Linguistic colonialism, *epistemicide* and ethno-racial relations: the marginalization of Indigenous and African languages

ARTICLE

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Abstract
This paper discusses how practices inherited from linguistic colonialism and epistemicide persist in the requirements of graduate programs in Brazil. It aims to understand how the lack of recognition of marginalized languages and knowledge continues to sustain colonial structures that silence voices and forms of thought that diverge from the dominant logic. The study is qualitative in nature and draws on decolonial frameworks. Institutional documents related to language proficiency were analyzed, and testimonies from former students of the Federal University of Paraná and the University of São Paulo were also collected. The document analysis reveals the centrality of colonizer languages as proficiency criteria, while the languages of marginalized peoples remain ignored. As a result, this exclusion affects Indigenous, quilombola, Black, and African migrant students, whose languages and knowledge systems continue to be placed on the margins of academic legitimacy. The findings indicate that colonial languages continue to be treated as central to academic validation, whereas Indigenous and African languages remain unrecognized. This demonstrates how seemingly neutral criteria reinforce colonial structures and contribute to the erasure of ancestral knowledge. It is concluded that recognizing Indigenous and African languages in proficiency assessments is a crucial step toward building a more plural, just university committed to epistemic diversity.
Keywords: Forgotten Languages. Silenced Voices. Other Knowledges. Exclusion.

Colonialismo linguístico, epistemicídio e relações étnico-raciais: a marginalização das línguas indígenas e africanas

Resumo
Este trabalho discute como práticas herdadas do colonialismo linguístico e do epistemicídio permanecem nas exigências dos programas de pós-graduação no Brasil. Tem como objetivo compreender como essa ausência de reconhecimento das línguas e saberes marginalizados ainda sustenta estruturas coloniais que silenciam vozes e formas dissidentes da lógica dominante. O estudo tem caráter qualitativo e se apoia em referenciais decoloniais. Foram analisados documentos institucionais ligados à proficiência linguística e também colhidos relatos de ex-estudantes da Universidade Federal do Paraná e da Universidade de São Paulo.

A análise documental revela a centralidade de línguas de colonizadores como critérios de proficiência, enquanto línguas de povos marginalizados seguem ignoradas. Essa exclusão afeta estudantes indígenas, quilombolas, negros e migrantes africanos, cujas línguas e formas de conhecimento continuam à margem da legitimidade acadêmica. Os resultados indicam que as línguas coloniais seguem sendo tratadas como centrais para a legitimação acadêmica. Já as línguas indígenas e africanas, por outro lado, continuam fora do reconhecimento acadêmica, o que mostra como critérios aparentemente neutros reforçam estruturas coloniais, apagando saberes ancestrais. Conclui-se que reconhecer línguas indígenas e africanas nas avaliações de suficiência é um passo fundamental para a construção de uma universidade plural, justa e comprometida com a diversidade epistêmica.
Palavras-chave: Línguas Esquecidas. Vozes Silenciadas. Saberes Outros. Exclusão.

1 Introduction

There is a persistent discomfort, difficult to name yet impossible to ignore, when one looks closely at how graduate programs operate in Brazil. This article stems precisely from that unease: the way certain languages, especially Indigenous and African ones, simply do not appear or are not even considered, as if they had never existed within the walls of academia. This is, of course, an institutional silence that is anything but neutral. On the contrary, this daily erasure, almost always naturalized, carries profound implications. It exposes a form of exclusion rooted in a long history of marginalizing modes of thought that fall outside the frameworks the university insists on calling universal. Perhaps that is why this linguistic and epistemic exclusion persists in ways as subtle as they are effective.

Our effort seeks to understand how this lack of recognition of marginalized languages and knowledges continues to uphold colonial structures that silence voices and ways of thinking that dissent from the dominant logic. We begin from the hypothesis that the linguistic criteria adopted in these spaces, strongly grounded in a Eurocentric matrix, not only render ancestral languages invisible but also reinforce, in subtle and persistent ways, the devaluation of the epistemologies that sustain them. In light of the contradictions

presented here, this text is organized into three sections, each conceived as both a form of denunciation and a proposal for rupture.

