

Politically Correct Language: Linguistic Variables for Persons with Disabilities, Black and Homosexual in a Speaking Community

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Abstract:

The politically correct language (PCL) proposes the substitution of forms considered pejorative. In this sense, are the linguistic variants of this language modality incorporated into the speech of ordinary people? This is the research question that guides this work. The objective of this study is to verify whether the forms proposed by the PCL are incorporated in a speech community in relation to the person with disabilities, black and homosexual. This work is based on the theoretical-methodological principles of sociolinguistic research and studies on linguistic beliefs and attitudes, with field research. The corpus consists of eight informants, stratified by: sex, age group and education. For the field research, a specific questionnaire was developed from images of the three segments that make up the study. From the images, the linguistic variants presented by the informants were cataloged. The three themes registered 228 occurrences with 26 linguistic variants. Among the main results are: i) the belief influences the speaker's linguistic attitude in the choice of their variants; ii) even if speakers do not dominate the variants proposed by the PCL, they show their beliefs when speaking; iii) the PCL variants are more incorporated by informants with higher education.

Keywords:

Sociolinguistic research. Linguistic belief. Politically correct language.

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INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian linguistic reality is diversified and the richness of the Brazilian Portuguese is due to multifactorial aspects, from the languages of Brazilian immigrants and indigenous people through the literacy process in schools to the contributions of the mass media. The language is part of the heritage of a population, and such a heritage can be understood from a sociocultural point of view, revealing characteristics developed and modulated over time, that is, by history.

As a social activity, the language in use presupposes a natural phenomenon to the human being, which allows them to grasp the contents, giving them a meaning, which depends on a series of factors such as the context and the historical-ideological process of those involved in the situation. It is in the communication between individuals that an important phenomenon occurs for the study of language: interaction, understood as the factor that join people and groups in a continuous process of interpretation in which meanings are constructed or reconstructed.

As a system of values, language announces the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, that is, the convention recognized by speakers of the same speech mode. However, the arbitrariness of the sign, which occurs in a language, can be agreed upon by the speakers themselves based on the establishment of previous criteria that involve different segments in the use of linguistic variants. This is the politically correct language (PCL) scenario, whose convention is forged in a given sociocultural context either to alleviate lexical items with negative meanings and considered pejorative, or to seek to reduce prejudice or discrimination to groups considered socially vulnerable, who end up stigmatized by linguistic forms in use.

Many researchers debate this perspective of language and its effectiveness in combating discrimination, since the word – as a materiality of ideology – can stigmatize groups and segments, leading to the maintenance of prejudice, which can generate discrimination.

ATTITUDE AND LINGUISTIC BELIEFS

Speech, as an exercise of language, enables countless studies to understand the mechanisms that lead to linguistic evolution. Here evolution does not have an evaluative character – positive or negative – and presents itself as a transformation process that can characterize variations or changes.

The use of PCL is characterized, therefore, by a linguistic attitude that considers – in a group or individual adept at the practice of it – psychological, social, historical and cultural aspects that lead to a certain behavior or attitude towards the language.

The concept of linguistic attitude comes from Social Psychology, an area that began to be interested in the matter from the 1960s onwards, with the sociocultural perspective of language. It was from the studies of Wallace Lambert, in *A Social Psychology of Bilingualism*, that the topic came to be considered, even becoming a data collection technique to measure linguistic attitudes. In the work,

Lambert presents the results of a survey, led by him, with a group of scholars using the technique that became known as matched guise.

Before defining the concept of linguistic attitude, it is necessary to conceptualize what the attitude itself is. For this purpose, Lambert and Lambert (1966) state:

[...] an attitude is an organized and coherent way of thinking, feeling and reacting in relation to people, groups, social issues or, more generally, to any event that takes place in our surroundings. Its essential components are thoughts and beliefs, feelings (or emotions) and tendencies to react. We say that an attitude is formed when these components are so interrelated that specific reactive feelings and tendencies are correctly associated with a particular way of thinking about certain people or events (LAMBERT; LAMBERT, 1966, p. 77-78).

Rodrigues (1975) synthesizes the elements that characterize social attitude. “(a) lasting organization of beliefs and cognitions in general; (b) an affective charge for or against; (c) a predisposition to the action; (d) a direction to a social object.” (RODRIGUES, 1975, p. 397).

The definition, proposed by the author, refers to the individual’s behavior in society based on the various elements that constitute them, that is, they mobilize several aspects to react in a certain way and not in another. In this context, the linguistic aspect is present, a characteristic inherent to the human being. After all, language is acquired and speaking one way and not another reveals the speaker’s attitudes, based on their beliefs.

