

THE GRAMMARIAN CELSO CUNHA: THE PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE, “ONE ON DIVERSITY”

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- **ABSTRACT:** The present incursion into Celso Cunha’s work highlights any tensions that he succeeds in establishing and conciliating in his linguistic-philological works. The incursion follows a notion that, with no conformity or nationalism, emerges from Cunha’s proposal according to which the prominence of “cultured norm” smoothly coexists with the prominence of spoken language. This coexistence is equated in a proposal of action at school level that provides the students constructive experiences toward the apprehension of the “prestigious dialect”, without being required from them the abandonment of the vernacular (and safeguarded the attention toward register adequacy). In this direction, this paper highlights, at its crux, the proposal that the work with grammar at school level should be conducted by the notion that a language is “one in diversity”, given that, scientifically, any natural language is “one”, nevertheless in the necessary plurality of uses (of modes of expression). In Cunha’s perspective, inside this building of conciliated tensions, we all are “tenants of the language”; and given the tasks he suggests for working with the language, it is safe to understand that we ought to be natural “keepers” of this common patrimony.
- **KEYWORDS:** Natural language; cultured norm; linguistic unit; linguistic diversity; school grammar.

Introduction

This article begins by recovering a text written under the order of *Caderno Mais*, from *Folha de S. Paulo* (NEVES, 2004), about two historical books that were published at the same time, both with the significant seal of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. In them came to light “scattered” and some unpublished works by two scholars who made history in the construction of linguistic and philological knowledge in Brazil: Antenor Nascentes and Celso Cunha. They were:

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- the collection *Estudos filológicos* by Nascentes (2003), organized by Raimundo Barbadinho Neto (with presentation and flap by Evanildo Bechara and with the back cover of Celso Cunha), belonging to the collection “Antônio de Moraes Silva – Portuguese Language Studies”, directed by Evanildo Bechara;
- the work in homage to Celso Cunha, *Sob a pele das palavras* [Under the Skin of Words] (2004), organized by Cilene da Cunha Pereira (his daughter, and researcher), with thirty essays by this great philologist and linguist, bibliophile and medievalist, literate and canonist, divided in five sections: Medievalistics, Canonistics, Lexicography (in most cases, Metalexigraphy, or Lexicology), Philology and Linguistics, Memorialistics.

These are two memorable tribute works, valuable material for an area – linguistic historiography – which, fortunately, has been gaining great momentum in the incorporation of new people, from Linguistics, who join the master philologists. They came from Rio de Janeiro, from where we have seen the great stuff of Brazilian philological culture, rocked in the cradle of Colégio Pedro II. Happy memory of those who have in their history a school that registers competitions for which a candidate sends for a book in Europe that deals with “the problem of nasals in old Portuguese”, which is what Antenor Nascentes did, according to the testimony of ambassador Roberto Assumpção de Araújo, on page XLIV of the homage book to which reference has already been made.

From the examination of both works and the reflection to which they lead - it was said in the article in *Caderno Mais* - there is, after all, the clear notion that many of the daring people today naively set up batteries, left and right, against the block of knowledge about language and language that tradition offers, they have certainly heard something about traditional grammarians and philologists of the last century, but they haven't really read the lessons that the great among them give us.

About Celso Cunha, the text said that who this author is in the history of Linguistics and Philology, any scholar in the field knows, admiring the figure. Also, those who sought to study this Portuguese language in depth, through any filter, had it at their bedside. And, also, that the Brazilian people – the populace –, from north to south, also know and respect this name, which is that of a grammarian with traditional rigor but innovative sensibility, to whom the convinced traditionalists, who trust in his establishment of grammatical standards, as well as the staunch innovators, who also rely on him for scientifically grounded lessons, for example even on “linguistic variation” (a banner of our days, when one wants to preach modernity and scientificity).

The article also recalled that our grammarian had already received a memorable tribute in the publication of the *Miscelânea de estudos linguísticos, filológicos e literários in memoriam Celso Cunha* [Miscellany of linguistic, philological and literary studies *in memoriam* Celso Cunha], in which Houaiss (1995, p.LV), our translation), in the same sense, referred to him as “in love with the struggle for unity of language and,

therefore, endeavoring to establish its variants and eventual contrasts, on the empirical level and in that of a common language policy”¹. He also emphasized that the set of texts that were then published only confirmed the position that Josué Montello (1995, p. LVII, author’s emphasis, our translation) attributed, relevantly, to Celso Cunha: that of the “great master who, having a deep knowledge of the Portuguese language, in its details and as a whole, he associated to this admirable knowledge the sensitivity of those who were born to appreciate it as a *work of art*”². And that is a point this article will return to, giving it its due importance.