In the first section, titled **The languages that count and those that remain invisible: how graduate education decides what counts as knowledge**, we seek to reflect on how the imposition of colonial languages in graduate education operates as a mechanism that defines what is recognized as legitimate knowledge, deepening the marginalization of ancestral knowledges and non-Western epistemologies. In the second section, **Silenced voices: experiences of Indigenous,** *quilombola* **and African students in graduate education**, we give visibility to the narratives and lived experiences of these individuals, who face daily linguistic and epistemic erasure within academic spaces. Finally, in the third, **Toward a plural university: pathways to recognize other languages and other knowledges**, we point to possibilities for transformation, reflecting on practices, policies and proposals that can contribute to building a genuinely plural, anticolonial university committed to valuing languages and knowledges that have been historically subordinated.

Before moving on to the three sections that make up this text, it is important to reaffirm that education is a process of humanization that develops collectively at the heart of society. This process involves values and forms of coexistence that originate in a shared social and historical trajectory, composing culture, that is, the ways of existing, feeling, believing and making use of the goods and achievements produced collectively. As Silvas and Giovedi (2022) highlight, in democratic contexts it is possible to identify spaces dedicated to dialogue, to the plurality of ideas and to diverse forms of social organization, including those that challenge the prevailing order and propose transformations.

However, this democratic potential of education stands in stark contrast to the exclusionary reality that still marks spaces of scientific production and graduate studies in Brazil, which are largely shaped by colonial logics. This is reflected not only in the content that is taught or the theories that are read, but also in the languages the academy chooses to recognize as legitimate. One need only look at admissions calls and the language proficiency criteria required: English, French, Spanish, German. Indigenous and African

languages, despite their immense historical and cultural richness, remain absent, as if they were incapable of expressing science or academic thought.

This choice is not neutral. On the contrary, it bears the marks of a linguistic colonialism that insists on surviving within the university, erasing knowledges and forms of existence that do not fit the European model of knowledge production. What is at stake here is not merely a bureaucratic or technical requirement, but a policy of silencing. When the university says that only certain languages "count," it is also saying that only certain ways of thinking and existing have value.

It is not hard to see how the so-called "proficiency exam" in foreign languages has been naturalized within graduate programs. It sits there as if it were a neutral, technical, indisputable condition. Yet the question is simple: neutral for whom, and in whose interest? This requirement has roots in the 1970s, when *CAPES* began reorganizing graduate education in the country under the banner of internationalization. In practice, a linguistic hierarchy was consolidated: on one side, English, French and Spanish as academic passports; on the other, Indigenous and African languages consigned to invisibility. It is a racial, social and epistemological filter. A colonial legacy disguised as a technical norm.

Even though the 1988 Constitution affirms equal rights (Article 5) and the protection of Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian cultures (Article 215), the academic system still excludes their languages from scientific production. In other words, we are left with an academic system that excludes the languages of these peoples from scientific production. Culture is preserved, yet its capacity to produce knowledge is denied.

There is no escaping the fact that this requirement operates as a racial, social, and linguistic filter. Who had early access to English or French courses? Who can afford them? And who never even had the chance to learn before having to survive? This is not only an academic barrier, it is a barrier of class, race, and territory. This is the point at which we need to make a break, to undertake deep questioning. The obligation to demonstrate proficiency in colonial languages is not a neutral measure. On the contrary, it reveals a sophisticated mechanism of symbolic violence that continues to operate in the

maintenance of epistemicide, a term that, in Santos (2010)'s words[1], denotes the systematic erasure of the knowledges, practices, and languages of peoples subordinated by colonial logic.