In this context, this work adopts as a conceptual principle – for linguistic attitude – the definition proposed by Moreno Fernández (2009). The author states that the linguistic attitude is the manifestation of the social attitude of individuals,

(...) distinguished by focusing and referring specifically to both the language and the use made of it in society, and when talking about “language”, we include any type of linguistic variety: attitudes towards different styles; different sociolects and dialects or different natural languages (MORENO FERNÁNDEZ, 2009, p. 177-178).

The author also states that the attitude towards language and speech is especially attractive when:

(...) one appreciates in their just magnitude the fact that languages are not only bearers of certain linguistic forms and attributes, but they are also capable of transmitting social meanings and connotations and also sentimental values (MORENO FERNÁNDEZ, 2009, p. 178).

The attitude, even being a social manifestation due to the speaker’s insertion in a certain context, reveals itself as an individual act that involves personal aspects, that is, the individual values – from the social context – provoke a linguistic attitude.

Politically correct language is adopted, mainly, by professionals from areas who work directly with vulnerable communities and audiences, often stigmatized, and public policy activists. In this sense, the objective of this work is to analyze the speaker’s attitude, without political militancy, in face of the politically correct lexicon, verifying if the forms defended in this modality are incorporated by the speech community. By the way, in this work, we assume the definition of speech community, adopted by Moreno Fernández (2009, p.23). “A speech community is formed by a group of speakers who share at least a variety of language, some rules of use, an interpretation of that use, some attitudes and the same valuation of linguistic forms.”

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The research question that this paper poses is: are PCL linguistic variants incorporated in the speech of ordinary people? This study is based on the theoretical-methodological principles of sociolinguistic research and the studies of linguistic beliefs and attitudes, with a field survey. Interviews were conducted with eight informants, stratified according to three social variables: gender (male and female), age group (young people: 18-35 years, and elderly: 50-65 years) and education (basic and higher education).

Workers from a university in Londrina constitute the universe of informants, working in various sectors of the institution: administrative, attendance, library, information technology, concierge and general services, having not been considered professors or course coordinators. Activists from social movements and political parties were also disregarded of the selection of informants, as people in this context tend to be consciously concerned with the use of words and expressions whose meanings denote prejudice. This exclusion is justified to avoid biasing the search results.

Among the informants with basic education, one completed high education. This is informant 5, male aged 50-65 years. During the interviews¹, there was not in this age group, in the institution, an informant worker with only elementary education.

For the interview, a specific data collection technique was developed. As the interviewer cannot anticipate the objective of the interview, it was communicated that three sets of photographs would be presented, with six images each, in a total of 18 pieces. The images deal with three distinct themes: disability, race/color and homosexuality.

With a notebook, the interviewer showed the images and asked the informant to describe the content based on their own knowledge. The lexicon presented by the informants, therefore, was spontaneous without prior contact with lexical items or politically correct language variants.

Of all the pictures, 17 have journalistic content, that is, they accompany online reports and socially represent real facts and events, based on the characters approached journalistically in the texts published. Only one picture is of an advertising nature and, even so, it was part of a journalistic article about advertisements that caused controversy.

The first set of images refers to Deficiency (Figure 1). The six pics encompass disability in different situations. The informant was asked to describe the imagery content.

Figure 1: Images of the Disability theme²



Source: Prepared by the author.

¹ The interviews were carried out in 2015, for the discipline “Sociolinguistic Research”, as part of the author’s credits as a postgraduate student – doctoral level.

² Source of images (clockwise): Image1: Globo Esporte/G1. (20/04/2014). Image2: Acesa.com (15/12/2010). Image3: Source: UOL News Portal (17/05/2011). Image4: Source: G1. (10/07/2008). Image5: Source: G1 (04/09/2013) Image6: Source: Gazeta do Povo newspaper (08/04/2013).

To describe and analyze the answers and for the purpose of methodological organization, the occurrences were grouped by equivalence, that is, lexical items that are close and can be considered synonymous by inflection of number and gender.

Theme 1 (Disability), in the data collection, presented the following variants: 1) *disabled (physically and visually impaired)*; 2) *paraplegic*; 3) *disabled person (visually impaired person, blind person, special person)*; 4) *handicapped person (physically handicapped, visually handicapped, handicapped, visually handicapped and physically handicapped)*; 5) *wheelchair user*; 6) *lost sight*; 7) *blind*; 8) *dependent*.

The second series of images refers to Race/Color (Figure 2). The images show black people in various everyday situations.

Figure 2: Images of the Race/Color theme³



Source: Prepared by the author.