Unpublished texts were particularly welcome, among which the delightful and intriguing *A magia da palavra* [The Magic of the Word] was highlighted (PEREIRA, 2004). This text is notable for its organization, which is clearly seen as provisional, and, for that very reason, as revealing a unique ability to highlight a theme and at the same time delve into it, only possible for someone with training, the curiosity and experience recognized in the author. The theme of “language as magic” is exposed, there, in an approach that comes from different angles. It starts with the study of the statement that by the word “we were created”³ (PEREIRA, 2004, p. 217), to then go to proper names – a field that requires treatment guided by a lot of reflection and sensitivity – reaching, then, to the mystery of silence, not without first focusing on the growth of a primacy of writing, a terrain in which Plato must not be forgotten (which, by the way, our grammarian never leaves forgotten).

Thus, up to this point, we have a framework to bring to reflection this thinker of language that is Celso Cunha, a *philologist* who (advancedly) does *grammar* in the light of *Linguistics* (with attention to the emphasis here).

And the frame now narrows to create tension spots within which Celso Cunha’s plural production takes place. This production will be referred to here by only four very representative works, separated into two sets (which will be developed below in two parts). It is proposed that each of them is defined by a particular type of tension – the first most sustained in Linguistics, the second most sustained in Philology – both reducing to the central tension between idiomatic unity and *linguistic* diversity,⁴ however both developed by a thinker who never gives up traditionalism for his vision of linguistic expression in the community. In the first set (next section) the sociopolitical bias leads the questions, and in the second set (subsequent section) the socio-educational bias leads the issues:

¹ Original: “apaixonado da luta pela unidade da língua e por isso esforçado no estabelecimento de suas variantes e eventuais contrastes, no plano empírico e no de uma política comum da língua” (HOUAISS, 1995, p.LV).

² Original: “grande mestre que, conhecendo profundamente a língua portuguesa, nas suas minúcias e no seu conjunto, associou a esse saber admirável a sensibilidade de quem nascera para apreciá-la na condição de obra de arte”. (MONTELLO, 1995, p. LVII).

³ Original: “*fomos criados*” (PEREIRA, 2004, p. 217).

⁴ Pay attention to the noun *national language* – which Celso Cunha (1975, work discussed below) defines as the “historical language” – for example, “the Portuguese language, the Spanish language, the French language” – in opposition to “functional language”.

- (i) the sociopolitical bias brings the tension between the Portuguese norm and the Brazilian reality;
- (ii) the socio-educational bias brings the tension between the contemporary (cultured) norm (of written and oral expression) and the usage pattern at a given time in the evolution of the language.

The sociopolitical bias of the issue: *Portuguese norm versus Brazilian reality. Or: servility versus linguistic nationalism.*

A significant fact to point out is that of Celso Cunha explicitly placing himself as a proponent of a “language policy” (CUNHA, 1975)⁵.

In the preface to this 3rd edition of the work, Aires da Mata Machado Filho retakes words with which he greeted the book in 1965: he begins by commenting on the indication that Celso Cunha himself makes about the way in which he understands this “policy”: to he (Cunha, 1975, p.9, author’s emphasis), it is “one of the many policies that can be adopted for language teaching”⁶ – characterized as “simple, realistic, fighting *not* for a utopian unification of the language, *but* for maintaining its relative unity”⁷ – knowing in advance that, “considered in time and space, a language cannot be *tout à fait la même*”. In continuation, the prefacer also recalls this addition to the grammar: “we just want that, on each side of the Atlantic, ours does not become *tout à fait une autre*”.

What he defends is, exactly, the existence of a unity that does not touch unification: instead, the unity he preaches gives identity to each of the parts, exactly what is obtained by sheltering what is not identical in both. Thus, the expression “wholeness in plurality”⁸, used by Ivan Russef (2003, p. 3) in a commentary on the work, fits well.

