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Linguistic intolerance in the press

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This study is part of the research carried out by the Laboratory of Studies on Intolerance (Laboratório de Estudos da Intolerância – LEI) specifically within the Linguistics research group, whose main aim is to "examine linguistic intolerance and linguistic prejudice in Brazil, as well as the resulting forms of resistance, both in relation to variants of the same language and to other languages." We intend to differentiate between linguistic prejudice and linguistic intolerance, based on Voltaire (1764) and Bobbio (1990), in order to analyze a case of linguistic intolerance published by the press. We will then analyze an article entitled "In the name of the law of the 'worst' effort", written by columnist Dora Krammer and published on January 26th 2005, in the O Estado de São Paulo newspaper which had nationwide repercussions. This study will examine why such discourses can be interpreted as being intolerant. Keywords: Linguistic intolerance; linguistic prejudice; discourse; Portuguese language.

Introduction One of the research groups of LEI is that of linguistics. Linguistic intolerance is hardly noticed by public opinion. Not being the cause of serious social disruption, unlike religious and political intolerance, it seems hardly to exist. However, linguistic intolerance does exist and is as aggressive as any other form of intolerance since it affects the core of the individual. Halliday (1974) states that language is a man's most intimate possession and represents his subjectivity. It is not an exaggeration, therefore, to say that linguistic criticism is a weapon that can hurt like any other. The goal of the Linguistic research group at LEI is to "study linguistic intolerance and linguistic prejudice in Brazil as well as the resulting forms of resistance, relating both to variants of the same language and to other languages ". The researchers taking part in this study are: Diana Luz Pessoa de Barros – Project coordinator; examines discourses of acceptance and rejection of the use of foreign terms in Brazilian Portuguese. Margarida Maria Tadoni Petter: studies the linguistic prejudice against black people and forms of resistance against their speech in 19th century illustrated newspapers. Ronald Beline Mendes (Linguistics Department – Faculty of Philosophy, Languages and Human Sciences): within the project of linguistic variation and intolerance, studies the speech of male homosexuals in the city of São Paulo. Marli Quadros Leite: studies the nature of linguistic intolerance in the press. Considering the title of our project - Linguistic intolerance and linguistic prejudice - the option for the distinction between both phenomena is evident. We will show how we can establish

this difference. Relationship between prejudice and intolerance We can say that talking about linguistic intolerance is a different task, since it is usual to make reference only to prejudice. Therefore, we should initially discuss the relationship between these terms and their differences and similarities. Firstly, I shall examine their dictionary definitions, verifying which meanings have been registered for both words. Next, I shall analyze how this subject was approached in the philosophy of Voltaire (1764) and Norberto Bobbio (1990). In the most recent Portuguese Dictionaries, the words are considered synonyms. The Brazilian Houaiss dictionary states that prejudice (*preconceito*) is: 1. any favorable or unfavorable opinion or feeling conceived without critical examination; 2. unfavorable idea, opinion or feeling, preconceived without any further knowledge or reasoning. 3. irrational attitude, feeling or opinion, especially of a hostile nature, assumed in consequence of a generalization of a personal experience or imposed by the environment; intolerance. 4. a combination of these attitudes. 5. In Psychoanalysis. Every ethnical attitude that has a specific irrational effect on the person who sends the message. There is also the expression linguistic prejudice: Expressions Linguistic p. (Linguistics). Any belief without scientific basis about languages and their users, such as the idea that there are developed and primitive languages, or that only the language of the educated classes contains grammar, or that indigenous people from Africa and America do not have languages, only dialects. On intolerance, the same dictionary states: 1. lack of tolerance, of condescension, of understanding; inflexible, rigid. 2. a person that does not admit opinions or views that differ from theirs. The meaning of the term is derived from the concept of tolerance, and this reference makes us also look up the meaning of this word: 1. that tolerates. 2. that excuses certain failures or errors. 3. it is said of the person who tolerates or is indulgent. At a first glance the two words can be considered synonymous. A closer look, however, will show that prejudice is the idea, opinion or feeling that can lead people to intolerance, that is, to the attitude of not admitting an opinion different from their own. This shows the first difference: the strongest semantic characteristic regarding the meaning of intolerance is the fact that it is a form of behavior, a reaction to an idea or an opinion that can be the object of opposition and, therefore, it is not simply a tacit disagreement. Prejudice, on the other hand, may never be allowed to surface, therefore its existence precedes that of criticism. Voltaire establishes a difference between the terms in his *Philosophical Dictionary* as when he defines prejudice he states that "prejudice is an opinion devoid of judgment" and, furthermore, even states that there are "universal prejudices that are necessary to have in order to be virtuous", and among these he mentions the belief in a "God of vengeance and retribution" (p. 428). From this we conclude that he admitted the existence of good and bad forms of prejudice. The *Philosophical Dictionary* does not have the entry intolerance, but the concept can be derived from the concept of tolerance. Tolerance is defined as the "attribute of humanity", that is, a privilege, an advantage, something that is not inherent to all human beings in every circumstance of their lives. The absence of tolerance, according to Voltaire's discourse, is the difficulty that human beings have to accept opposition, especially in matters of faith, and this can lead to aggressive behavior and persecution (Voltaire does not use the term intolerance). These are the words he uses when referring to the man lacking in tolerance: "It is a matter of fact that everyone that persecutes a fellow man for differences of opinion is a monster". To avoid being restricted to an 18th century concept, we shall examine the ideas of a contemporary, the Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio (1992: 203-04). When dealing with the reasons for tolerance, Bobbio