By grouping by equivalence, theme 2 (Race/Color), based on field interviews, was organized as follows: 1) *black (negro, negros, negra, negras⁴)*; 2) *moreno⁵ (moreno, morena⁶, lighter brown, darker brown, much darker brown)*; 3) *negro (preto, pretos, preta, pretas⁷)*; 4) *colored (colored, colored person)*; 5) *black ethnicity*; 6) *dark*; 7) *Afro-Brazilian*; 8) *mulatto*; 9) *dark brown*.

The last set of photographs refers to the theme Homosexuality, whose images also reflect different contexts (Figure 3).

Following the methodology of grouping by equivalence, theme 3 (Homosexuality), according to the survey respondents, presented the following linguistic forms: 1) *gay (gay, gays)*; 2) *homosexual (homo, homosexual, homosexuals)*; 3) *male/female couple (women's couple, woman's group, two men, men's group, female group, male group, both men, man with man, woman with woman)*; 4) *two boys/two women (two boys, two young men, two women)*; 5) *lesbian*; 6) *dyke (sapatão, sapatona, sapatonas, mulheres sapatonas⁸)*; 7) *two fathers*; 8) *people of the same sex*; 9) *bis*.

³ Source of images (clockwise): Image1: Revista Isto É (09/21/2012). Image2: Benetton Campaign/Portal UOL (19/09/2012). Image3: Imagick Psychic Research Institute. Image4: Agência Brasil EBC (30/10/2013). Image5: News Ceará (14/10/2014). Image 6: GGN Newspaper (22/02/2013)

⁴ Referring to singular and plural masculine, singular and plural feminine, respectively.

⁵ Dark-skinned.

⁶ Referring to masculine and feminine, respectively.

⁷ Referring to singular and plural masculine, singular and plural feminine, respectively.

⁸ Singular masculine augmentative, singular and plural feminine augmentative, dyke women.

Figure 3: Images of the Homosexuality theme⁹



Source: Prepared by the author.

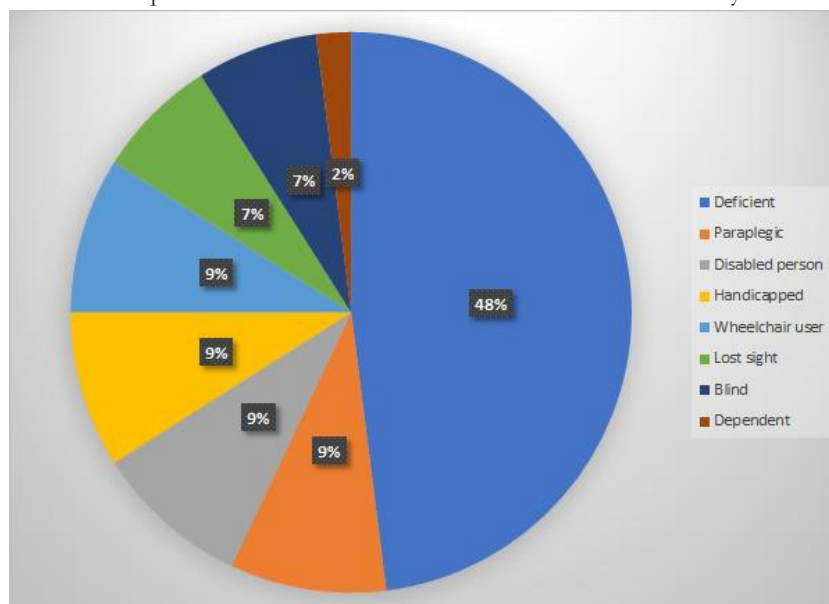
DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Altogether, the three themes registered 228 occurrences with 26 linguistic variants. Theme 1 (Disability) had 67 occurrences in eight forms. Theme 2 (Race/Color) had 62 occurrences for nine lexical items. For theme 3 (Homosexuality), 99 occurrences were recorded in nine variants.

Theme Disability

In the theme Disability, out of 67 occurrences, the most used by speakers is *disabled* with 32 records, which is equivalent to 48%, that is, almost half (Graph 1).

Graph 1: Distribution of the variants of the theme Disability



Source: The author.

In second place are four variants, with six occurrences each (9%): *paralegic*, *disabled person*, *handicapped* and *wheelchair user*. In third place are *blind* and *lost sight*, with five occurrences each (7%). Finally, it is *dependent*, with one occurrence (2%).

⁹ Source of images (clockwise): Image1: G1 (12/06/2009). Image2: UOL Portal(09/12/2013). Image3: G1 (25/05/2014). Image4: Abril.com (19/04/2010). Image5: BOL Portal. Image6: Folha de São Paulo Newspaper Online (24/04/2013).

