



FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGE STUDIES AND RACISM

December 6th, 7th and 8th, 2022

Open Letter

Translated by Joel Windle

The First International Conference on Language Studies and Racism, held between December 6th and 8th, 2022 in Ilhéus, Bahía (Brazil), politically discussed the most diverse themes that have been circulating in the broad area of language studies in Brazil and that directly and indirectly bear upon the gravest expressions of racism in the country. This letter, compiled not as a final result of that meeting, but as dissemination of a series of agendas drawn from it, is proposed as a draft that brings together efforts undertaken over its course.

Brazil is going through one of the largest institutional crises in its history. Bolsonarism became a force that emerged from the polls, with a supposedly democratic face, but it was emboldened by the coup against former President Dilma and the unjust and illegal arrest of former President Lula. All of these factors encouraged and were encouraged by a historical racism that, in Brazil, has linguistic foundations.

Brazil is a country of continental dimensions, whose historical and racial nuances have contributed to keeping the Black population as a theme or intellectual discourse

rarely connected with the body-politics of Black lives that still exist in Brazilian society and that, for centuries, were organized in quilombamentos, guerrillas, secret societies, sisterhoods, strikes, pro-independence movements and religions of African origin. All of these movements were crucial to consolidate a multifaceted linguistic resistance, through forms of linguistic transmission in which body-politics consists of, beyond the norms and assumptions of language as mere linguistic norms, African ancestry in orality, in the body and in the linguistic politics exercised by Black people when resisting.

In Brazil, however, there are several barriers for Black people in language policies. Currently, the quota policies implemented in universities have not been accompanied by corresponding language policies. When we talk about racist language policies, some points are fundamental:

- Programs such as *Idioma sem Fronteiras (Languages without Borders)* or *Future-se* have symbolized visions of language that do not include Black people as their target subjects;

- Academic literacy programs still focus on basic skills, ignoring students' own forms of community literacy;

- The languages chosen for linguistic transmission and formal schooling stem from the colonizer's monolingualism and not from the ancestral multilingualism of peoples who were enslaved and decimated. In our schools we still study Portuguese, English or Spanish, European mother tongues, as monolingual foreign languages and not as languages that have been nativized, Africanized or appropriated by traditional indigenous peoples. African languages, which markedly formed Portuguese, the great technology of the Black African people and their descendants when speaking Portuguese, are cruelly made invisible, even in universities. Languages like English remain taught to a White or Whitenized target audience, in which Black people remain read as languageless or incapable speaking-listening subjects. The Spanish language, always guided by a Eurocentric vision, remains silenced in Brazil by a language policy contrary to regional strengthening in Latin America. The Portuguese language, in turn, remains taught in

accordance with the idea that European Portuguese prevailed, thus erasing a teaching more connected to the students' own Portuguese. What we call pretuguês (Black Portuguese) is, in addition to the idea of a set of norms that, in general, give rise to what is called language, a set of speech practices based on African languages such as the Bantu languages, the West African languages and the technologies of speech used by enslaved people who were forcibly brought to Brazil for centuries.

· Graduate programs in the area of language studies are still obstacles to the access of Black men and women. In addition to the absence of access policies through reservation of places via affirmative action programs, the requirement of proof of proficiency in foreign languages serves directly as an impediment to the entry of Black people in an unequally racist country. While the absence of language policies for the inclusion of Black and Brown students persists, proficiency tests reflect a past of slavery, when legal and/or political instruments were first used to prevent access by Black people to institutional spaces.

· CNPq productivity researchers in the area of linguistic studies, who are rewarded for their academic work, are still, for the most part, White people.

· Commercial publishers in the area of Literature/Linguistics have not encouraged affirmative action programs for the publication of works by Black (Black and Brown) Brazilian authors. This does not, of course, include occasional or sporadic efforts.

Research associations, especially the Associação Brasileira de Linguística (Brazilian Association of Linguistics), urgently need to position themselves more clearly on their views regarding race, beyond social media. More than that. It is up to these associations to introduce forms of affirmative action for the inclusion of Black people in the spaces of power and decision within associations, in line with public policies of the last 16 years. Political strategies such as the Rede de Pesquisadores Negres dos Estudos da Linguagem (Network of Black Researchers of Language Studies) emerged as a response to a historical silencing suffered by the Black population at the hands of research

associations, especially in the composition of their academic events, journal special issues, and summer courses, amongst other activities.

· There is a profound lack of recognition of multilingualism among Brazilians. In a naturally multilingual State, due to the strong but muted presence of thousands of indigenous languages that little by little became victims of linguicide, we also had African languages, including the Bantu languages. However, this diversity has not produced, in the Brazilian State and in school education, the means of recognizing the learning of multilingual linguistic practices.

