

THE MANUAL OF DESCRIPTION OF BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE

O MANUAL DE DESCRIÇÃO DO PORTUGUÊS BRASILEIRO

EL MANUAL DE DESCRIPCIÓN DEL PORTUGUÉS BRASILEÑO

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ABSTRACT: In this work we present a review about the work “*Descrição do Português Brasileiro*” (Description of Brazilian Portuguese) (BASSO, 2019), which belongs to the Linguistic Collection for Higher Education. In this manual, the author shows the functioning of the varieties and peculiarities of Brazilian Portuguese (hereinafter, BP), indicating how the language varies and changes over time. For this, the teacher starts from the description of linguistic phenomena that occur at different levels of linguistic analysis, describing phonetic-phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic-pragmatic properties of BP. This linguistic knowledge has repercussions, both on teaching and learning practices, as well as on the formation of the mother tongue teacher, in addition to helping a teaching practice that is free from prescriptive prejudice.

KEYWORDS: Description. Brazilian portuguese. Language. Teaching.

RESUMO: Neste trabalho apresentamos uma resenha sobre a obra “*Descrição do Português Brasileiro*” (BASSO, 2019), que pertence à Coleção Linguística para o Ensino Superior. Nesse manual, o autor mostra o funcionamento das variedades e peculiaridades do Português Brasileiro (doravante, PB), indicando como a língua varia e muda ao longo do tempo. Para isso, o professor parte da descrição de fenômenos linguísticos que ocorrem em diferentes níveis de análise linguística, descrevendo propriedades fonético-fonológicas, morfológicas, sintáticas e semântico-pragmáticas do PB. Esses conhecimentos linguísticos repercutem, tanto sobre as práticas de ensino aprendizagem, quanto sobre a formação do professor de língua materna, além de auxiliar uma prática de ensino que seja livre de preconceito prescritivista.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Descrição. Português brasileiro. Língua. Ensino.

RESUMEN: En este trabajo presentamos una revisión sobre el trabajo “*Descripción del portugués brasileño*” (BASSO, 2019), que pertenece a la Colección Lingüística para la Educación Superior. En este manual, el autor muestra el funcionamiento de las variedades y peculiaridades del portugués brasileño (doravante, PB), indicando como el idioma varía y cambia con el tiempo. Para ello, el docente parte de la descripción de los fenómenos lingüísticos que ocurren en diferentes niveles de análisis lingüístico, describiendo las propiedades fonético-fonológicas, morfológicas, sintáticas y semántico-pragmáticas del PB.

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Este conocimiento lingüístico repercute, tanto en las prácticas de enseñanza-aprendizaje, como en la formación del profesor de lengua materna, y también ayuda a una práctica docente libre de prejuicios prescriptivos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Descripción. Portugués brasileño. Idioma. Enseñanza.*

The manual “*Descrição do Português Brasileiro*” (Description of Brazilian Portuguese) (BASSO, 2019), by professor Renato Miguel Basso, is part of the Linguistic Collection for Higher Education - Volume 8, from Parábola Editorial, a work certified by the Brazilian Linguistic Association (ABRALIN), which aims to offer the Brazilian academic community a complete picture of the disciplines in the area of Linguistics. Renato Miguel Basso holds a PhD in Linguistics and is a professor at the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar). The book has 168 pages and is organized in seven chapters that deal, in general, with the description of (socio)linguistic phenomena belonging to the spoken Brazilian Portuguese. In addition to the aforementioned chapters, the work also contains a presentation, an introduction, an epilogue and a conclusion.

In the *Introduction* to the work, Basso points out that the central focus of the linguistic description must be in *the actual language*, that is, the language spoken by Brazilians in different speech communities, without considering the reductionist parameters/criteria of the traditional approach. In this way, the linguist aims to present an overview of real/concrete (socio)linguistic patterns and not the establishment of prestigious social norms. So, for the aforementioned author, “[...] in the linguistic description, you will not find how something *should be said*, but how something *is actually said* - in the same way that a biologist does not describe an alligator as it *should be*, but as *it is*” (BASSO, 2019, p. 13, author’s highlights, our translation).

Basso (2019) also points out that the central objective of the work is to show the functioning of the variations and peculiarities of Brazilian Portuguese (BP), starting from the description of linguistic phenomena that occur at different levels of linguistic analysis, describing phonetic-phonological properties, morphological, syntactic and semantic-pragmatic of BP. The author presents which path will be taken throughout his work:

[...] we will walk through the history, the grammar, the regional differences and several other characteristics that, I hope, will lead you to find Brazilian Portuguese as interesting as I think [...] that you see examples and facts as something to be described and understood and not as errors or something irrelevant (BASSO, 2019, p. 17, our translation).