The form *deficient*, which includes other equivalent lexicons, was used by almost all informants. Only informant 6 (woman, age group 50-65 years and elementary school) did not use this name. She used the variants *wheelchair*, *lost sight* and *dependent*.

Data show that *deficient* is widespread and consolidated as an important lexical item in the researched speech community. However, this can be considered stigmatized, if the guidelines of the public bodies that elaborate the policies for the service to the segment are considered.

The “Manual of Orientation and Support for Assistance to People with Disabilities”, by the Secretariat for Human Rights of the Brazilian Presidency of the Republic, offers tips for serving this public.

To start with, it is important to emphasize that words act on people and may or may not discriminate. What we say shows what we think and in what we believe. So, in the first place, it must be said that the correct nomenclature to be used is “person with disability” (BRASIL, s/d, p. 4).

In the division of the disabled person segment, the manual establishes as correct forms, *blind* or *visually impaired people*, *people with physical and motor disabilities*, *deaf* or *hearing impaired people*, and *people with intellectual disabilities*.

Based on the manual approach of the Federal Government, this study records only six occurrences of the variant *disabled person* (9% of the total), which can be considered a form of prestige in this context. The study allows us to state that the speech community mainly uses stigmatized items and, even so, the informants showed concern with the way they would use to refer to the person with a disability.

Baronas (2011) recognizes that “the examples show that political correctness has to some extent influenced not only the conduct of individuals, but their language.” This perception is echoed in the speech of informant 2 (woman, age group 18-35 years, elementary school), who – for people with visual impairments – would not use the word *blind*.

Int. __Besides being visually impaired, would you call it another way?

Inf2__ I don't think so. Because *blind* would be a very heavy word, right.

Int.__Heavy. Why do you think *blind* is a heavy word?

Inf2__Because sometimes people don't think the word to say, the thing really hurts... is takes a hit!

The interviewer also asked if there would be – for people with physical disabilities – some expression that they would not use.

Inf2__ Cripple. Never!

Int. __Cripple. Why?

Inf2__ Because it's also very heavy. Ah! The crippled person. It's too heavy for the person to be like that.

Historically, the name *cripple* was used for a long time from a conception of disability and fell into disuse. Currently, this terminology is pejorative and depreciates the segment to which it refers.

In this sense, the informant's willingness to refuse the use of such an expression coincides with the reflections of Moreno Fernández (2009). He claims that linguistic attitudes are psychosocial attitudes.

(...) languages have a meaning or social connotations; it is natural that they are appreciated and evaluated according to the position or social characteristics of their speakers. Therefore, it is not easy to delimit where the attitude towards a linguistic variety begins and where the attitude towards the social group or the speaker of this variety ends (MORENO FERNÁNDEZ, 2009, p. 179).

The worry behavior in reference to the use of the correct expression, which reveals a linguistic attitude based on the belief that the word has a great weight in relation to another, was also observed in another interviewee. Informant 3 (male, age range 18-35 years, higher education) even spoke about the correct use of the expression:

Int. __You said visually impaired and physically disabled, would you use another word to designate these people?

Inf3 __People with visual impairment and that would be correct. I even forget. Visual impairment bearer and “bearer of physical disability”.

The informant reveals concern with the correct use of the word, but mixes the forms person and bearer (People with visual impairment and people with physical disabilities). This is because the expression “disabled person” was also coined to refer to the person with a disability. However, nowadays, “disabled person” is mainly used for the educational environment. From forms and/or interviews, the special needs of the student in the teaching and learning process are raised. Thus, the educational establishment can provide the necessary resources to promote teaching and learning.

In the context of the variant *people with physical disabilities*, 9% of the total occurrences were registered. Here, it is even more explicit the collection of expressions that can be taken as equivalent and that reveal the confusion caused by the proposal of this language modality: *physically disabled, visually impaired, special needs people, visual carrier need and people with physical disabilities*.

Informant 8 (female, age group 50-65 years, higher education) also explained the attitude of using the correct variants.

Int. __Some that you wouldn't use?

Inf. 8 __I think that... no, I would not use blind nor paraplegics, I think it is/that type of term is no longer used.

Int. __Right.

Inf. 8 __Visually disabled, people with special needs... I don't know if there would be any other.

The informant's speech reveals a learning process in which the attitude towards the stigmatized forms, which she denies, leads to considering others considered more appropriate. This finds resonance in Rodrigues (1975, p. 406) who states: “if attitudes influence the processes of perception and motivation, it seems logical to infer that they will play a relevant role in the learning process.”