And this is not a new indictment; it was already evident, above all, in the mid-twentieth century when Fanon (2008, p. 50) stated that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture." By stressing this, Fanon (2008) warned us that language is not merely a tool of communication, it is also a weapon. Yet by requiring someone to demonstrate command of the other's language, the university continually reaffirms the existence of a hierarchy in which knowledge must pass through the colonizer's sieve to be validated.

In this sense, when we consider the reality of Black, Indigenous, and African migrant students who enter graduate school in Brazil, it becomes evident how much this model reinforces structural barriers. After all, what democracy are we talking about when access to scientific production remains conditioned on mastery of languages that have historically served as instruments of domination and cultural erasure?

For this reason, this article is, above all, a cry. A cry against this logic which, cloaked in academic neutrality, continues to marginalize our languages, our knowledges, and, consequently, our very existence within the university. Thus, it proposes a critical look at this scenario through a qualitative approach, with analysis of institutional documents and the listening to Indigenous, *quilombola*, and African students.

2 Methodology

This study followed a qualitative approach guided by critical and decolonial perspectives, given that the topic demands sensitivity to capture the experiences, perceptions, and meanings attributed by the participants. The main goal was not to quantify data, but to understand the meanings that Indigenous, *quilombola*, and African students

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[1] Acknowledging this author's intellectual contribution does not imply endorsement of harassment, which we reject in all its forms.

assign to their experiences in graduate programs, especially with regard to the exclusion of their heritage languages.

The research was conducted along two complementary lines. The first consisted of a systematic documentary analysis of calls for applications, regulations, and guidelines from different graduate programs at Brazilian public universities, with emphasis on the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR) and the University of São Paulo (USP). We examined documents published between 2019 and 2024, available on institutional websites, to identify the required language proficiency criteria and the languages recognized as prerequisites.

The second line involved generating data through the direct listening to three students belonging to Indigenous, *quilombola*, and African groups, selected through recommendations from academic networks and institutional contacts, ensuring diversity in terms of program and year of entry. The interviews were semi-structured, conducted remotely via Google Meet, averaging 40 minutes each, recorded, and later transcribed for analysis. In addition, complementary informal conversations helped deepen the understanding of coping strategies and perceptions regarding the place of their languages and knowledges within the academic environment.

Data analysis followed the principles of thematic content analysis (Bardin, 1995), enabling the identification of emergent categories related to linguistic exclusion, strategies of resistance, and the reproduction of hierarchies in academia. The entire process engaged with theoretical references on decoloniality, epistemic racism, and ethnic–racial relations in higher education.

Following the ethical principles of academic research, all participants had their identities protected, took part voluntarily, and signed the **informed consent form**, ensuring confidentiality and respect for the participants' autonomy.

3 The languages that count and those that remain invisible: how graduate education decides what counts as knowledge

When we look closely at the calls for applications and regulations of graduate programs at various Brazilian universities, it is hard not to notice a recurring feature: the mandatory testing of European languages such as English, French, Spanish, or German appears as an almost indisputable requirement for those who wish to enter and remain in these programs. This rule is generally defended with the argument of internationalization and the pursuit of academic quality. What is rarely discussed, however, is that this requirement also quietly carries the traces of a colonial logic that still persists within the university.

The imposition of a single model of knowledge production, centered on Western rationality, not only excludes other ways of knowing but also determines which languages are considered legitimate in academic spaces. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos affirms

> It confronts the monoculture of modern science with an ecology of knowledges. It is an ecology because it is based on the recognition of a plurality of heterogeneous forms of knowledge (one of which is modern science) and on sustainable, dynamic interactions among them, without compromising their autonomy. The ecology of knowledges is founded on the idea that knowledge is *interknowledge* (Santos, 2010, pp. 22–23).

This perspective helps us understand that the choice of which languages "count" within academic institutions is not a neutral decision, but one deeply shaped by relations of power and coloniality. While African and Indigenous languages carry complex ways of seeing and living in the world, they continue to be rendered invisible in selection processes, curricular regulations, and scientific publications. This linguistic exclusion, in fact, reveals a political project of epistemic silencing that privileges knowledges from the Global North, leaving other legitimate forms of existence and thought at the margins.