In the first chapter, entitled *History and formation of Brazilian Portuguese*, the UFSCar researcher describes how the expansion and consolidation of Portuguese took place in Brazil, via the *Bandeirante* incursions and the realization of economic cycles (gold, coffee, rubber, for example), with a population movement leaving the coast to the interior of the country, thus emerging a series of phenomena of linguistic contacts. Thus, according to Basso, BP is the result of the contact of hundreds of indigenous languages, Portuguese from Portugal, languages of slaves, general languages (*Paulista* and Amazonic, mainly) and the languages of immigrants. Faced with this, Basso warns of the fact that:

[...] instead of assuming a reducing posture, which in no way helps us to understand what happens here, and to say that it is a 'mistake', the descriptive analysis of the language shows us the grammatical rules in force during a given time of the language (BASSO, 2019, p. 30, our translation).

This discussion pointed out by the professor is in line with what Faraco (2019) postulates, in *História do Português* (History of Portuguese), a work belonging to the same collection as that proposed by Basso (2019), especially when he emphasizes that every language has history, and this history is dynamic ("The life of the language"). In it, structural and lexical changes occur (FARACO, 2019), resulting from different and diverse processes, such as struggles, wars, bloodshed, conflicts between peoples, religious and/or political interests, for example.

Still in this chapter, the author discusses some issues related to processes, phenomena and sociolinguistic rules already perceived since the mid-1600s, such as the linguistic variation involving *cama* ~ *cãma* (bed), *menino* ~ *mininu* (boy), *você* ~ *tu* (you/thee)², among others, that show, on the one hand, the linguistic diversity of BP, and on the other, the need to carry out, with scientific rigor, the description and linguistic analysis of these facts. In addition, the professor also affirms the need for a standard language norm, written and spoken for the entire national territory, when underlining, "this does not mean that we must completely dismiss a standard language norm, written and spoken, for the entire territory national, that can support, for example, the teaching of mother tongue and even mass communications" (BASSO, 2019, p. 33, our translation).

In the second chapter, *The sounds of Brazilian Portuguese and its writing*, the author discusses and relates the levels of representation of the object-language of investigation: writing, pronunciation and phonology; it also describes the consonantal and vowel systems of

² The words are written using two forms, one following the standard rule, another following the spoken Portuguese

BP and its relations with writing, showing that writing is not a way of passing speech to paper, a view that can still be found within some school practices in Brazil. For the author, “[...] the writing of a language [...] is not the same as the sounds that constitute it. One of the differences between these two systems is precisely their behavior in the face of the passage of time” (BASSO, 2019, p. 43, our translation). Finally, in that chapter, he lists and describes some linguistic phenomena that occur at this level of linguistic analysis, such as monotongation [*manteiga* ~ *mantega*] (butter) and elevation of the pretonic /e/, as in [*escola*, *estojo* ~ *iscola*, *istojo*] (school, pencil case), constituting sociolinguistic realities of BP.

In the third chapter, *Morphology of Brazilian Portuguese*, Basso presents three central morphological processes (inflection, derivation and composition) and how they impact on the spoken language, above all, by highlighting the speaker's creativity and his expressive and communicative needs when using language and lexicon. For this reason, the author states that “[...] our lexicon is certainly a mosaic in which different parts of different origins have entered at different times, due to the most diverse motivations, which fit together forming a possible image of the language we speak” (BASSO, 2019, p. 71, our translation). At the end of the chapter, the teacher describes some linguistic phenomena that occur at this level of analysis, such as variation of nominal and verbal concordances, apheresis, deletion of -r from verbs in the infinitive, reduction of the -ndo group of verbal forms and some questions of evaluative morphology, that is, when the speaker prints his opinion/subjectivity in certain uses of the language, as it can happen in the case of the use of diminutives or augments.

In the fourth chapter, *Brazilian Portuguese Syntax*, the author discusses how the BP seeks to organize the use of its syntactic constituents (such as subject, verb and objects, for example), a reality that is also variable from language to language. Basso also stresses that at this level of linguistic description, it should be noted that “[...] the words of a language combine to form phrases, sentences and orations with the most diverse degrees of complexity” (BASSO, 2019, p. 85, our translation). Thus, the author exemplifies that, even though there are canonical syntactic uses, there are also variable phenomena at this level of analysis, such as: null object, relative clauses (there are at least three usage strategies: standard, cutter and copier), construction of topic/commentary, use of unstressed pronouns and other pronouns in the BP pronoun chart.

Considering the last level of linguistic analysis, in the fifth chapter, *Semantics and Pragmatics of Brazilian Portuguese*, the author initially distinguishes these two sub-areas of Linguistics, exemplifying the scope and its scopes of analysis and discussing concepts of interest in both Semantics and Pragmatics: ambiguity (structural and lexical), presupposition

and daxis, for example. The author also points to the reality of languages as a complex structure, manifested through layers that can interact with each other, stating that “[...] a morpheme we choose will always be performed by a morpheme made up of certain phonemes (concretely realized phones), and their use will have an impact on the sentence's syntactic structure, resulting in a specific meaning, and all of this happens together” (BASSO, 2019, p. 111, our translation). At the end of this chapter, the professor from São Paulo describes some semantic phenomena of BP: singular x plural (notion of countable x massive), crude names, structures that contain bad words, uses of the imperative, use of articles defined in the plural, such as *uns/umas* (a, an) and the peculiarities of the verb to find, which in certain contexts of use can be a full verb, while in others, it can function as a modalizer, that is, it undergoes a grammaticalization process.