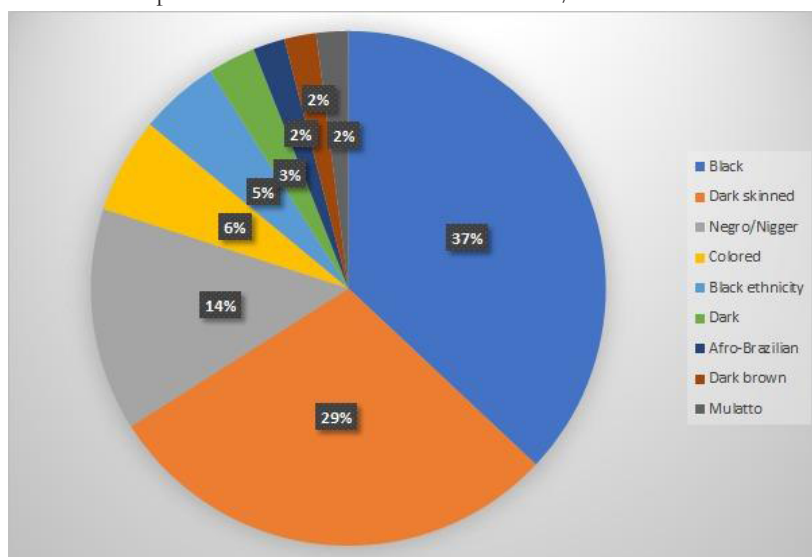
This means to say that the attitude leads the individual to apprehend and, with that, to learn. “It is reasonable to hypothesize that a material consistent with a person's attitudes should be more easily learned than one that clashes with them.” (RODRIGUES, 1975, p. 406-407).

It is important to highlight, in this theme, the variants *wheelchair* and *paraplegic*. These forms were used by four informants, considering the three social variables (gender, age and education). This means stating that the variant is used by both men and women, young and old, with elementary and higher education.

Theme Race/Color

The theme Race/Color registered 62 occurrences in nine variants (Graph 2).

Graph 2: Distribution of the Variants Race/Color Theme



Source: The author.

The most used is the variant *black* (*negro*), with 23 occurrences (37%). In second place is *dark skinned* (*moreno*), with 18 occurrences (29%), followed by *negro* (*nigger*), with nine (14%); *colored* (*de cor*), with four occurrences (6%); *black ethnicity* (*etnia negra*), with three (5%); *dark* (*escuro*), with two (3%); *Afro-Brazilian* (*afro-brasileiro*), *mulatto* (*mulato*) and *dark brown* (*marrom escuro*), with one occurrence each (2%).

The variant *black*, and its equivalences with gender and number inflection, was used by six informants, that is, by 75% of the *corpus*, by men, women, young and elderly informants, with elementary and higher education. This coincides with what is determined in the booklet “Politically Correct & Human Rights,” by the Brazilian Special Secretariat for Human Rights, published in 2004.

Most militants of the black movement prefer this term to “negro”, which they use with pride to affirm the values of Afro-Brazilian culture. The context determines the pejorative meaning of the two expressions. In certain situations, both “black” and “negro” can be highly offensive. In others, they can denote affection, for example, in the diminutives “neguinho” (“little blacky”), “minha preta” (“my black woman”) etc. (BRASILb, 2004, p. 26)

It is reckless to say that most of the informants in this study have used the variant *black*, consciously based on the knowledge of the politically correct language proposal. The form *black*, as explained by the Special Secretariat for Human Rights, is used in situations of a positive nature, for example, in campaigns that show “Black Pride”, “100% black”; and negative, in expressions such as blacklist, black sheep, black market, among others.

During the interviews, the two informants who did not use the variant *black* draw attention: they are black. Informers 1 (male, age group 18-35 years old, elementary school) and 6 (female, age group 50-65 years old, elementary school) preferred the form *dark skinned*, *lighter brown*, *darker brown*, *much darker brown*. The variant *dark skinned*, the second most used, was registered in 18 occurrences, that is, 29% of the total. This form was not used by any other informant in the *corpus*.

Informants 1 and 6 have only elementary education and access to schooling can be a factor in strengthening self-esteem that affects the language in use. Furthermore, not identifying oneself as black can be a self-defense strategy. After all, “we talk about the inferiority of black people based on empirical observation of their socioeconomic condition” (PINSKY, 2004, p. 6).

This perception can be reinforced by the speech of informant 6 who believes that the variant *dark skinned* is more delicate than the word *negro*. For her, the interlocutor may feel bad, when called *negro*.

Int.__What if we were going to talk about color?

Inf6__If we were talking about color, we would say: he is dark skinned.

Int.__Dark skinned.

