" or "Pure Sinhalese Movement" in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) had no problem setting aside all available scientific evidence and claiming Sinhalese to be older than Sanskrit or Greek, rather than having been derived from the former. (Kumaratunga 1958; cited in Dissanayake, 1989:195).

Finally, in Brazil itself, the monster of purism had reared its ugly head long before Aldo Rebelo ever dreamed of jumping aboard the band wagon. In the last decade of the 19th century, for instance, there was a popular clamour to root out—ironically enough—the growing French influence on Brazilian Portuguese.

Someone might argue at this stage that language purism and linguistic chauvinism thrive on ignorance and must be combated by educating the people about the true nature of language, its workings and how individual languages evolve and change over the years. As we have seen, this is the one string that many linguists in Brazil, alarmed by the growing demands for linguistic engineering through legislation, have got used to harping on. Luckily, there are some indications that they have realised the need to change the tactics urgently. Faraco's exhortation to address the issue as a political one (Faraco 2000) and Fiorin's claim that what is at stake is the ideological dimension of language must be seen as an important step forward.

In a thought-provoking paper published in 1989, Geoffrey Nunberg had the courage and honesty to admit that linguists have made mistakes in the past and that it was important to learn from those mistakes.

Bloomfield, Fries, Hall, and their contemporaries spoke to educators with all the arrogance of an adolescent science

that was jealous of its intellectual prerogatives. As a result, their educational pronouncements now sound as high-handed and in some cases as irresponsible as many of the dogmas they were intended to counter. (Nunberg 1989: 586)

Rather than making the traditional grammarians scapegoats for all the linguistic ills that plague the world, we as linguists ought to be doing a little bit more of soul-searching to see if we ourselves have our share of responsibility in the way things have come to pass.

Where linguistics failed us

Some of the remarks made in the foregoing sections might be interpreted in such a way as to conclude that, if linguists have not had any appreciable amount of success in influencing the ongoing debate over language legislation in Brazil and elsewhere, it has to do with the fact that they are, ironically enough, bad communicators, and have not found the right rhetorical strategies with which to address and sway the masses. While there may be a grain of truth to this, I want to argue in what follows that it is linguistics as a discipline that has failed us in this regard—more so than the linguists in their efforts to get their message across.

The question that we should be asking ourselves to begin with is: what sort of linguistics is it that has failed us? In his book *Politics of Linguistics*, Fredrick Newmeyer (1986) argues for his own preferred way of doing linguistics which he calls “autonomism” which he distinguishes from two other contending approaches that he refers to as “the humanistic approach” and “the sociological approach”. In his own words,

[The advocates of the autonomous approach] approach language as a natural scientist would study a physical phenomenon, that is, *by focusing on those of its properties that exist apart from either the beliefs and values of the individual speakers of language or the nature of the society in which the language is spoken* (Newmeyer 1986: 5-6) (italics mine)

Now, every scientist, including the linguist, is entitled to carve out from the phenomenon s/he looks at the kind of object s/he wants to

study. But there is a price to pay when the degree of abstraction is so high that the object studied has little or no semblance to the way the ordinary men and women regard the same phenomenon. And, for the ordinary men and women, language is a powerful symbol invested with social, political, ideological and often ethnic connotations (Le Page 1964, Anderson, 1983, Gellner, 1983, Smith 1986). They may be right or wrong about their beliefs, but so too have linguists of other epochs been, at least in the eyes of their contemporary heirs. In other words, it is not necessarily the case that the ordinary people are always wrong and the professional linguists are always right.

Unfortunately, linguists have a long habit of brushing aside what the ordinary person thinks or says about language (Rajagopalan, 1999b, c). As Christopher Hutton put it, “[the linguist’s professionalisation] is rhetorically grounded on a rejection of everyday views about language. For the linguist, the court of public opinion is no more than a kangaroo court.” (Hutton 1996: 212). The layman’s opinions are collectively dismissed as “folk theory”, interesting at best from an anthropological perspective. Thus Kay (1987) is anxious to distinguish folk theory from linguists’ theories by pointing out things such as that the former is not “globally consistent” and is not “believed” in the same way as the latter etc. But these and other arguments crumble as soon as it is recognised that what triggers a “paradigm-shift” in the sense of Kuhn is the discovery of an anomaly or in Kuhn’s own words “with the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science” (Kuhn 1962:52). Henningsen points out that, in Germany, the distrust among the linguists of what the ordinary people thought and believed about language, may be traced back to philosophers such as Hegel. To quote him,