To better understand how this logic of exclusion operates in practice, it is essential to examine the calls for applications of graduate programs from various Brazilian universities. These documents show that the requirement for language proficiency tests remains a consistent rule, particularly for European languages such as English, French, and others.

The table below presents a survey of these requirements, indicating which languages are demanded, the types of tests accepted, and the conditions for demonstrating proficiency. It is important to highlight that Indigenous and African languages do not appear as official options, which reinforces the exclusionary and colonial nature of these linguistic policies.

Table 1 – Actual Foreign Language Proficiency Requirements (UFPR and USP / 2019–2024)

University	Graduate Program	Required Languages	Criteria (accepted exams and deadlines)	Remarks
UFPR[2]	Several Graduate Programs	English, Spanish, French (generally only European languages)	Certificates issued by: UFPR Examination Center, CAPES programs, or other recognized institutions.	Indigenous and African languages are not accepted; criteria are vague.
FEUSP (USP)[3]	Education (Master's, Doctorate)	English, French, Spanish, German, Italian	Master's: 1 language; Doctorate: 2 languages; certificates valid for up to 5 years (external) or 3 years (internal); minimum grade B1.	Only European languages; deadline of 12 months after enrollment.
ECA-USP[4] (USP)	All areas of ECA	English, Spanish, French, Italian, German	Master's: 1 language; Doctorate: 2 languages; certificates from recognized institutions.	Requirement common to all programs; includes Portuguese proficiency for foreign students.

[2] **UFPR** - Universidade Federal do Paraná
[3] **FEUSP** - Faculdade de Educação da Universidade de São Paulo
[4] **ECA-USP** - Escola de Comunicações e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo

IP-USP[5]	Social Psychology (Master's/Doctorate)	English (mandatory); 2nd language: French, Italian, Spanish, or German	Master's: intermediate English. Doctorate: advanced English or two languages. Internal exams or recognized certificates accepted.	English is central; the second language is secondary.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

When compiling the data in the table above, we were not surprised. The pattern repeats itself: English, French, Spanish, and German, always the same languages, always the same gateways. But it was only when organizing this information side by side that we realized something even more troubling. It is not just the absence of African or Indigenous languages in the calls for applications, it is the *naturalness*, as mentioned earlier, with which this absence is treated, as if it were obvious, expected, indisputable, normalized.

This realization led us to think about how the language proficiency requirement actually functions as a filter of belonging. It is not simply about assessing whether someone can read an article in English or another language. It is a symbolic marker: those who speak these languages possess a certain cultural universe that the university considers valid. Those who do not, or who speak other languages, languages that do not fit within the call for applications, simply do not enter.

And here we begin to see the deeper problem. The rules appear neutral, but they carry political choices. Some argue that it is necessary to follow international standards. But who defines these standards? And what do they silently exclude in the process? What becomes clear, in the end, is that the linguistic criterion not only serves to select candidates but also determines which forms of knowledge may or may not circulate in academic spaces. And this, quite frankly, needs to be addressed with more courage and confrontation.

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[5] **IP-USP** - Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade de São Paulo

In this sense, it is essential to reflect on the mechanisms that legitimize certain languages to the detriment of others within the field of scientific knowledge.

The decision about which languages are recognized as legitimate for producing and expressing knowledge in academic spaces is closely tied to what Nascimento (2019) defines as *linguistic racism*. According to him, this phenomenon refers to the devaluation of languages and forms of expression associated with historically marginalized peoples. As the author himself argues:

> Once we admit that racism is embedded in the structure of things, we must also admit that language is a position within that structure. In my main hypothesis here, I understand that racism is produced in historical, economic, cultural, and political conditions and takes root in them, but it is through language that it materializes its forms of domination (Nascimento, 2019, p. 19).