examines two of the main meanings of the word and from this he establishes the concepts of both prejudice and intolerance. He states that tolerance can be used in reference to the acceptance of the diversity of beliefs and opinions, especially of a religious or political nature. From the author's writings we conclude that intolerance refers to the individual being unable to live with different concepts, beliefs and opinions. Furthermore, intolerance results in discourses about "the truth" (or truths) and also about the theoretical and practical compatibilities/incompatibilities between opposing truths. The author states that "Nowadays the concept of tolerance has been generalized to include the problem of integrating ethnic, linguistic and racial minorities, and those who are generally said to be "different", such as homosexuals, the insane and the handicapped". According to Bobbio, although prejudice shares with intolerance the feature of non-acceptance of the difference of the other, it does not lead individuals to construct an accusatory discourse about differences, because it can grow out of what has not been even thought of, but has culturally assimilated irrationalities or emotions and feelings. Prejudice may result in discrimination, but it is not manifested discursively in arguments that aim to support "truths". Although both concepts analyzed are different, we can learn the same lesson from both: prejudice does not originate solely from a dichotomy; it can be a rejection, a refusal, a dislike without any reason, and it might not be manifested, whereas intolerance necessarily grows out of opposite judgments and is manifested in a discursive way. It is the result of criticism and judgment of ideas, values and opinions. On the basis of this philosophical issue, especially in its relation to language, we can talk about both prejudice and intolerance, while recognizing their differences. Prejudice is a silent and hidden discrimination that individuals may have against the other's language, it is a dislike, and it is finding a type of usage (or a language) wrong or bad, without any idea of what is correct or good. Intolerance, in turn, is noisy, explicit, because it is necessarily manifested through metalinguistic discourse, based on dichotomies, oppositions such as tradition vs. modernity, knowledge vs. ignorance, knowing vs. not knowing. Linguistic intolerance in the press After what has been discussed, the work of linguists in fighting intolerance can be justified, in order to analyze the cases of linguistic intolerance. The object of this paper is an article published by the press. Considering that this is a vast subject, I have decided to discuss discourses published this year, in which the supporting dichotomy is knowledge vs. ignorance. By chance, or maybe not so much, the object of such discourses is the "poorly spoken" Portuguese, according to the author, of the President of Brazil, which would make him incapable of doing his job. This apparently easy-to-solve problem is, in fact, an enigma. I do not intend to defend positions or solve the matter of the linguistic standard adopted in Brazil. I simply aim at analyzing metalinguistic discourses, expressed in different genres of journalistic texts, to show how and why they can be considered intolerant. I will analyze an article by columnist Dora Krammer, published in "O Estado de São Paulo", on January 26th, 2005, entitled In the name of the law of the "worst" effort. Krammer's opinion had nationwide repercussions. My aim is to comment on why discourses such as this can be interpreted as intolerant. Since I am about to analyze an article on the discourse and language of President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (President Lula), it is important to point out that my object of study is not the discourse of the President, but the metalinguistic discourse of the person who analyzed it. My position is therefore strictly scientific (not politically biased), aiming at analysing metalanguage in order to show how the facts of linguistic intolerance are constructed, through declarations of non-acceptance of the