· Language education still has strong elements of racialization when the private prevails in a totalitarian discourse over the public, as a result of decades of military dictatorship and underfunding of those educational sectors in which the expansion of private education took the place of public investments, meaning that most of those who can afford foreign language courses are White.

· The area of Linguistics and Literature at CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) needs to promote policies that directly benefit Black and Indigenous populations, avoiding meritocratic views that, historically, serve to strengthen racist outlooks that exclude Black people from entering postgraduate studies, and from research, science and technology programs.

This Open Letter comes from researchers, a majority of whom are Black men and women, with heterogeneous views and from different theoretical traditions, it does not propose a manifesto that might constitute a singular orientation. We wish to be and are from different orientations, which proves that Black people do not form a unitary and homogeneous block and come from multiple positions marked by the absences that racism creates in Brazilian society.

All the arguments that make up this letter, in turn, do not lay out an agenda, but present demands listed daily by Black people who, most of the time, are not heard.

Different paths through language studies, from normativism and descriptivism, the ethnographic use of Black people without identifying them as subjects, the hyper-

valorisation of private language courses as the only place to learn a second language, the establishment of linguistic projects that seek to normalise or exoticise popular speech, remain direct dangers in language studies. We must, therefore, see language as a racist creation, but also a way in which we recreate struggles against racism every day.

We are not interested in talk alone. In a society where the predominant agenda follows a market logic, we are interested in talking and prevailing, talking and perpetuating. Our literacy agencies, which arise from our political bodies, take as given that it is insufficient to grant our bodies representative spaces that when used, are abandoned by the white supremacy of linguistic science. On the other hand, representation needs to become a political agenda led by actors who wish to claim to be anti-racist at this crucial moment in our history.

More than ever, it's time to take a stand. More than taking a stand, it is necessary to act. Those who do not position themselves, or hide behind their objects of study, will pay dearly in history for their failure to take a position. Those and those who wish to continue provoking changes against the tentacles of racism must, in order to break the ties of racist continuity, position their speeches and their bodies against a colonial linguistics that perpetuates racism.

This letter, far from being an end to itself, is a call to continuity. In different parts of the world, when the racial diversity agenda revolves around a discursive agenda in which body and discourse are separated, anti-racism has served a range of liberal or market reforms. Our political struggles centre on full recognition of the Black locus of enunciation and the assumption that Black people, more than subjects of language, are also capable of being language analysts. With this letter we want believe that linguistic studies seek a commitment to the faces, colour, gender, sexuality, culture, languages and body politics of our people throughout Brazil. These are many and are not, nor could they ever be, standardized or framed in the images produced by scientific research, but they are the places that should always guide us. With this, we do not seek a solution, but pathways

and possibilities to constantly disturb disciplinary academic knowledge and to search for political sources of Afro-Indigenous popular resistance.

Signed (by order of arrival)

Gabriel Nascimento (UFSB)

Christopher Stroud (University of the Western Cape- África do Sul)

Lynn Mário Trindade de Menezes e Souza (USP)

Tânia Ferreira Rezende (UFG)

Joel Windle (University of South Australia)

Ana Lúcia Silva Souza (UFBA)

Maria D'Ajuda Alomba Ribeiro (UESC)

Jefferson Campos (Unir)

Mariana Santos (IFBA)

Luciana Beatriz Ávila (UFSB)

Terezinha Oliveira Santos (UFOB)

Maurício Neto (UFBA)

Mônica da Silva Francisco (SENAI-RJ)

Kelly Barros (UFRB)

Henrique Freitas (UFBA)

Suellen Thomaz de Aquino Martins (UFSB)

Rogério Modesto (UESC)

Verônica de Souza Santos (IFBA).

Fábio Barbosa de Lima (FATEC-SP)

Fábio Sampaio de Almeida (CEFET-RJ)

Tatianne Gomes de Sousa (Centro Universitário do Distrito Federal – UDF)

Pedro Henrique Ribeiro Santos Messias (UESC)

Marco Antonio Lima do Bonfim (UFPE)
Gabriela Silva Santos (UESC)
Maria Elia dos Santos Teixeira de Carvalho (IFBAIANO)
Davidson Martins Viana Alves (SEEDUC-RJ)
Kelly Barros Santos (UFRB)
Rafahel Parintins (UFRN)
Eduardo Yamina Agostinho (UNILAB)
Pedro Henrique Dantas da Cruz Kelly (UFF)
Sávio Oliveira da Silva Santos (UESC)
Rodrigo Borba (UFRJ)
Maria Clara Oliveira Bertúlio (UFMR)
Naiara Santos Felipe Costa (UFBA)
Paula Graciano Pereira (IFG)
Neide Elias (UNIFESP)