This reflection makes clear how the imposition of certain languages in the educational and scientific fields is shot through with colonial logics that, by elevating European languages as legitimate, silence knowledges and epistemologies rooted in other cultural matrices. In this sense, it becomes essential to consider the implications of this linguistic choice for the production and recognition of knowledge. Thiong'o (2021) draws attention to something simple yet profound: the language we speak also shows how we see the world. When the university sidelines African or Indigenous languages, it ends up ignoring the ways of life, histories, and knowledges that come with them. Even if this is not stated openly, the consequence is that these knowledges are gradually erased. This discussion connects directly with Mignolo's (2005) critique of epistemic erasure promoted by coloniality, especially in the realm of language and memory.

As Mignolo (2005, pp. 37–38) states, coloniality operated through voices "heard or erased," histories "told from only one side," and memories "suppressed," revealing a process that can also be understood as *linguistic racism*, as it delegitimizes the languages and forms of expression of colonized peoples. For this reason, when calls for applications list only European languages in proficiency exams, other possibilities of knowledge are

implicitly silenced. The justification of "internationalization" often serves as a technical veil that camouflages historical and political inequalities.

Moreover, the requirement to master the colonizer's languages is therefore not merely a functional demand, it is a reaffirmation of the hierarchy among forms of knowledge. In this sense, the language policy of Brazilian graduate programs reinforces the subordination of Indigenous, Black, *quilombola*, and African migrant students, many of whom have trajectories marked by educational exclusion and lack of access to formal instruction in European languages.

The aim of this section, therefore, is to denaturalize this scenario. By examining institutional documents closely, it becomes possible to identify the mechanisms through which the university decides what counts as legitimate knowledge, and even more, who is allowed to produce it. As Freire aptly puts it (2013, p. 70), "Now no one educates anyone else, nor does anyone educate himself; people educate one another in communion, mediated by the world." But which world is being mediated when only a few languages have value?

4 Silenced voices: experiences of Indigenous, *quilombola,* and African students in graduate education

When we look at the trajectories of Indigenous, *quilombola*, and African students in graduate education in Brazil, it becomes clear how deeply racial inequalities still shape this space. Even with policies intended to promote diversity and affirmative action, many of these students continue to have their voices ignored and their knowledges dismissed. Racism, whether overt or subtle, is present at multiple stages, from the admissions process to the daily dynamics of academic advising. Beyond the practical and material difficulties that hinder the permanence of Black and Indigenous students in universities, there is a subtler yet equally violent dimension: the symbolic exclusion of their knowledges. This form of epistemic violence manifests in the devaluation of ancestral and traditional knowledge,

often labeled as "non-scientific." As Carneiro (2023) observes, this exclusion also affects the subjectivity of racialized individuals:

> The contempt for intellectual life reflects the internalization of the idea of being out of place: it is like adopting the attitude of the fox toward the grapes that are out of reach and, with disdain, declaring, "They are sour," precisely to soothe the feeling of inadequacy, of not belonging to a space to which our access is made possible almost exclusively so that we can be objects of research for those who are supposedly endowed by nature with the capacity to "know" and, above all, to explain (p. 109).

This reflection is grounded in the concept of *epistemicide*, which Carneiro (2023) uses to denounce how racism also operates through the denial of the intellectual capacity of the Black population and through the hierarchization of knowledges, thereby sustaining colonial logic within the academic space.

In this context, it becomes fundamental to reaffirm the importance of recognizing different knowledge systems and the legitimacy of knowledges that have been historically silenced. As Munanga (2004, p. 7) emphasizes, "equality also implies respect for the individual in what makes them unique, such as ethnic and cultural diversity, and the recognition of the right that every person and every culture has to cultivate its specificity." By defending the importance of respect for diversity, the author demonstrates that it will only be possible to confront *epistemicide* when different ways of thinking and knowing are genuinely valued – especially those that arise from the lived experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples, so often left out of university curricula.