discourse of the Other. This means that I am neither defending nor accusing the parties involved in the issue: neither the interpreted, the President, nor the interpreter, the writer. Before starting the analysis, I believe it is important to comment on the nature of linguistic problems in Brazil, which generally lead people to be strongly biased and passionate advocates of total freedom from traditional language usage. There are unquestionable facts about the usage of languages at all times, and one of them is, in non-written languages, the existence of: 1. a diversifying force, which causes regional, social, stylistic, and temporal variations (found in all linguistic expressions), which are inherent to language; 2. a unifying force, represented by the tradition of a set of linguistic usages, historically inherent to those who are educated and have accumulated knowledge through reading. Being culturally dependent, this force is secondary to the former. The dialectic relationship between these two forces creates conditions for language stability, that is, it allows the speakers of a given generation to cling to the illusion that the language they use is stable, despite the fact that all languages go through the natural phenomena of variation and change in the same manner and at the same pace as (does) life in society. It so happens, though, that the second (unifying) force, unlike the first, which is more deleterious, materializes as, on the one hand, instructions and rules – producing traditional grammar course books and other similar works – and, on the other, lists of words updated and accompanied by their respective meanings – producing dictionaries. Besides, grammar books and dictionaries are linguistic tools of common use in schools. Aléong (1983) stated that these tools, in addition to the school itself, make up a “set of references” of this linguistic tradition. One may easily conclude from this that, in countries where all inhabitants (or at least the majority) attend school, the tradition of the language used is better known and is, for this reason, available to the speakers. In each discourse situation, they can choose between a closer and a more distant version of this tradition. This does not describe Brazilian reality, where most people have no access to school. And this is not the only problem because the educated minority is divided between those who have had access to good or satisfactory schools and those who have attended poor schools which are unable to employ the traditional set of references. Therefore, this tradition is less available to a larger number of Brazilian speakers. From this derives the prejudice – in this case, it is a new “prejudice” – that Brazilians cannot “speak Portuguese”. If we particularize the situation, we reach the following summary: · On the one hand, we have two interpreters of the linguistic practices of Brazilians in discourse, both of them familiar with the traditional use of the language. Using technical linguistic terms, both of them are users of the educated or standard norm. · On the other, the object of interpretation, the discourse (and why not the person?) of someone who is not familiar with the tradition of the language. (The reasons for this lack of familiarity are not relevant here because they are outside the linguistic scope). These are the facts. Let us now examine discourses related to such facts, looking at Dora Krammer’s article “In the name of the law of the ‘worst’ effort”. Her thesis, based on bipolarity, on the pairs of opposites being familiar vs. not being familiar with [the tradition] or knowledge vs. ignorance [of the tradition], is that, for political purposes, the President does not use the educated variant of the language in order to gain or regain support of the millions of voters who do not employ such a variant. Therefore, his intention is political. However, Krammer goes beyond criticism of the President’s speech. She disqualifies the dialect of the Brazilians who speak like the President, although the text focuses on the opposite, since it is the President who speaks like the

