

Presentation

Rethinking Rights and Inequalities in Language Studies

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This special issue examines new directions in thinking about how language and literacies are connected to frameworks and movements demanding human, social and linguistic rights. Many of these new directions are compellingly signposted by the organic intellectuals of contemporary social movements. For example, scholars engaged in anti-racist activism have developed notions of linguistic racism (NASCIMENTO, 2020) and raciolinguistics (ROSA; FLORES, 2017). Such notions, while naming dehumanising linguistic regimes and rationalities, also contribute to the task of identifying those conditions that are needed for more socially just alternatives. As Freire observes,

The utopian is not the unrealizable; utopia is not idealism, it is the dialecticization of the acts of denouncing and announcing, the act of denouncing the dehumanizing structure and announcing the humanizing structure (FREIRE, 1979, p. 16)

It is worth noting that we are in a period in which rights that appeared to have been conquered have come under threat, most notably through the rise of right-wing populism that has targeted educational and cultural institutions (KNIJNIK, 2021; RAMPTON; SILVA; CHARALAMBOUS, 2022; VERMA; APPLE, 2020). Thus, the work of denouncing/announcing is constant and recursive, meaning that drawing discursive links between histories and geographies of oppression/resistance performs a valuable pedagogical function. Situating this work in the unifying time-space dynamic of colonialism helps to sharpen our understandings of the *longue durée* of resistance and re-existence (SOUZA, 2016). This is the task taken up in proposals such as *pretoguês*, or Black Portuguese, which challenges a racist linguistic purism framed by Portuguese colonialism and Brazilian nationalism, replacing it with an Afro-centric linguistic register and metapragmatic regime (GONZALES, 1984; GONZALEZ, 2020).

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How to cite:

WINDLE, Joel; JORGE, Miriam. Rethinking Rights and Inequalities in Language Studies. *Gragoatá*, Niterói, v. 28, n. 60, e-57719, jan.-abr. 2023. Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.22409/gragoata.v28i60.57719.en>

While myriad forms of language regime perform the work of reinforcing inequality, three have garnered particular attention, as noted by Rampton and colleagues (RAMPTON; SILVA; CHARALAMBOUS, 2022). In the first instance, linguistic purism and separatism, tied to colonial and nationalist projects, continues to play an important role. Hence, moves to linguistic pluralism, mixing, and hybridism provide sources of disruption and revaluing of marginalised practices (HEUGH, 2021; VALLEJO; DOOLY, 2019; WINDLE; FERREIRA, 2019). Linguistic pluralism has been usefully tied to epistemological and ontological pluralism in some of this work, as well as explicitly to rights that are embedded in language, for example through the notion of linguistic citizenship (STROUD; HEUGH, 2016).

More recently, market logics have reinforced existing linguistic hierarchies and generated new ones, as language in commodity form, or as handmaiden to commercial exploitation, exerts pressure in local and global exchanges (HELLER, 2010; SOTO; PÉREZ-MILANS, 2018). Language even enters into mixed commodification processes where erotic economies are inflected with other economies of labour through digitised mobile media, as analysed in the present special issue. English language education is a prime example of the ideological workings of commodification, as accent, identity and social mobility are sold through commercial courses (ALMEIDA, 2021; COGO; SIQUEIRA, 2017), inviting teachers and students to distance themselves uses of language that might challenge inequalities that affect their own lives.

A third way in which power is expressed in language regimes is through discourses of (in)security and securitisation (RAMPTON; SILVA; CHARALAMBOUS, 2022). Rampton and his colleagues view this mode of power, working through fear, as gaining ascendancy through discourses circulating around terrorism, migration, border security, and war. These have indeed shaped public discourses across the first decades of the twenty-first century with renewed vigour, and weigh on interactions between unequal social actors such as favela dwellers and military policy in the context of Brazilian urban space (RAMPTON; SILVA; CHARALAMBOUS, 2022).

While the invocation of rights has important strategic affordances, it is important to recognise the rights as also discursively produced and mobilised to by sometimes divergent interests at different historical junctures. As work later in this special issue notes, human rights as a supra-national institutionalised discourse emerges in the twentieth century as part of a distinctive ideological project. Further, talk of rights can be used in the service of censorship – notably of teachers who are increasingly restricted in what they can say and do as part of a technicist definition of their role. Freedom of speech can be put at the service of intolerance and hatred, while freedom of religious expression can be used as a *livre passer* for bigotry. The effects of such invocations

are context-specific, as the case of religion demonstrates. Freedom of religion is mobilised by those supporting African-inspired expression in Brazil, in defence of pluralism of spiritual expression and defence of identities suppressed by state and by other, dominant religions. However, religious freedom has also been used by conservative Christian organisations to argue for a right to exclude other faiths from discussion in public institutions, and to avoid sanctions for intolerance (homophobia, transphobia, religious racism, misogyny, amongst others).