Info6__Dark skinned. It's a word that... if I'm going to speak negro, they think it's bad, right. The word brown is a word that it... is more... delicate.

The informant knows the two variants (*negro* and *dark skinned*) and chooses the one that she believes is the most suitable for referring to the segment in question. She chooses what she considers more “delicate,” that is, she gives a positive value to the lexical item selected during her speech.

The belief that the word can offend is also expressed by informant 2 (woman, age group 18-35 years, elementary school), which reinforces the linguistic attitude based on their own beliefs.

Int.__Would you call it any other way?

Inf2__Like... To avoid prejudice: a person of color.

Int.__Ah color.

Inf2__It would be much less... like, heavy.

Int.__Heavy. And what wouldn't you call it?

Inf.2__Black.

Int.__Wouldn't you call him black?

Inf2 __No. Never! Or are you dark. Because there are several themes when the person is prejudiced, racist, right So never... the black person, no! Person of color, what a beautiful color, you are a mulatto.

The informant mentions prejudice and racism that can be invoked from the way she refers to a third person. However, even with such concern, the informant ends up using expressions considered pejorative, such as *colored*, *dark*, *black* and *mulatto*.

Although she uses forms considered pejorative by the PCL, her linguistic attitude towards the topic in question is evident, based on her belief. Being concerned about using the correct word, so as not to offend, is not a guarantee of using politically correct variants. The informant stated that she would not use the lexical item *black*, but during the interview she used this variant in two moments.

Int.__And the misery, who would it reach the most?

Inf2__Of course, people more... middle-class people... people of color suffer more, you know, with that. If it's a person like that, more or less, who passes will try to help, but... [MANY] if you see a person like that, why? It's a black person, let them, let them die.

Int.__And this image that contrasts with that one?

Inf2__That the person, despite being black, they can succeed in life.

Int.__ Huh.

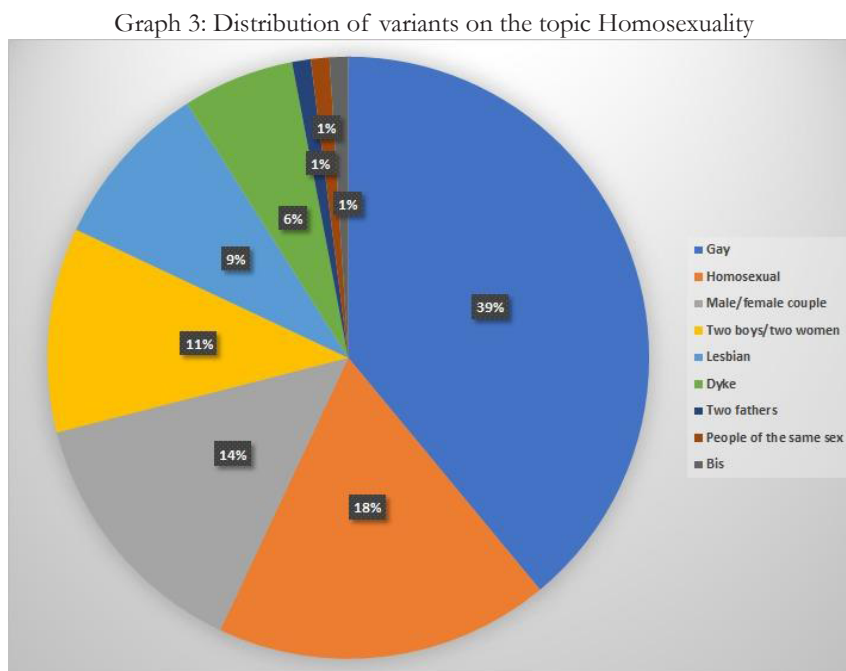
Inf2__Regardless of color, he struggled to be there today.

This situation – of becoming aware of the use of certain variants – is supported by the studies and reflections of López Morales (1993), for whom the linguistic attitude is not a process inherent to human beings, but something to be acquired socially. This means stating that this is a process taught and learned from the individual's socialization.

Still on the theme Race/Color, the variant *negro*, the third most used (14% of occurrences), appears in the speech of four women informants, both young and elderly, with elementary and higher education. The variant, according to the data collected in the field research, refers to the person's skin color and not the race of the characters shown in the photographs.

Theme Homosexuality

The nine forms registered under the theme Homosexuality totaled 99 occurrences (Graph 3).



Source: The author.

Of the total, the variant *gay* appears in first place with 38 occurrences (39%); followed by *homosexual*, with 18 (18%); *male/female couple*, 14 (14%); *two boys/two women*, 11 (11%); *lesbian*, 9 (9%); *dyke*, 6 (6%); *two fathers*, *people of the same sex* and *bis*, with 1 occurrence each (1%).

