

THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE

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A *DICTIONARY OF INFORMAL BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE*. By BOBBY J. CHAMBERLAIN and RONALD M. HARMON. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1983. Pp. 701. \$22.50.)

THE URBANIZATION OF RURAL DIALECT SPEAKERS: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY IN BRAZIL. By STELLA MARIS BORTONI-RICARDO. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp. 265. \$32.50.)

Ronald Wardhaugh has defined *sociolinguistics* as "trying to work out either the social significance of the various bits and pieces of language or the linguistic significance of the various bits and pieces of society."¹ Such a definition leads one to ask how much is known about the sociolinguistics of the national variety of Portuguese known as "Português do Brasil," now spoken by more than 130 million persons. The answer remains "very little," but accurate information is accumulating rapidly thanks to research efforts in Brazil and the United States. The Brazilian efforts are centered in graduate programs in linguistics at the federal universities of Rio de Janeiro, Santa Catarina, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, and Brasília; at the Catholic universities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; and at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas in the state of São Paulo. In the United States, research is being conducted by sociolinguistically oriented Brazilianists such as Brian Head (State University of New York, Albany), Fritz Hensley (University of Texas at Austin), and John Jensen (Florida International University, Tamiami).

Evidence of the qualitative increase in the literature on Brazilian Portuguese sociolinguistics are two recent works, both published in English-speaking countries. One is designed as a practical reference and language tool, the other as a scientific description of "Caipira" Brazilian Portuguese and the transformation taking place in the speech of rural migrants living near the capital city of Brasília. Researchers oriented to application as well as theory will find much of interest in these books, even if Portuguese is not the language of primary professional concern. The availability of English translations for the entries in the dictionary

and for the illustrative excerpts in the description will facilitate comprehension by readers unfamiliar with Portuguese. The authors of the first book to be reviewed are U.S. researchers, while the author of the second book is a Brazilian.

The teaching of Brazilian Portuguese in the United States has been characterized by ups and downs, reflecting the trends in foreign-language or second-language (to use the more widespread term) course offerings. Despite noteworthy efforts by individuals and institutions, the Brazilian and European ("Luso") varieties of Portuguese are presently being taught in only a dozen or so American high schools and in less than one hundred universities, according to Frederick Williams.²

Visiting some U.S. universities that offer programs in Brazilian Portuguese and culture and spending a year as a Fulbright Visiting Professor at the University of Georgia have given me a sense of some of the issues and encouraging trends.³ Among the latter is the appearance of new course materials for Brazilian Portuguese, either as textbooks or as complementary sources. An example of recent classroom-designed textbooks is *Da Conversa à Cultura: O Português do Brasil* by John B. Jensen, N. Norma Casarin, and Gerald Curtis, currently being tried out in half a dozen universities.⁴ Another example of the revolution in methodological approaches to Brazilian Portuguese (and the most ambitious) is the creation of a two-year course in Portuguese language and Brazilian culture called *Travessia*. The video teaching materials, which are being prepared under the direction of Brazilianists Jon Tolman of the University of New Mexico and Ricardo Paiva of Georgetown University, incorporate music videos, skits, folklore, and *telenovelas*. Joint sponsors of the project are the National Endowment for the Humanities and Rede Globo de Televisão. Given the increasing importance of video technology in language teaching, this U.S.–Brazilian joint project should prove motivational among college students and help establish Brazilian Portuguese in more university curricula in the late 1980s.⁵

While up-to-date, engaging, and culturally authentic texts and aids are necessary, they are not sufficient for students to develop fluency in a second language, hence the growing importance of tools that facilitate spoken proficiency. For precisely that reason, Bobby Chamberlain's and Ronald Harmon's *A Dictionary of Informal Brazilian Portuguese* is a most welcome publication. It consists of a foreword by the distinguished American translator Gregory Rabassa, an introduction in which the authors explain their data collection procedures and the format adopted, a list of thirty-two "principal informants" (from various regions of Brazil), keys to abbreviations, the lexicon proper (529 pages), a 170-page English index, and a selected bibliography.