In the sixth chapter, *Linguistic politics and Brazilian Portuguese*, Basso addresses issues related to linguistic policies in general and, specifically, to the BP, describing several episodes that manifested themselves about the language, sometimes encouraging the promotion and dissemination of the Portuguese language, sometimes restricting its use and reach power, as in the case of the *Diretório dos Índios*, in 1757. For the author,

[...] a language is much more than its previous history and its structure; although these two aspects are absolutely essential to get to know a language in depth, it also has social and economic values and participates in the regional and global political stage [...] (BASSO, 2019, p. 137, our translation).

In the last part of the chapter, Basso discusses issues in the current linguistic context of Brazil, such as issues related to indigenous languages, LIBRAS and Brazil's participation and position in the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), that is, it discusses issues of more recent language policies in addition to Portuguese.

The seventh chapter, *To learn more*, is reserved by the author for the indication of specific bibliographic references that help to deepen and discuss the topics covered in the chapters of the work on screen. Thus, for each chapter of the manual “Description of Brazilian Portuguese”, since the *Introduction* of the work, there is a specific theoretical reference. The chapter also draws attention due to the degree of detail adopted by Professor Renato Miguel Basso, when indicating and commenting on the set of themes and works that deal with all the themes addressed by him in this work. However, he warns at the beginning of the chapter that “[...] there is no way to do justice to all the material produced in the last few years” (BASSO, 2019, p. 149, our translation) that gives an account of the entire description of BP. Another

relevant fact of this chapter is that the indication of these readings can encourage new research and/or serve as an aid to deepen others.

In the Epilogue, entitled *A language different from that of Portugal?*, Basso justifies why the recurrent use of the expression “Brazilian Portuguese” in his work, since, parallel to it, there are others, also consolidated within linguistic studies: only Portuguese, Portuguese from Brazil, for example. “The reason for this is to recognize that the variety of Portuguese spoken in Brazil is specific, in several aspects different from that found in Portugal, in Angola, or even in Macau” (BASSO, 2019, p. 155, our translation). Thus, the author reveals which social place he is talking about and what are his epistemological choices in the act of doing Linguistics. Basso still discusses the place of Portuguese in the current national scenario and states:

[...] Portuguese is the seventh most spoken language in the world, and this guarantees Portuguese political power to, for example, claim to be one of the official languages of the UN and ensure, in principle, that a Portuguese speaker can 'handle himself' in regions of the American, European, African and Asian continents, where there are nations and regions in which Portuguese is spoken (BASSO, 2019, p. 159, author's highlight, our translation).

Then, the author presents his *Conclusion*, stating that:

[...] it is increasingly necessary to describe BP [Brazilian Portuguese], to prepare good materials on that language, to recognize its diversity, the diversity of its speakers and the cultures it traverses, as well as to establish acceptable bases for the coexistence of BP with other languages spoken in the Brazilian territory (BASSO, 2019, p. 161, our translation).

As an introductory book, “Description of Brazilian Portuguese” (BASSO, 2019), it is highly recommended. All the work is produced in a language accessible to beginners, without losing the theoretical and explanatory power of a handbook, allowing, also, to understand how language description and analysis is done (BEZERRA; REINALDO, 2013).

Another contribution of inestimable importance of this work concerns the didactic method adopted by the author, which allows a better understanding of the description of a language: starting from the discussion around the elements present in the formation and expansion of the BP, highlighting historical-demographic peculiarities about regional varieties and explaining that they leave identity marks in the different components of a language's grammar. In this way, it is possible to better understand that all linguistic variants are complete, with grammatical and structural rules in full operation, that is, these linguistic

varieties exhibit formal fullness and sufficient semiotic potential to communicate their intended users.

In short, we can say without a doubt that the work on screen, on the one hand, presents a significant discussion and exemplification of the (socio)linguistic phenomena of BP and, on the other, makes specific reference to the bibliography for further deepening by readers of the topics covered. We also emphasize the use of vocabulary precision and the depth of description and analysis of the phenomena examined in the work reviewed here.

Thus, the work under analysis constitutes a source of research in the field of descriptive studies of the BP by contemplating analyzes at different levels of the grammar, allowing not only to reflect on the linguistic diversity of the BP, but also to serve as a starting point for studies of interfaces that the work permit and, still, allow reflection and/or production of didactic material on the teaching of mother tongue.

Reading the book highlights aspects of BP and linguistic analysis that allow the development of theoretical generalizations about the language and the formulation of linguistic principles that govern it. In this way, the sample described makes it possible to rethink the teaching of the mother tongue, generally guided by the perspective of traditional grammar under the criteria of right/wrong, beautiful/ugly and aesthetic.

The work is also an excellent choice for those who are starting a degree in Letters/Portuguese or who are in the process of describing and analyzing a linguistic phenomenon, when carrying out some course completion and/or scientific initiation work, for example, since the author presents and describes the linguistic and social contexts that favor the use/realization of a given variant.

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