The variant *gay* appears in the speech of all informants in the research, that is, it is a universalized expression used by all social strata: men and women; young and old; with elementary and higher education. This reality can be explained by the massification of this lexical item in the news media, for example, about gay parade, gay marriage, gay couples and gay adoption, gay kissing in soap operas and movies.

This reality shows, once again, that the linguistic attitude is socially constructed. This variant – *gay* – can be considered, therefore, of prestige, since it is indicated as the adequate expression to refer to the segment. This form even integrates the acronym of the LGBT movement (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transvestites and Transsexuals).

The linguistic attitude towards the variant *gay* is evidenced in the speech of informant 2 (woman, age group 18-35, elementary school), which makes clear the way she would not use to refer to the public.

Int.__And how would you define them?

Inf2__Gays, right.

Int.__Gays. Are there any word you wouldn't use?

Inf2__Faggot. I think it's heavy. There are so many ways... Ah! he is homosexual; his option. Why saying: ah, you faggot! That's so ugly... It's so heavy that word.

Informant 4 (female, age group 18-35 years, higher education) also reveals this attitude, in two excerpts of the interview, both referring to *gays* and *lesbians*.

Int.__Is there a word you wouldn't use? Any designation?

Inf4__ Which I wouldn't use?

Int.__Yeah!

Inf4__Dyke.

Int.__ Why?

Inf4__I think it's offensive, isn't it?

Int.__Because it's offensive. Right...

Inf4__I think it's kind of making fun, in this sense.

Int.__Is there another one that you've heard and wouldn't use?

Inf4__Fag, faggot.

Int.__Why?

Inf4.__I don't know... Because I think it's more aggressive because/ at least when people refer to it in these words, they're being aggressive.

The linguistic attitude of the informants is the consequence of a psychological attitude towards the fact itself. Lambert and Lambert (1966) argue that attitudes play a significant role in behavior itself. "(...) for example, they affect our judgments and perception of others, help to determine the groups we associate with, the professions we finally choose and even the philosophies under which we live" (LAMBERT; LAMBERT, 1966, p. 83).

faggot or *queer*, considered offensive by gays and activists of the movement, were not registered, the variant *dyke* was registered to refer to the homosexual woman, registered in 6% of the occurrences. The variant was used by three informants, that is, 37.5% of the *corpus*: two women (one young and one elderly), with elementary education; and an elderly man with a college degree.

Why did not the forms *fag*, *faggot* or *queer* occur in the study carried out? It is necessary to deepen this questioning in other studies, but the author's perception is related to the stigmatization of these variants, known by the population, mainly, in jokes and situations that belittle the homosexual condition. The informants were unaware of the research objective, but the interview has a formal aspect, and this may have put these variants away from the interviewed speakers.

The second most used form (*homosexual*) is also widespread. Out of the eight informants, six (75%) used it, that is, men and women, young and old, with elementary and higher education.

The third variant (*male/female couple*) and the fourth with the highest number of occurrences (*two boys/two women*) had 14 (14%) and 11 records (11%), respectively. It is noteworthy that this variant is centered on male and female gender, and not on sexual orientation. This also reveals the linguistic attitude towards the subject. Informer 6 (female, age group 50-65 years, elementary school) recognizes the couple as two men, approaching the variant by the male sex. She hesitates when talking about the sexual orientation of the characters in the photograph.

Int. __ Here is a couple, whom you called a group, there [in another photo]. It's a couple of what?
 Inf6 __ But there are two men!
 Int. __ Yes. It is a couple... they are married and have adopted three children.
 Inf6 __ Hmm... I'll say the word.
 Int. __ You can speak. No problem.
 Inf6 __ They are gay!

When using the word *gay*, the informant reveals concern, and the researcher's impression is that, for her, it is an insult. It should be noted that this variant is of prestige, since it is used by activists in the segment and considered adequate by politically correct language manuals.

With respect to people who are attracted to or have romantic or sexual relationships with people of their own sex, use the following identifications: gay – for men and women; understood – for men and women; lesbian for women; transvestite and transsexual – for transgender people; bisexual – for men and women (BRASILb, 2004, p. 9).

Researcher Fiorin (2008) states that the emergence of politically correct language gives public expression to the identity of historically oppressed segments, such as women, black people and homosexuals. For him, the movement reveals

(...) the strength of these “minorities”, which were discriminated against, ridiculed, disregarded. It is intended, with it, to combat prejudice, proscribing a vocabulary that is strongly negative in relation to these social groups. The idea is that, by changing the language, discriminatory attitudes change (FIORIN, 2008, p. 1).