Here, we will not deal with the properly political coating of Celso Cunha’s manifestations, which Mata Machado discusses as polemicizing and critical, especially when assessing the historical conduct of what the grammarian calls “normative control”⁹ (CUNHA, 1975, p. 10) of our language (from Brazil) by Portugal, which leads to the controversy over who is the owner of the common language. It is within this question that the remarkable proposition of Celso Cunha (1975, p.42) of “political condominiums”¹⁰ language, in our case represented by the fact that we are, Brazil and Portugal, “speakers

⁵ It should be noted that, in an Explanation placed in this 3rd edition (1975), Celso Cunha warns that what was as a subtitle of the first reprint of this work (Para uma política do idioma [For a language policy]) is then changed to the title (Uma política do idioma [A language policy]), because it was what – he says – “contained the predominant idea of the study” (CUNHA, 1975, p. 15). Pay attention again to the reference to national language, not functional language.

⁶ Original: “*uma das muitas políticas que se podem adotar para o ensino da língua*” (CUNHA, 1975, p.9).

⁷ Original: “*singela, realista, que luta não por uma utópica unificação do idioma, mas por manter a sua unidade relativa*” (CUNHA, 1975).

⁸ Original: “*inteireza na pluralidade*” (RUSSEF, 2003, p. 3).

⁹ Original: “*controle normativo*” (CUNHA, 1975, p. 10).

¹⁰ Original: “*condomínios políticos*” (CUNHA, 1975, p. 42).

of the language”¹¹ (CUNHA, 1975, p. 41), let’s say, paired partners in the natural use of the Portuguese language.

We still remain on this general issue to remember that, as always in his exams, Celso Cunha chooses texts with a focus on the school’s dealings with the mother tongue (this adjective he does not use). Obviously, the role of Philology enters the case, whose spectrum, for the consideration of the facts of the language, happily *adds to / is organized along* the spectrum of the science of language – Linguistics – whose lessons our grammarians called “traditional” (I quote Evanildo Bechara and Celso Cunha as examples) have been able to show. Celso Cunha says verbatim, in the “Explanation” that affixes to the 3rd edition (CUNHA, 1975, p. 15, author’s emphasis): “We intentionally seek to align facts and base our assertions on the good doctrine of contemporary *linguists* and *philologists*”¹².

It can be interpreted that there he stands, declared, for the defense of a multi-biased scientific conduction of analysis, by considering the facts of language in such a way that, when dealing with the act of language, there is a clear vision of the linguistic system (taking into account exactly the abstract character of the system). On the other hand, one can observe in Cunha (1975) a defense of the undeniable weight of the historical chain in the present stage of the linguistic fact under analysis, a defense that, however, has no value simply because of pure revival bets, with which, incidentally, the fact that language has a real history would be denied. This is also valid, as Cunha (1975) points out, in the opposite sense, which is that of wanting to see facts from another time through the eyes of the present: well, whoever produced them (and the grammarian’s reference goes to “writers”) had the linguistic patterns of their time. Thus – as he says – these writers “breathed into expression the ideals of their time”¹³ (CUNHA, 1975, p. 23).

In principle, what Celso Cunha puts under examination are, therefore, examples, they are selected tokens, almost always directly referred to as coming from “writers”. It is enough to remember that, of the “writers” (true examples of language use, that is, of choice governed by standards), Cunha (1975, p.26) even said things like: “[...] they even make conscious use of impropriety, using it as a style resource of rare expressiveness”; “Better than philologists, writers feel”; “Most errors (if any is present with writers) generally serve to prevent and repair deficits in correct language”¹⁴.

And, after all, explicitly excluding from the writers’ (these true models) an intention of normative control of expression (and explicitly criticizing the purists), Cunha (1975,

¹¹ Original: “condôminos do idioma” (CUNHA, 1975, p. 41).

¹² Original: “Procuramos intencionalmente alinhar fatos e fundamentar nossas afirmações na boa doutrina dos linguistas e filólogos contemporâneos” (CUNHA, 1975, p. 15).

¹³ Original: “insuflaram na expressão os ideais de seu tempo” (CUNHA, 1975, p. 23).