Chamberlain and Harmon explain that their work "is designed primarily as a reference tool," "as a documentation of the informal lexi-

con of contemporary Brazil." They add that "it is unique in that it is the only work of its kind directed specifically to speakers of English" (p. vii). The outcome of "fifteen years of systematic research" in Brazil and the United States, the book's "great variety of informants from seventeen of Brazil's twenty-four states were the main source of the material." This alphabetically arranged, computerized reference work fills a major gap in the still relatively limited literature in linguistics on Brazilian Portuguese as a second language.

Because of my interest in sociolinguistics, particularly the application of sociolinguistic research to teaching Brazilian Portuguese (as both a native and a second language), an assessment of the sociolinguistic comprehensiveness and accuracy of *The Dictionary of Informal Brazilian Portuguese* seems in order. Before coming to the United States in 1985, I selected twenty items at random from the dictionary and checked the reactions of undergraduate and graduate students in my applied Portuguese linguistics courses at the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. The result was overwhelmingly favorable to this dictionary: the students found the English translations and the descriptive labels provided to be appropriate and useful. The Brazilian students remarked that the dictionary could also serve as an aid in learning the English equivalents of many common Brazilian Portuguese words and phrases. This dual applicability highlights the dictionary's usefulness. Another test used a checklist of ten items to see whether the items had been included and dealt with adequately. The items selected were *biônico*, *c.d.f.*, *dose para leão*, *uma 'figura,' uma 'jogada,' uma 'mamata,' estar na onda*, *porreta*, *salafatório*, and *estar vidrado em*. All ten were found and were adequately treated. As is true of all lexicographical tools, however, this one sometimes applies descriptive labels inconsistently or subjectively. Examples of faulty entries are *tá*, described erroneously as a corruption of *está* instead of as a reduced variant of the full verb form *está* (p. 476); *cê*, misanalyzed as corruption of *você*, instead of as a reduced variant of the full pronominal form (p. 124); and *té*, mistakenly explained as corruption of *até*, rather than as a rapidly spoken form of it. Except for these rare descriptive inaccuracies, the *Dictionary of Informal Brazilian Portuguese* characterizes current informal spoken usage effectively. Its comprehensiveness will make this dictionary a useful adjunct to what remains Brazil's standard reference lexicon, the well-known *Aurélio*.⁶

In short, Chamberlain and Harmon are to be congratulated for having produced a reference tool that will be eminently useful to learners of the Brazilian variety of spoken informal Portuguese. Publication of this pioneering lexicographic tool represents a significant step forward. Perhaps a similar work centering on some of the usages of writ-

ten Brazilian (and European) Portuguese will become a reality in the not-too-distant future.

Sociolinguistics is still a young field—only twenty-four years old if one takes the usual starting date of 1964.⁷ Existing descriptions of sociolinguistic aspects of Brazilian Portuguese remain incomplete and challenge social scientists and humanists investigating its uses in specific social and cultural contexts. These circumstances make one sympathize with the difficulties of compiling works like the Chamberlain and Harmon dictionary. Its minor sociolinguistic lapses (easily remedied in a second edition) point to the need for more productive interaction between those using a descriptive-explanatory (theoretical) approach and those exploring new ways to meet the needs of language students. Even the most thorough sociolinguistic study suffers from gaps and troublesome areas in labeling “usage variants” (*variantes de uso*).

More theoretical questions are posed in Stella Maria Bortoni-Ricardo's *The Urbanization of Rural Dialect Speakers*, which is based on her dissertation completed at the University of Lancaster in 1983. What happens to speakers of rural varieties of Brazilian Portuguese when they come into contact with users of urban varieties? Are nonstandard varieties of “Português do Brasil” being maintained or urbanized, that is to say, being transformed into near-standard or quasi-standard varieties? What are some of the distinguishing features of the pronunciation of “Caipira” (“hillbilly”) speakers? How sociolinguistically resistant are “low-status *rurban* communities,” or groups whose members “are tightly linked by kinship ties, premigration relations and interaction at the neighborhood level” (p. 114)? How does the more restricted spatial mobility of women in the satellite city of Brazlândia (about thirty miles west of Brasília) seem to correlate with changes in their verbal repertoire? Why has the “intelligibility between speakers of different varieties of Brazilian Portuguese been taken for granted” (p. 217)? What kind of “therapeutic functions” can sociolinguistics perform to help a society become more linguistically egalitarian? All these questions and more are raised by Bortoni-Ricardo in her pioneering inquiry into the complex, multifaceted process of the “urbanization of rural dialects.” Her interdisciplinary approach draws on such diverse sources as social network analysis, ethnographic and sociodemographic studies, William Labov's theory of variation, and cross-cultural discourse analysis. The resulting work consists of ten chapters, an appendix, a bibliography, and indexes by subject and name.