The past years have revealed the intensification of discourses and praxis where the entanglements of language, rights and inequalities became very visible within the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systematic racism across the globe. As editors of this special issue, we believe that the articles assembled contribute to important conversations in language studies, language education and the education of language professionals that address these contexts of intensified inequality and contestation. Collectively, they theorise rights and inequalities in relation to constructions of coloniality, race, class, gender, and sexuality. The papers further engage with issues of transnationalism, identity and power in ways that draw upon, and contribute to, critical traditions in the fields of the social sciences and humanities.

In the first paper, Joana Plaza Pinto and Ana Luiza Krüger Dias discuss interactions involving multilingual migrants, offering a critique of the term “language barrier”. They argue that much current analysis and media coverage of the difficulties encountered by migrants relies on a modernist linguistic ideology that invests achievement of interactional objectives in mastery a homogeneous linguistic unit – the national language. By contrast, the authors argue, conflicts, cross-purposes and negotiated interactional instances to which the term “language barrier” are applied are shaped more by power inequality between interlocutors than by mere absence of shared language.

Continuing with the theme of migration, the second paper, by Carina Fior Postingher Balzan, Monique Dias Souza, Júlia Sonaglio Pedrassani, Leandro Rocha Vieira and Aléxia Islabão dos Santos draws attention to the monolingual habitus of Brazilian schools, in which a homogeneous vision prevails in subject area Portuguese. This marginalises multilingual students, including migrants and refugees. The authors advocate a plurilingual outlook to generate greater inclusion, based on a range of intercultural negotiations and dispositions.

Raquel Souza de Oliveira and Branca Fabricio move the focus to the learning of a foreign language – English – and the ways in which this process can alienate and disenfranchise students who disqualify themselves, perhaps protectively, as knowing “nothing”. The authors base their research on a life-history approach, detailing the language ideologies embedded in the prior experiences of a working-class woman who is taking evening classes in order to gain access to university.

In his contribution, Gabriel Nascimento relates the theoretical framework of Franz Fanon to contemporary debates over race and language. He shows how Fanon's analysis of the inferiorization and alienation of Black speakers of French in colonial settings (FANON, 1970) contributes to understanding the division between a zone of being and a zone of non-being established in contemporary Brazil.

Patricia Reis and Layenne Oliveira offer a different approach to the issue of English in the global south, drawing attention to the intersections of class and race as part of the epistemic south, more specifically, in the context of Parintins, in Northern Brazil. The authors conclude their discussion by advocating for an anti-racist and decolonial approach to teaching English is possible when we question modernity from a more clearly defined Southern locus of enunciation.

Looking to the future, Marcelo José Derzi Moraes and Marinazia Cordeiro Pinto investigate debates over inequalities related to the introduction of affirmative action policies in Brazilian higher education. Based on Derrida's Force and Law, Moraes and Pinto reflect on the hierarchization of access to higher education and explore contradictions, paradoxes, or impasses of affirmative action laws, which need continuous social pressure in order to contribute effectively to achieving social justice.

Dalve Batista-Santos and Júlia Cerutti Dal Bosco take us to the context of prison, a site where inmates' rights as human beings are constantly denied. Analyzing a Reading group in a female prison, the authors show us how the participants give life to the stories they read and relate them to their own life experiences. Participants in their study unveiled their dialogic and subjective voices, confirming that reading while imprisoned is an act of emancipation, social protest, and liberation.

Gleiton Bonfante and Daniel de Augustinis Silva turn our attention to interactions online. They discuss how a cruising app naturalizes neoliberal individualism and combines sex and capital, where the other is seen as a disposable competitor. Their article, *Reassessing the erotics of signs: a study on stylization on a cruising app through an anti-neoliberal critique*, uses the erotics of signs as a methodology that combines ethnographic description and the tracking of indexicality.

Ian Martin offers a provocative thought exercise in the final paper - "the Indigenous Critique and the Divided Brain Hypothesis: Ideas to Postpone the End of the World." His essay delves into the onto-epistemological distinctions between several strands of Indigenous thought in the Americas and the complex of modernity that underpinned colonialism. Martin's paper reflects the search for a possible response to overarching questions regarding indigenous and western cosmovisions relying on two ideas to "postpone the end of the world".

In addition to the articles above, the present issue includes a review written by Irham Irham of the book *Transnational Education Crossing 'Asia' and 'the West'* by Le Ha Phan. He shows how this book inverts discourses

of excellence used to propel the internationalisation of higher education through examination of the ambiguities of mediocrity in the context of globalisation centred on the English language in Asia.

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