¹⁴ Original: “[...] fazem até da impropriedade uso consciente, empregando-a como recurso de estilo de rara expressividade”; “Melhor que os filólogos, os escritores sentem”; “A maioria das incorreções (se há nos escritores) serve geralmente para prevenir e reparar os déficits da língua correta” (CUNHA, 1975, p. 26).

p. 28) pontificates: “a purist writer is, therefore, a writer who sticks to forms of poetry invented by other artists in his country: which means he is an imitator, not a poet”¹⁵.

And it is through the constant reference to writers that one can enter into the discussion of a tension – which Cunha (1968) considered observable in the treatment of the linguistic use of Portuguese in Brazil – between what he considered the “Portuguese norm” and what he invokes as “Brazilian reality”, after all, two norms that the author configured. For this, one goes here, exactly, through the work *Língua portuguesa e realidade brasileira* [Portuguese Language and Brazilian Reality] (CUNHA, 1968), in which both Celso Cunha’s linguist and philologist portion and his grammarian portion are clearly seen dedicated to school language teaching (which the second part of this article will deal with). It is worth mentioning that, in Celso Cunha, school education is configured as that directed at linguistic performance that is attributable to an educated Brazilian, because – a premise is fixed there – it is this language standard that he takes care of when referring to “cultured norm”. There is a tension exactly pointed out there – observable in the treatment of the linguistic use of Portuguese in Brazil – between what he considers the “Portuguese norm” and what he invokes as “Brazilian reality”, after all, two such norms configured:

- (i) the first (“Portuguese norm”), linked to the “peacefully accepted” “idea that Europe – and only Europe – had, by right, the matrices of culture”;
- (ii) the second (the “Brazilian reality”), inaugurated with that “greater indiscretion” that was the “powerful penalty of José de Alencar”.

All this comes with attention to the fact that the criticism made of the romantic Alencar is particularly directed at his “linguistic expression”, not at his theme of idealization of the indigenous (in which the question of normativity would be absent). This is how, for Cunha (1968, p.15), already stated, “language problems naturally derive from the conflict of passions”¹⁶, a “conflict of prejudices” between “a fossilized conception of language” and a “longing for a national language, its own, disconnected from Portuguese”, which would be – and for some, it still is – “an imperative of our sovereignty” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 15-16). And what our grammarian discusses, by the way, is exactly the concept of proper language, a notion defended, for example, by Cassiano Ricardo, in relation to a language, which Cunha (1968, p.15) considers a “linguistic Jacobinism”. Quoting Amado Alonso, he says that this idea of a proper language is due to a mistake. In fact, “the assets *notable in the property* register belong to *one* person when they are not belonging to the *others*”; however, the language is not of this type of goods: on the contrary, it is of those goods that “are greater the more communicated, as men of the Renaissance said”: “a language is proper to a nation

¹⁵ Original: “um escritor purista é, pois, um escritor que se atém a formas de poesia inventadas por outros artistas de seu país: o que quer dizer que é um imitador, não um poeta.” (CUNHA, 1975, p. 28).

¹⁶ Original: “os problemas de língua derivaram naturalmente para o conflito de paixões.” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 15).

when it is *the* one that children learn from their parents [...] and that their poets and prose writers esthetically elaborate and cultivate for their high-culture productions”¹⁷ (CUNHA, 1968, p. 16, author’s emphasis).

What Amado Alonso theorizes so accurately is posed by Cunha (1968, without citing names) in that conflict – which we have all witnessed in our dealings with the issue of Brazilian Portuguese – between “historicist reactionism and nationalist Jacobinism”¹⁸ (CUNHA, 1968, p. 18), which he explicitly attributes to “certain philologists (some of them eminent)”¹⁹ in his “examination of the linguistic differences between European and American Portuguese”²⁰. The problem, says Celso Cunha, is that valid conclusions can only be drawn if what is being compared are “related terms” (CUNHA, 1968, p.18), and this is not what has happened; lucidly, he says: “as a rule, the common language of Portugal is opposed to the speaking of the humble classes of the countryside and cities of Brazil” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 18), and, so, of course, “profound differences in all domains” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 18) are reached, leaving unnoticed the “superior unity not only of the literary language, but also of the language spoken by the educated classes in both countries” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 18-19). All because they are “frequently forgotten”, “*common* features, undoubtedly the predominant ones” in use (CUNHA, 1968, p. 18, author’s emphasis).