For the uninitiated, the second chapter provides a good historical background and an insightful overview of “Caipira culture.” A long chapter on the Caipira dialect discusses aspects of its phonology. Here I found a few instances of sociolinguistically inappropriate labels of

variants allegedly attributed to the speech of "caipiras." For example, perfectly legitimate pronunciations (in informal, cultivated spoken Brazilian Portuguese all over the country) of *otro* for *outro*, *falanu* for *falando*, and *kerenu* for *querendo* are erroneously labeled as nonstandard. In rapidly spoken Brazilian Portuguese, these reduced variants are produced, rather than the clearly enunciated "full forms." Similarly, Bortoni-Ricardo mislabels the variants *bebu* for *bêbado* and *lâpa* for *lâmpada* as "characteristic of Caipira and rurban varieties" (p. 58), but the distribution of such forms in informal spoken Brazilian Portuguese is much wider, occurring even in the conversational speech of Northeasterners.

Specialists in the sociology of migration will be interested in the author's treatment of "the process of rural or urban migration and its linguistic consequences" (p. 98). Using fifteen passages excerpted from statements by middle-aged subjects (between forty and fifty-four years of age), Bortoni-Ricardo documents the extent of a "psychological predisposition towards assimilation" by the Brazlândia inhabitants interviewed in her study (p. 113).

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 deal with collecting data, models and methods, and quantitative analysis of the linguistic data. The most thought-provoking chapter is that dealing with cross-cultural communication problems. Bortoni-Ricardo convincingly highlights the breakdown in communication (in message comprehension or processing) that occurs when critical linguistic differences exist between standard-variety speakers and rural migrants now living in the vicinity of Brasília. This miscommunication between speakers of the same national variety of Portuguese is attracting increasing attention from Brazilian sociolinguists. The view that comprehension and improvement of human communication, both intraculturally and cross-culturally, must be a top priority for a truly humanizing sociolinguistics has been emphasized by linguists from many countries.⁸ Bortoni-Ricardo's *The Urbanization of Rural Dialect Speakers* sheds much light on a fascinating problem and demonstrates the validity of qualitatively and quantitatively sound studies of varieties of language in their social and cultural contexts. Her work and Chamberlain and Harmon's *Dictionary of Informal Portuguese* are encouraging signs for the development of the field of Brazilian sociolinguistics.

NOTES

1. Ronald Wardhaugh, *Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 125.
2. See Frederick G. Williams, "O Ensino de Português nos Estados Unidos," paper presented at the Congresso Internacional sobre a Situação Actual da Língua Portuguesa no Mundo, Lisbon, 2 July 1983, 15.

3. I visited the University of Texas at Austin, University of New Mexico, Tulane University, University of California at Los Angeles, University of California at Berkeley, and California State University at Fullerton.
4. John B. Jensen, N. Norma Casarin, and Gerald Curtis, *Da Conversa à Cultura: O Português do Brasil*, preliminary ed. (Miami: Florida International University, Department of Modern Languages, 1985). I was fortunate to be able to use it in Georgia.
5. Additional team members are Nívea Pereira Parsons of the University of Arizona and John B. Jensen of Florida International University. These materials are expected to be available for classroom use by the fall of 1988.
6. A new edition was recently published. See *Novo Aurélio, Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1987).
7. The year 1964 is considered the landmark date because of the Indiana University Sociolinguistics Seminar, a natal event that I witnessed.
8. See "A Plea for a Universal Declaration of Individual Linguistic Rights," which has been circulated in many countries and was published by the ALSSED-FIPLV *Newsletter* (UNESCO, Paris), no. 4 (April 1984).