people, and this is what really matters. The problem in the criticism of Lula is weakened because, if the variant used by Lula is, in some situations, intentional, then it is presumed that he knows and can use a prestigious variant. But at this point Krammer's discourse is contradictory because it reveals an argumentative inconsistency, once a statement is asserted and denied at the same time. Let us observe the sentence: "Considering that the President can speak standard Portuguese (without refinement, but at the limit of acceptable speech) when he wants to (...)" stating that the President uses standard speech, that is, closer to the tradition: here there is a parenthetical sentence restricting the statement twice, by means of two different strategies, first through a reduction of the preceding statement, the prepositional phrase with no refinement"; following it, there is the restriction through the (adversative conjunction) but, which introduces the argument stating that the "standard" is at the limit of what is acceptable. The definite denial of the normality of the President's speech appears two paragraphs ahead, in the following statement: "If non-educated people speak bad Portuguese, most of them certainly don't do so because they choose to, or because they think it's charming or fun, but on account of the social disparities widely known by all and systematically recalled by the President (...)" (My Italics) If the President makes "systematic" mistakes, as Krammer states, the thesis that he does so on occasion and by choice is proved wrong. This suggests that the previous statement was made merely because she wanted to be polite, so that she could preserve a positive image. However, the text is based on the argument that the President intentionally uses the popular variant. This can be observed from the opening, in the first paragraph: "There must be an explanation for the attempts by both the government, in general, and President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, in particular, to consolidate trivial thoughts, substandard words, and irrelevant acts as values representative of the national character" The answer to this implicit question is, according to Krammer, populism with a view to reelection. The excerpt above is important because it mirrors the ideology that language influences thought and hence, action; thus, that a speaker of a variant other than the educated one neither thinks nor acts intelligently. Here lies the problem. The law of the "worst" effort refers exactly to Lula's effort to speak like the majority of Brazilians, like the hoi polloi. The adjective in the name of the article highlights Krammer's lexical choice; the worst possible thing is to speak like the people whose dialect, by implicit comparison to that of the President, is (dis)qualified by means of negative expressions such as: dumbing down, deficient, insufficient, unprepared, deformed, and extravagant. In short, it is substandard and should be fought against. "Therefore, it is something that should not be praised, but opposed (...)." Based on the premise of the conditioning of language/thought/act, Krammer understands that language mistakes lead to discourse mistakes, when she states: "The combination of irrelevant arguments ("I doubt any other country has a mail service like ours"), trivial reasoning ("God doesn't always elect as President a nobody from Caetés, Pernambuco"), offensive use of substandard Portuguese ("a gente quer ser gentis", where there is a gross agreement mistake between adjective and noun), and socially excluding concepts ("For those on top, the poor will always be poor") does not suit the innate qualities of someone who was able to become President of Brazil". The President's dialect is characterized by the word "Unionese" (trade union lingo) written between quotation marks that indicate that the reference is not limited to the neologism; they also suggest irony for the choice of a popular language variation. "Unionese", as it was called, the dialect of millions of people who elected the President,

and not specifically Lula's dialect, is described as a degraded Portuguese: "The assumption that it is necessary to address humble people in a 'Unionese' that destroys Portuguese in order to please them does not do justice to the government's campaign of stimulating Brazilians' self-esteem." (My italics) The idea of comparing Lula's dialect to the dialect of the people is made clearer when Krammer asks whether the choice to use the popular dialect is really a reelection marketing strategy. She explicitly brings Lula's dialect near to the people's, at least to the dialect of the millions of people who voted for him. She states: "It would be cruel for Brazil if the marketing department of Palácio do Planalto were, as it seems, trying to support the reelection campaign by praising the image of the President of Brazil as a "Brazilian just like you", bringing back a motto that has already been unsuccessfully used at a previous election." (My italics) In Krammer's opinion, Lula won the 2002 election because he gave up these populist characteristics and tried to comply with middle class standards both in dress and in language. The phrase she chose to characterize the former situation (the dialectal proximity between the President and the people) was "dumbing down". However, to refer to the change in situation and standard, that is, to the President's leveling with the middle class, she chose the metaphorical expression "chose a wardrobe", supposedly referring to the Armani suits that Lula started wearing in the campaign, which were largely commented on by the press. Krammer states: "In 2002, Lula abandoned the policy of dumbing down, chose a wardrobe which was closer to representing average society and won the election." (My italics) The pattern of the language adopted by Brazilian middle class, in general, is not the closest to tradition. Their clothes aren't those of Armani ... their desires are far beyond their reality. The focus of Dora Krammer's explicit analysis is Lula's language, but, with this remark about his "improved standard", it included an evaluation of the government. In her words, the government is doing well because the most important sector, the economy, is meeting the expectations of the middle class – that which wears Armani suits. The paragraph just mentioned finishes like this: "To a certain extent and in what was crucial, the economy, it performed as expected, which was a pleasant surprise" (My italics) So, if everything is going fine, one might ask why the visible fear underlying the criticism of Lula's discourse/language? The thing is, states Krammer, that the economy is doing well, but the majority of society is not because when the President attended to the needs of one sector of society, he forgot another. If the President attended to the needs of the middle class during his first period, in the second one (the "return to the starting point", as he said) he might want to please the forgotten section and maybe neglect the economy. The linguistic organization of this argument, in a sentence that starts with a phrase confirming the social deficit of the government – "The choice [for the economy] resulted in losses at grass roots level [the majority that doesn't belong to the middle class pattern]" connected to the other, by the adversative conjunction "but", to expose the second argument, which makes an evaluation of the present situation of our country – "BUT kept the country afloat". – puts all the argumentative weight on the second, and leads the writer to a second inference "it doesn't matter if the people are not well, provided the economy is". So, what is important is the maintenance of the middle class pattern, in all senses, even though the text seems to introduce a major complaint about language. The final paragraph presents the same type of reasoning. First, the acceptance of a situation summarized in an absolute sentence "It is a way", then its absolute rejection in a concessive linguistic structure: "Legitimate and acceptable, PROVIDED THAT it doesn't mean the domain of the law of the worst effort