And so, this notion – extremely relevant within Celso Cunha’s vision of the “Brazilian reality” of the use of Portuguese – of the “cultured” modality of the language, a striking center of attention for our grammarian, comes into play. Thus, it is continually the language considered “standard” in each geographical point in question – Brazil and Portugal – that he goes to, in order to defend that there are two facts to consider (CUNHA, 1968):

- (i) the “sensitive differences of the popular language”²¹ (CUNHA, 1968, p. 19);
- (ii) and the “relative cohesion of the standard language”²² (CUNHA, 1968, p. 19) of one and another geographical, political, and cultural place.

As Cunha (1968) shows, in the history of our colonization,

[...] on the one hand, a popular language is easily recovered, handed to its fate in the mouths of so many and so varied communities of illiterate people that spread across the immensity of Brazil, and, on the other,

¹⁷ Original: “os bens anotáveis no registro da propriedade são próprios de um quando não o são dos demais”; “uma língua é própria de uma nação quando é a que as crianças aprendem de seus pais [...] e a que seus poetas e prosadores elaboram e cultivam esteticamente para suas produções de alta cultura” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 16).

¹⁸ Original: “o reacionismo historicista e o jacobinismo nacionalista” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 18).

¹⁹ Original: “certos filólogos (alguns deles eminentes)” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 18).

²⁰ Original: “exame das diferenças linguísticas entre o português europeu e o americano” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 18).

²¹ Original: “sensíveis diferenças da língua popular” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 19).

²² Original: “relativa coesão da língua culta” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 19).

the language of doctors and priests, of well-spoken bachelors [...]”²³
(CUNHA, 1968, p. 20)²⁴.

Here is the great flag of Celso Cunha: the defense of a recognition of variation and change in language, but not with that nationalism that raises the defense of the legitimacy of a libertarian concession to the popular or non-regulated, but with a *focus* on called “standard language” (which, after all, for him, is the language of the literati).

The words of Machado de Assis (which appear, as indicated, in an article published in 1873 (which has no bibliographical reference) are remembered by Cunha (1968, p. 25) to affirm that, without a doubt, “languages increase and they change with time and the needs of usage and custom”²⁵ and that “wanting our language to stop in the 5th century is an error equal to saying that its transplantation to America did not bring new wealth to it.”²⁶ Very relevantly, what is there is not the biased preaching of a libertarian populism, as if this truth were just a flag for tolerance or even the good acceptance of uses that the prescriptive norm would indicate as deviations. On the contrary, it is enough to go to the end of the excerpt to verify that such linguistic changes are defended there in order to account for gains, even in style. Still quoting: “There are, therefore, certain ways of saying, new locutions, which forcefully enter the domain of style and gain the right of the city”²⁷ (CUNHA, 1968, p. 25). And there is the invocation of style, to prove the notion that Celso Cunha maintains in prioritizing the language that springs from that uncommitted creation of the writers.

Therefore, nothing of what Cunha (1968) defends as the legitimation of variation and change is installed in the defense of a legitimization of sociopolitical-cultural losses (a degradation): there is no effort on his part to defend pure “idiomatic correction” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 35) and simply for the correction in and of itself, that is, there is no concession to “purist terrorism” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 27), to “grammatical preceptivism” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 35), no safeguard of “purism” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 15), or “idiomatic purity” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 29).

The flag that Celso Cunha places here is that of the theorist of a non-canonical sociolinguistics, which, in a way, dispenses with the discussion of changes linked to the popularization of the language and abstracts from their legitimacy. In this banner, it is

²³ Original: “*de um lado, uma língua popular, entregue à sua sorte na boca de tantas e tão variadas comunidades de analfabetos que se espalhavam pela imensidão do Brasil, e, de outro, a língua dos doutores e dos padres, dos bacharéis bem falantes [...]*” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 20).

²⁴ In parentheses, Celso Cunha makes a reservation, invoking the contrast with the Spanish colonization of America. So he observes, making a concession: although “Portuguese colonization, with numerous positive results”, has not been “exemplary in the educational and cultural field” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 20), since “only in the 19th century did we have the first higher education establishment” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 19-20).

²⁵ Original: “*as línguas se aumentam e se alteram com o tempo e as necessidades dos usos e costume*” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 25).

²⁶ Original: “*querer que a nossa língua pare no século de quinhentos é um erro igual ao de afirmar que a sua transplantação para a América não lhe inseriu riquezas novas*” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 25).