Fanon (2008), in turn, when analyzing the psychological effects of colonialism, warns us of how the Black or colonized subject is constantly pressured to deny their origin in order to be accepted within the dominant space. In the context of graduate education, this translates into an implicit demand for "academic neutrality," which delegitimizes situated knowledge, experiences of pain and resistance, and the right to think from other cosmologies. The voices of these students are not merely ignored; they are often shaped, silenced, or co-opted to fit within the molds of Western science. This epistemic violence prevents the university from fulfilling the plural and democratic role it claims to uphold.

The testimonies of the interviewed students reveal that *linguistic racism* and epistemic racism continue to operate powerfully within graduate spaces. An Indigenous student from the Xukuru people shared that she was discouraged from writing her dissertation in her mother tongue: "*They said that if I wrote in my language, no one would understand; besides, they said that it wasn't scientific*". Another *quilombola* student from the interior of Bahia recounted that his research project, based on the oral knowledge of his community and citing the words of the elders, was **often** for not containing **enough theoretical references in a 'scientific' way**: "*It seems that what I learned from my elders doesn't count at the university*". And a student from Guinea-Bissau expressed his sense of displacement:

> "What really troubled me is that recently I wrote an article and submitted it for publication. I included the abstract in Brazilian Portuguese and then in my mother tongue – in this case, the Guinean language. They returned the article and asked me to include one of the modern foreign languages. For example, I have to choose between English, French, or Spanish. That made me sad, and I wondered: isn't my language considered foreign, or more importantly, isn't it considered modern? In another case, when submitting my master's dissertation to the graduate library, there was discomfort simply because I had included the abstract in three languages: first, Brazilian Portuguese; second, the Guinean language; and third, English. I was asked to place English in the second position."

These accounts confirm what Frantz Fanon (2008, p. 34) describes:

> Every colonized people – that is, every people among whom an inferiority complex has been created by the burial of their cultural originality – positions itself in relation to the language of the "civilizing" nation, that is, of the metropolitan culture. The more the colonized assimilates the cultural values of the metropolis, the more they escape from their jungle. The more they reject their Blackness, their wilderness, the whiter they become.

This aligns with what Munanga (2019) identifies when denouncing the Eurocentric structure of the Brazilian university, marked by the exclusion of Black knowledge systems and identities. According to the author, there has been a historical stance of making racial inequality invisible within academic institutions, that is, within "[…] the university and society in general in relation to the social and racial inequality historically experienced by the Black

segment of the Brazilian population" (p. 127). This passage highlights how the Brazilian university has historically rendered racial inequality invisible, reinforcing the urgency of decolonizing knowledge and valuing Afro-Brazilian epistemologies.

5 Toward a plural university: pathways to recognize other languages and other knowledges

Brazilian universities continue to operate on colonial structures that devalue and exclude knowledges and languages that do not have European origins. Therefore, rethinking language policies in graduate education is not only necessary—it is fundamental for promoting real and profound change.

However, recognizing Indigenous and African languages in proficiency processes is not merely a matter of linguistic inclusion; it is a crucial step toward confronting the *epistemic racism* that still shapes knowledge production in universities. Such neglect reveals the systematic erasure of African and Indigenous voices, especially in a context where foreign students continue to face invisible linguistic barriers within Brazilian institutions.

Universities in Brazil still overlook many of the languages spoken in Portuguese-speaking African countries. This exclusion is particularly serious when we consider the students who come from these nations to study here through programs such as the *Programa de Estudantes-Convênio de Pós-Graduação* (PEC-PG) and the *Grupo de Cooperação Internacional de Universidades Brasileiras* (GCUB), especially students from countries of the *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa* (CPLP). In Angola, for instance, many people speak Kimbundu, Umbundu, or Kikongo in their daily lives. In Mozambique, it is common to hear Changana, Macua, Sena, among others. In Guinea-Bissau, the Guinean lingua franca is spoken everywhere, alongside languages such as Balanta, Mandinga, Fula, and Bijagó. Cape Verde has its own *lingua franca* with numerous regional variations, and in São Tomé and Príncipe, Forro, Angolar, and Lung'ie are still spoken. In universities, when certain languages are not recognized, this is not merely a

linguistic issue. Along with them, entire histories, ways of life, and ways of understanding the world are left aside. Valuing these forms of expression also means embracing other ways of thinking, teaching, and learning, going far beyond a simple gesture of respect.