in a country that is so much in need of qualification". A question remains: what is the legitimate and admissible way?" Conclusion Intolerance in the text is related to rejection, demonstrated by the author's speech, towards those who ignore the tradition of the language and, therefore, are not competent to perform the activities that require intellectual effort. This conclusion was made concrete in the text of another writer, Gilberto de Mello Kujawski. On February 17, he used his colleague's discourse and concluded, confirming our argument: "Lula's speech, full of mistakes, is not isolated and free of consequences. His 'substandard speech' introduces the 'trivial thoughts which are responsible for the 'irrelevant act.'" In conclusion, I remind readers that this sentence was published in the section of the magazine VEJA called VEJA ESSA, devoted to quotations, in nº 1893, February 23. Funny... Are there any doubts left about the intolerant nature of this discourse? ABSTRACT This study is part of the research carried out by the Laboratory of Studies on Intolerance (Laboratório de Estudos da Intolerância – LEI) specifically within the Linguistics research group, whose main aim is to "examine linguistic intolerance and linguistic prejudice in Brazil, as well as the resulting forms of resistance, both in relation to variants of the same language and to other languages." I intend to differentiate between linguistic prejudice and linguistic intolerance, based on Voltaire (1764) and Bobbio (1990), in order to analyze a case of linguistic intolerance published by the press. I shall then analyze an article entitled "In the name of the law of the 'worst' effort", written by columnist Dora Krammer and published on January 26th 2005, in the O Estado de São Paulo newspaper, which had nationwide repercussions. This study will examine why such discourses can be interpreted as being intolerant. KEYWORDS: Linguistic intolerance; linguistic prejudice; discourse; Portuguese language. Bibliography ALÉONG, Stanley (1983). Normes linguistiques, normes sociales, une perspective anthropologique. In: Édith Bedart & Jacques Maurais. La norme linguistique. Paris : LeRobert. BOBBIO, Norberto (1992). A era dos direitos. Trad. Carlos Nelson Coutinho. Rio de Janeiro. [1990] HALLIDAY, M. K. et. al. (1974). Os usuários e os usos da língua. In: _____. As ciências lingüísticas e o ensino de línguas. Trad. Myriam F. Morau. Petrópolis : Vozes. MARCUSE, Herbert . Tolerância repressiva. In: MARCUSE, Herbert; WOLFF, Paul; MOORE, Barrington(1969). Crítica da tolerância pura. Rio de Janeiro : Zahar. VOLTAIRE (1994). Dicionário filosófico. Trad. Pietro Nasseti. São Paulo : Martin Claret. [1764] Sources KRAMMER, Dora. Em nome da lei do pior esforço. O Estado de São Paulo. São Paulo, 26 jan. 2005. KUJAWSKI, Gilberto de Mello. O linguajar de Lula. O Estado de São Paulo. São Paulo, 17 fev. 2005. VEJA. São Paulo: Abril, 23 fev, 2005, ano 38, nº 8, ed. 1893. ANNEX In the name of the law of the 'worst' effort Dora Krammer 1. There must be an explanation for the attempt by both the government, in general, and President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, in particular, to consolidate trivial thoughts, substandard words, and irrelevant acts as values representative of the national character. 2. One might have expected that, once elected, Lula would make an effort – taking advantage of the of the opportunities his position afforded him – to overcome his lack of education and to become a real example of social, political, educational, cultural, and above all personal improvement. 3. By better understanding the complexity of the universe that surrounded him, the President would then have been able to simply and accurately demonstrate this to the millions of people to whom he represented the dream come true of a Brazilian who "made it". 4. Contradicting all logic, however, Lula's government has moved backwards in this field and seems particularly interested in valuing insufficiency, encouraging the lack of education, and