²⁷ Original: “*Há, portanto, certos modos de dizer, locuções novas, que de força entram no domínio do estilo e ganham direito de cidade*” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 25).

proposed, here, to include the special attention that the grammarian gives to the spoken language, which, in this context – and it is remarkable – remains exactly within the vision of the “standard language”: *in fact*, what is put in question (given the central objective of offering a proposal for a grammatical work that *goes* to school) is to *preserve* this institution as the place in which it is incumbent – in assumed preaching – to “guard” the “unity” of the language; more specifically (and significantly): of the “superior unit” of the Portuguese language (CUNHA, 1968, p. 72).

Celso Cunha continually preaches the imperative of safeguarding this “superior unity” of the language, while at the same time proclaiming the need for the language to renew itself (CUNHA, 1968, p. 31). It is not about unification, it is not about standardization, it is about safeguarding the maintenance of a schooled language standard, which – abstract that it is, like any standard – goes so far from consideration of a nationalist libertarianism (in terms of linguistic expression) as well as the consideration of a purist terrorism (in terms of action on linguistic performance).

It is quoting Coseriu (1958, p. 31), with his various “systems” and his various “norms”, that Cunha (1968) goes to what is referred here as a standard, for the vision of (returning) “higher unit” of the language:

If a language can encompass several systems, that is, the ideal forms of its realization, its dynamism, its way of doing it, it can also admit several norms, which represent models, choices that have been established within the possibilities of realization of a linguistic system. (CUNHA, 1968, p. 73).²⁸

From that point on, naturally, to school education, noting that until now, Celso Cunha wanted to establish a firm position of a language policy that guides all his conduction of a “school grammar”.

The socio-educational bias of the issue: The contemporary (cultured) norm of written oral expression versus the current moment of language evolution. Or: pattern maintenance versus usage innovation.

And it is in this new framework that the ensemble of the specifically grammatical work of Celso Cunha²⁹ is seen, that is, the one prepared by him to go to school. We can begin with his indication, made in the inaugural *Gramática do português*

²⁸ Original: “*Se uma língua pode abarcar vários sistemas, ou seja, as formas ideais de sua realização, a sua dinamicidade, o seu modo de fazer-se, pode também admitir várias normas, que representam modelos, escolhas que se consagraram dentro das possibilidades de realizações de um sistema linguístico.*” (CUNHA, 1968, p. 73).

²⁹ These include: Contemporary Portuguese Grammar (1st edition Belo Horizonte, 1970), from which the New Contemporary Portuguese Grammar would emanate, written in collaboration with Lindley Cintra and published simultaneously in Lisbon and Rio, in 1984; Grammar of the Portuguese language, published by the Ministry of Education (1st edition Rio, 1972).

Contemporâneo [Grammar of Contemporary Portuguese] (1970), whose stated objective is, exactly, “to present *the characteristics of contemporary Portuguese in its standard form*” as well as the “*facts of colloquial language*” (CUNHA, 1970, p. 9, italics by this author, calling attention to the shelter of that same “tension”, again wide open). More: to exemplify the uses, the author says that he uses texts by “Brazilian and Portuguese writers of Romanticism here, naturally giving a privileged situation to authors of our days (1969)” (CUNHA, 1970, p. 9). It is the assumption of “a clear concept of *norm* and *correction*” (CUNHA, 1970, p. 10, author’s emphasis), indispensable, according to the author, for a descriptive grammar of the standard language. And it should be insisted that there is the linguistic concept of norm very close to that of Coseriu (already cited in Cunha, 1970, p. 13), which, within a functionalist way, corresponds to what has been said and traditionally says in the considered community” (CUNHA, 1970, p. 13).

But, based on this basic foothold (theoretical conduction) in the functionality of the concepts that support the proposals, it is necessary to conduct the reflections in order to verify the practical direction of Celso Cunha’s grammatical work, and, then, what is understood is that the verification can go, more profitably, by the last grammatical work produced, which is the widespread *Nova Gramática do Português Contemporâneo* [New Grammar of Contemporary Portuguese] (CUNHA; LINDLEY CINTRA, 1985). There it is stated that the intention was to create a grammar that would serve as a “*guide* for an oral and written expression that, for the [then] present moment of the evolution of the language, could be considered correct” (CUNHA; LINDLEY CINTRA, 1985, p. xiii, author’s emphasis). In the first chapter, what is meant by “correct” is explained, indicating: “the norm may vary within the same linguistic community”, and therefore, “this concept of norm, which implies greater grammatical liberalism, is which, in our opinion, *should be adopted* for the Portuguese-speaking community (...)” (CUNHA; LINDLEY CINTRA, 1985, p. 8, author’s emphasis). And it literally adds (pay attention): “In fact, above all the correction criteria - applicable in some cases, inapplicable in others – hovers that of social acceptability, according to Varrão, the only one valid in any circumstance.” (CUNHA; LINDLEY CINTRA, 1985, p. 8).