Despite the many discourses on inclusion and diversity, students from African and Indigenous backgrounds continue to face requirements that disregard their realities. Among these invisible barriers is the obligation to master languages such as English or French, while their own languages, which carry memories and lived experiences, remain devalued.

These practices, disguised as academic neutrality, end up reaffirming a logic that excludes knowledges that are not expressed in the colonizer's languages. Thus, paradoxically, what is presented as inclusion ultimately reinforces exclusion.

Some isolated experiences already show that change is possible. Universities that accept academic work written in Indigenous languages or that create specific language training programs for students from traditional communities point toward important paths. Furthermore, the strengthening of affirmative action policies and the growing discussion around decoloniality have contributed to expanding this debate.

Breaking with linguistic colonialism does not simply mean including new languages for symbolic reasons. It means creating real space for other epistemologies, other ways of constructing, validating, and sharing knowledge. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2021) reminds us:

> Language, any language, has a dual character: it is at once a means of communication and a vehicle of culture. […] Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's historical experience. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that enables its development, articulation, and transmission from one generation to another (pp. 64–67).

From Thiong'o's (2021) reflection above, we can infer that language is more than a mere means of communication; it also profoundly shapes thought and perception of the world. In this sense, we not only describe reality through words but also understand it according to the linguistic structures imposed upon us, which reveals the power of linguistic colonialism in reconfiguring consciousness.

This understanding aligns with Frantz Fanon's (2008) analysis, according to which speaking the colonizer's language entails internalizing their culture, values, and logic: "To speak means to exist absolutely for the other. […] To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (pp. 33–50).

A university that claims to uphold respect for linguistic diversity can no longer operate as an institution that transforms everything into Portuguese, English, French, or Spanish. If it truly intends to be international, it must take the next step: to listen to, value, and incorporate the languages and knowledges of those who have been historically silenced, not as a symbolic concession, but as a political and epistemological commitment to cognitive justice.

6 Final considerations

The reflections developed throughout this work reveal that *linguistic colonialism* remains active within the structures of Brazilian higher education, especially at the graduate level. In the subchapter "The languages that count and those that remain invisible," it became clear how proficiency policies and academic validation criteria still reproduce colonial logics that designate certain languages as legitimate and relegate others to oblivion. This not only impoverishes linguistic diversity but also limits the very horizon of knowledge by defining it through Eurocentric filters.

In the subchapter "Silenced voices," the accounts and experiences of Indigenous, *quilombola*, and African students lay bare the reality of exclusion that shapes their trajectories in universities. Linguistic barriers, often naturalized, reveal that this is not merely a technical matter or an education policy issue, but a deeper system that continues to operate by denying the other. As Nascimento (2024, p. 60) warns us, "*linguistic racism* develops through the bonds that language forges when it uses racism to be shaped as a language by colonizers," creating a symbolic hierarchy in which some languages are treated as superior and others as nonexistent or undesirable.

Finally, in proposing "a plural university," we point out that the recognition of Indigenous and African languages should not be regarded as a concession, but as

historical reparation and an ethical commitment to cognitive justice. As Munanga (2004, p. 5) states, the racialized logic that shaped the modern sciences was far more doctrinal than scientific, serving to legitimize inequalities and exclusions. Overcoming this logic requires not only accepting diversity but rebuilding the foundations of what we consider knowledge. In this sense, making room for other languages also means making room for other ways of thinking, feeling, and living in the world, and this is, above all, a political choice.

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