Fiorin (2008) states that PCL provokes a series of reflections on the functioning of language and draws attention to two important aspects, the use of euphemism and the neutrality of the words proposed by the modality's defenders. For him, “excessive care in the search for euphemisms to designate certain social groups reveals the existence of deep-rooted prejudices in social life” (FIORIN, 2008, p. 3). Regarding the second aspect, the author recalls that there are neither objective nor neutral terms. “All words, Bakhtin teaches, are marked by a social appreciation” (FIORIN, 2008, p. 3).

If, on the one hand, the informants know the expressions recommended by the politically correct language, showing concern with the type of words they will use; on the other hand, the possibility of these informants using these expressions to preserve the face should be considered.

The sociolinguistic interview is a form of direct communication in which the speakers expose themselves by giving their opinion, making value judgments about different situations. This means saying that they have an image to protect and can choose to preserve their face, that is, to speak according to a code of etiquette that does not compromise them.

The notion of face was defined by Erving Goffman in the 1970s, in studies of social representation, in a situation of interaction between people. For the author, individuals may want people to think well of them or to think that they are thinking very well of the other, leading them to preserve their own image.

Goffman (1956, p. 5) states that “in everyday life, of course, there is a clear understanding that first impressions are important”. In this sense, people tend to control what they say in a self-acting game. The individual

(...) can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan. Thus, when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey (GOFFMAN, 1956, p. 2-3).

Even if some informants have used variants of politically correct language such as *homosexual*, *black* and *people with disabilities*, not resorting to expressions such as *dear*, *negro* and *cripple*, to keep their face, that is, the appearance during the interview; this does not change the fact that they used the prestige lexical item, disregarding the stigmatized variants.

Possenti (2009, p. 35) reflects on politically correct language from the perspective of Discourse Analysis (DA). This is not the theoretical support of this work, but it is worth resorting to the author who recognizes in this language modality a “confused movement, with ups and downs, which includes some relevant theses, others extremely debatable and still others frankly laughable.” The author argues that, although the discussion seems to be of a political order, what happens in the externality of language is quite relevant to language studies.

Whatever is said in relation to political effects, however, we are facing a movement that has already produced discursive facts that cannot be ignored, regardless of their historical durability and the solidity of the theses that justify them (POSSENTI, 2009, p. 35).

Possenti (2009) states that when analyzing some lexical items, proposed by PCL and in use in the speech of many people, the relationship that these words have with their discursive formations is evidenced, thus influencing the meanings they acquire in this process, since the meaning varies depending on the speakers and where they are located.

(...) there is another relevant aspect: some speakers are aware and others not, of the negative or positive charge of certain terms; or alternatively, some speakers become aware of the negative charge of certain terms only when applied inappropriately. (POSSENTI, 2009, p. 38).

For DA, Possenti (2009, p. 38) states that the words of the PCL should direct efforts by taking “the idea of discourse as a social and historical practice of what to see and live in disputed meanings, materialized in the struggle for the use of certain words and in the fight for the employment of others.”

CONCLUSIONS

This paper, whose objective was to analyze the speaker’s attitude, without political militancy, towards the politically correct lexicon, verifying whether the lexical items defended in this language modality are incorporated by the speech community, considers some aspects for reflection on PCL functioning:

i) Politically correct language variants were incorporated more by speakers with higher education than by those with only elementary education, regardless of gender and age group. It can be said that the social education variable stands out in relation to the other variables (gender and age group).

ii) The speaker reveals a linguistic concern, in the choice of form, in relation to the lexicon of the themes presented because he believes that the word can hurt someone or be negative for the segment described. Belief – of a psychological order –, therefore, influences the speaker’s attitude in choosing its variants.

iii) Even with linguistic concern in the choice of the lexicon, the speaker does not master all the forms that constitute the politically correct language, considered adequate by the official bodies, responsible for the formulation of public policies for the segments involved.

iv) As there is no domain in relation to the politically correct language lexicon, speakers “mix” the variants to refer to the segments represented in this work, but this does not invalidate the speaker’s attitude towards the topics covered.

Baronas (2011) recalls that the mere replacement of words – of expressions considered pejorative by politically correct ones – would not eliminate prejudice, because this is often prior to the word itself. Replacing forms considered pejorative by softer or milder ones may not reduce or eliminate prejudice against stigmatized segments.

However, it should be considered that the use of pejorative lexical items also maintains the ideologically embedded prejudice in the word. Therefore, stigmatized variants can maintain the prejudice that also contributes to the segments continuing to be discriminated against and the target of social depreciation. In this sense, PCL is a great challenge.

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