There is not, however, in the work, a movement that socially leads to instructions for the confinement of expression, which, incidentally, would attack Celso Cunha’s central conception of the need to offer texts in which the mode of creative linguistic expression is registered, which is precisely what makes writers the reference of use in his grammatical works. Remember, by the way, that what he proposes in his *Língua portuguesa e realidade brasileira* [Portuguese language and Brazilian reality], which is dealt with in Part 1., are “practical measures, based on the linguistic reality of the two countries”³⁰ (CUNHA; LINDLEY CINTRA, 1985, p. 68), which – it can be said, in conclusion – persuade more, in the direction of the “educated” norm in force in each country, than artificially construct conventional patterns of use.

³⁰ Original: “*medidas práticas, baseadas na realidade linguística dos dois países*” (CUNHA; LINDLEY CINTRA, 1985, p. 68).

In essence: in the *Gramática do português Contemporâneo* [Grammar of Contemporary Portuguese] (1970), Celso Cunha already says that his objective is to present the characteristics of contemporary Portuguese in its standard form, and the facts of colloquial language. To exemplify the uses, the author uses texts by “Brazilian and Portuguese writers of Romanticism here, naturally giving a privileged situation to authors of our days”. It is, therefore, a proposal for a grammar based on “a clear concept of norm and correction” (CUNHA, 1970, p. 9), indispensable, according to the author, for a descriptive grammar of the standard language. It should be understood, however, that the adopted linguistic concept of norm is that of Eugenio Coseriu, which corresponds “to what has already been said and traditionally said in the considered community”³¹ (COSERIU, 1973 apud CUNHA; LINDLEY CINTRA, 1985, p. 8).

Conclusion

These reflections lead precisely to the work *A questão da norma culta brasileira* [The issue of the Brazilian cultured norm] (CUNHA, 1985, p. 47), in which this title of explicit reference to the “cultured norm” coexists with a very strong emphasis on the spoken language, an absolutely unique proposal in the panorama of time, but not surprising in this grammarian, which, as indicated here, in his *Gramática do português contemporâneo* [Grammar of Contemporary Portuguese] (1970) had already established the objective of presenting the characteristics of contemporary Portuguese in its cultured form together with the facts of colloquial language, always with a visit to the “writers”, especially the writers of those “days” (CUNHA, 1970, p. 9).

Cunha (1985) explicitly defends the desirability of providing school students with conditions (always edifying) so that they “progressively master the prestigious dialect without being violated with the disorganization or destruction of their vernacular”, a statement that is accompanied by the exception that the student “will continue to use this vernacular in their most intimate situations” (CUNHA, 1985, p. 47).

It should be stated that, for the evaluation of this grammarian, who, in the mid-twentieth century, has already raised the (tense) flag of the “language one in diversity”, it is worth what Aires Mata Machado Filho says in his *Preface to Uma política do idioma* [A policy of language]. What he debugged from Celso Cunha’s proposal for a school grammar is, however, in his statement: “the finesse and subtleties of the language should not neglect the teachers, as rightly warns [Celso Cunha]” (CUNHA, 1975, p. 11).

What we want to emphasize in this review of Celso Cunha’s role in the history of school management of the grammar view is the preaching of care for the Portuguese language – the author’s material for reflection and analysis – through the preaching of an effort to maintain unity in diversity, and from two angles of view: both the defense

³¹ Original: “ao que já se disse e tradicionalmente se diz na comunidade considerada” (CUNHA; LINDLEY CINTRA, 1985, p. 8).

of unity and the defense of plurality are based on the most legitimate conception of linguistic science of what is a natural language (and, consequently, a national language): one, however recognized as plural. The angle is, therefore, the defense of the plurality of modes of expression (the plurality of norms) in a nation. From this it is presented, legitimately and relevantly, the variation by the place of speech and the variation by the characterization of the speaker; the first (diatopic variation), represented in the circulation of the language in more than one nation (with the gaze directed more centrally to Brazil and Portugal, which is the historical metropolis); and the second (diastratic variation), particularly hooked by the parameter of the seal – or not – of culture, that is, the treatment of speakers with “culture” (which, in the final analysis, is represented in the schooling named in the literature).