showing that it is possible to “make it” even when one’s mindset remains attached exactly to what weakens human beings and hinders the development of a community: ignorance. 5. The examples of this choice of the dumbing down concept have recently been diverse, constant and more apparent. They have been such as to draw attention to the fact that this choice has been deliberate. 6. There can be no explanation but a previously conceived purpose for the President of the Republic, for example, to address an audience of postal workers in such terms as he did yesterday during a celebration to launch a new Post Office service. 7. “The combination of irrelevant arguments (“I doubt any other country has a mail service like ours”), trivial reasoning (“God doesn’t always elect as President a nobody from Caetés, Pernambuco”), offensive use of substandard Portuguese (“a gente quer ser gentis”, where there is a gross agreement mistake), and socially excluding concepts (“For those on top, the poor will always be poor”) does not suit the innate qualities of someone who was able to become President of Brazil.” 8. For the last two years, Luís Inácio da Silva has been perfectly able to adapt himself to various situations, when he has wanted to do so and the occasion has thus demanded. Although being inclined to simplify reality, his initial extravagances – including idiomatic ones – have been contained. 9. What is the reason for this return to the starting point? 10. The only credible assumption is that the President is playing a part, exaggerating his character for a specific reason. 11. The target is reelection (that is publicly admitted and is not derogatory to the government, since the law allows it). It is fair to conclude that there resides the reason for the obvious populism that we are witnessing. 12. Considering that the President speaks standard Portuguese (without refinement but at the limit of acceptable speech) when he means to, what was the purpose of his speech to an audience of postal workers yesterday in warped language, with mistakes in every phrase he uttered? 13. The assumption that in order to please the lower classes it is necessary to speak to them in a form of “Unionese” that destroys Portuguese, one of the strongest symbols of national sovereignty, does not do justice to the campaign of the government to encourage the self-esteem of Brazilians. 14. If non-educated people speak bad Portuguese, most of them certainly don’t do so because they choose to, or because they think it’s charming or fun, but on account of the social disparities widely known by all and systematically recalled by the President. 15. Therefore, this situation is not to be praised, but fought against, especially through efforts to improve education by those “at the top”, a segment whose main representative is the President himself. 16. It would be cruel to Brazil if the Marketing Department of Palácio do Planalto were, as it seems, trying to support the reelection campaign by praising the image of the President of Brazil as a “Brazilian just like you”, reintroducing a motto that has already been unsuccessfully used in a previous election campaign. 17. In 2002, Lula abandoned dumbing down, dressed like the average Brazilian, and won the election. To a certain extent and in what is crucial, the economy, the government performed as expected, which was a pleasant surprise. 18. The choice lost him votes at his grassroots level, but kept the country afloat. Now, there is evidence that the government, lacking suitable discourse for the voters who elected him two and a half years ago, intends to be reelected by talking to those who, according to the polls, keep Lula's popularity at a high level. 19. It is a legitimate and acceptable possibility as long as it does not imply imposing the law of the “worst” effort on such an uneducated country. (“O Estado de São Paulo”, 26 January 2005)

Descrição:

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