Hegel, who was interested in the unfolding of meaning in the process of universal history, treated [the] *Volkgeist* (the people’s *mentalité*) somewhat disparagingly by relegating it to lower levels of meaning that lacked in conceptual clarity. *Vox populi*, the voice of the people, held no promise for him of any truth of any aspect of the process of human history. Truth would emerge from the negation of this commonsensical type of knowledge. (Henningsen, 1989: 46)

It is precisely because of their principled decision to distance themselves from the thinking of ordinary men that many linguists are at a total loss when called upon to address problems of social and political relevance and urgency. All the same, they are given to sulking like

Achilles in his tent when they wake up to the fact that their opinions are not adequately taken into consideration by policy framers and politicians. The same Newmeyer, who proudly defended a way of doing linguistics which took no notice of what language speakers actually thought or how language related to the society in which it is in fact spoken, was among the foremost to lament that in such fields as language teaching the voice of the linguist is progressively being heard less often (cf. Newmeyer, 1982). In other words, the theoretically oriented linguists would, it seems, like to have it both ways: on the one hand, they are eager to deny that theirs is an enterprise that has anything to do with how the speakers, singly or collectively, live their linguistic and cultural reality; on the other hand, they also want everyone to agree with them that all practical concerns relating to language have to be based on what they, the theorists, say about language—albeit, in blissful unconcern with anything practical. Newmeyer's lamentation about language teachers paying scant attention to what the linguists have to say is reminiscent of what Bloomfield had to say in his inaugural address to the Linguistic Society of America:

Our schools are conducted by persons who, from professors of linguistic science down to teachers of the classrooms, know nothing of the results of the linguistic science, not even the relation of writing to speech or standard language to dialect. In short, they do not know what language is and yet must teach it, and in consequence waste years of every child's life and reach a poor result (Bloomfield, 1925: 2)

In retrospect, we now know, as Nunberg has called our attention to, that linguists have their share of blame in many of the ill-fated policies adopted in the name of the "science of language".

Language policy and language planning are areas where those at the helm of affairs can ill afford to ignore what the ordinary folks "out there" feel and think. Because the concept of language that is involved here is necessarily a *political* one. As far as the lay people are concerned, their national language is and will always be a flag of allegiance. A flag of allegiance is something in the name of which one is, by definition, prepared to shed one's own blood, if need be.

The only way we linguists can make our contribution to practical matters involving language is by adopting a critical stance vis-à-vis our own practice. It is never too late to start doing some soul-searching and asking ourselves if we have not, whether by omission or by commission,

shied away from our responsibility to see language as a social phenomenon with all the political and ideological implications that follow from it.

In other words, if we linguists are at all to have a say in matters such as language teaching and language planning, what we urgently need is to convince ourselves of the political implications of our own work. "Critical linguistics" or "Critical Discourse Analysis" may prove to be an important step in this direction (Hodge and Kress 1979, Chilton 1985, Fowler 1987, Wodak 1989, Fairclough 1989, 1992, Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). As Wodak (1989: xvi) put it, the *Leitmotif* of critical research is " 'Diagnosis' first, interpretation and 'therapy' to follow." On closer inspection, even such a way of putting things may turn out to conceal vestigial traces of a way of thinking about language that accommodates the possibility of analysis as capable of being done in blissful ignorance of their practical consequences and ethical implications. For, what we really ought to be claiming is that there is no way theory and practice, analysis and interpretation, or diagnosis and therapy can be prised off from each other. *To do one is always already to be doing the other.*

Unfortunately, there are many among us who still seem perfectly happy with and resigned to the idea that linguists should do well by sticking to the well-trodden path, by which they mean keeping a safe distance from all political matters and the ethical issues arising out of their own work. Let us hope that passage of time and the perception of our own limited relevance will help them see through the veil of illusion.

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