And, it should be added that all this is valid in the written modality (with the attribute of “writers”) but also in the oral modality, which Celso Cunha did not neglect, and, in this particular, it is worth mentioning its role in the history of the NURC Project like his work *The question of the Brazilian cultured norm* (1985)³². As for diachronic variation, the position taken by our grammarian is, on the contrary, segregating, with an unquestionable appreciation of the modern, and so it is that school action is characterized as the arrival point of language teaching goals (and, consequently, of grammar). Attention is paid to dialectal variety and the spoken language (not without reason, specifically the cultured norm; and not without taking care of the dangers of “fractionating the linguistic unit of the nation itself” [CUNHA, 1985, p. 75 - see note]), at which point, precisely, the role of school education as a preventive action, therefore, it is about “wholeness” in “plurality”, to use Ivan Russef’s terms (2003, p.3).

As has been developed in this text, the CC proposal for dealing with the national/mother tongue in school does not include subservient colonialist conformism, but neither is it unreasonable nationalism, nor even the flight through simple palliative, indefinite and uncommitted expedients. “Historicist or nationalist prejudices” are both rejected by Celso Cunha, and, thereafter, labels such as “Brazilian language” (for being Jacobin), “Brazilian dialect” (for being subservient) and “national language” are also rejected (because it is neutral and nondescript, for the language spoken in a country) (CUNHA, 1985, p.15).

Remembering the condition of “owners of the language” that Celso Cunha attributed to all paired speakers in the use of the language (CUNHA, 1975, p. 41), it is very lucid that teachers should be suggested to see themselves as natural caretakers of this condominium, and even as landlords (each a landlord), in the continuous management of what is common to all, by belonging to the use and by the living community in constant exchange.

³² Both in *The question of the Brazilian cultured norm* (1985) and in *Portuguese language and Brazilian reality* (1968) and also in *Que é um brasileiro?* (CUNHA, 1987), we see Celso Cunha dedicated to the NURC project (describing the standard Brazilian variant of Portuguese). On the other hand, in *Uma política do idioma* (1964), there are guidelines for research and teaching of the spoken language, considering that it is a largely “illiterate” country.

After all, this is the historical role that has to be attributed to Celso Cunha, with his firm lesson on defending the balance between tradition and modernity, after all, the universe within which languages tell their story.

NEVES, M. O gramático Celso Cunha: a língua portuguesa una na diversidade. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v.65, 2021.

- *RESUMO: Esta incursão na obra de Celso Cunha destaca tensões que o autor logra estabelecer e conciliar em suas obras linguístico-filológicas, movendo-se em uma noção que, sem conformismo e sem nacionalismo, decorre de sua proposta de que o destaque da “norma culta” (das “finuras e sutilezas” da língua) convive tranquilamente com o destaque da preeminência da língua falada. Fica equacionada essa convivência – singular, para o panorama da época – na proposta de uma ação escolar que ofereça ao aluno experiências “edificadoras” para a apreensão do “dialeto prestigioso”, sem lhe pedir o abandono do vernáculo (e salvaguardada a atenção à adequação de registro). Nessa direção, o que este artigo ressalta, na sua espinha dorsal, é a proposta de que o trabalho escolar com a gramática se conduza exatamente pela noção de que uma língua é necessariamente “una na diversidade”, dado que, cientificamente, qualquer língua natural tem como estatuto, rigidamente, ser “una”, entretanto na necessária pluralidade dos usos (modos de expressão). Decorre, dentro desse edifício de tensões conciliadas, que, para Celso Cunha, todos somos “condôminos do idioma”; e dadas as incumbências sugeridas por ele para o trabalho com a língua, entende-se que temos de ser naturais zeladores desse patrimônio comum.*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Língua natural; norma culta; unidade linguística; diversidade linguística; gramática escolar.*

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