



Between race and class: a critical review of linguistic scholarship on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese

Entre classe e raça: revisão crítica da literatura linguística sobre a permanência de africanismos no português brasileiro

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ABSTRACT: In this essay, I investigate (socio)linguistic scholarship on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese to analyze the semiotic ideologies that inform academic literature on this topic. I argue that there are two main schools of thought within this field: the one that sees race as a prominent analytical category, and the one that favors social class over race. I claim that there are three commonalities to different frameworks analyzed here: (1) racialized speech is often equated with Africanisms; (2) Africanisms are commonly treated as an index of pre-modern times; and (3) Africanisms are perceived as foreign to the modern present. In addition, I also suggest that authors who privilege social class over race – as an analytical tool – might be aligned with the ideology of racial democracy.

KEYWORDS: Africanisms. Race. Social class. Semiotic ideologies. Language ideologies.

RESUMO: Este ensaio investiga a literatura (sócio)linguística sobre a permanência de africanismos no português brasileiro para analisar as ideologias semióticas que informam a literatura acadêmica sobre o assunto. Argumenta-se que há duas principais escolas de pensamento neste campo: uma que vê “raça” como a categoria analítica principal, e outra que entende que “classe” é mais importante do que raça. Sustenta-se três pressupostos são comuns às diversas teorias estudadas aqui: (1) as falas racializadas são frequentemente entendidas como sinônimos de falas marcadas pela africanidade; (2) os africanismos são geralmente tratados como índices de tempos pré-modernos; e (3) os africanismos são entendidos como “estrangeiros” no presente moderno. Ademais, também se sugere que os autores que preferem “classe” a “raça” (como categoria analítica) podem estar alinhados à ideologia da democracia racial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Africanismos. Raça. Classe social. Ideologias semióticas. Ideologias linguísticas.

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1. Introduction¹

The goal of this essay is to analyze linguistic scholarship on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese through a critical investigation of the semiotic ideologies that inform said scholarship. In particular, I pay special attention to the relationship between different theoretical frameworks and broader societal ideologies that inform them.

This essay is organized as follows: In Section 2, I define what are language ideologies and semiotic ideologies. These concepts constitute the theoretical framework I adopt in this essay. In the following sections, I discuss the main streams that constitute linguistic scholarship on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese. They are: (a) scholarship on African languages in Brazil – especially during the colonial period; (b) scholarship on language contact and its consequences for the development of Brazilian Portuguese; and (c) scholarship on so-called ‘secret’ and ‘expert’ languages. Finally, I also discuss the place of race in the stream of sociolinguistic literature that privileges social class over race in the Brazilian context.

Needless to say, it would be impossible to engage with every book or article ever published on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese in this essay. Therefore, what I present here is a selection of relevant works in each of the aforementioned scholarly streams. My ultimate goal is not to produce an exhaustive summary of literature on the topic; rather, I intend to demonstrate how (socio)linguistic scholarship is not divorced from broader societal understandings regarding race.

2. Language and/or semiotic ideologies

Judith Irvine and Susan Gal (2000, p. 35) define language ideologies as “the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic

¹ I would like to thank Kira Hall, Natasha Shrikant, and two anonymous reviewers for reading and providing feedback on previous versions of this study.

varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them". In other words, language ideologies are never only about language, and have consequences, for instance, to how one conducts oneself, and the moral judgements one makes – after all, “there is no view from nowhere, no gaze that is not positioned” (2000, p. 36). For Irvine and Gal, *language ideologies* are a lens through which one can see the linkages between people’s beliefs about language(s) and the broader sociocultural contexts in which individuals find themselves. Processes of linguistic differentiation, Irvine and Gal (2000) argue, are a particularly privileged locus to observe language ideologies at work, for these processes unveil how indexical relationships between linguistic form and social meaning are forged (2000, p. 37). Irvine and Gal’s theorization references Charles Sanders Peirce theory of the sign heavily. Consequently, understanding Peirce’s theory of the sign, and especially of the index, is vital to comprehending Irvine and Gal’s (2000) claims. According to Peirce, a sign:

...is something, A, which brings something, B, its interpretant sign determined or created by it, into the same sort of correspondence with something, C, its object, as that in which itself stands to C. (PEIRCE, 1976 [1902], p. 20-21).

Signs only exist in relation to something else, never in isolation. In fact, a sign – just like an interpretant or an object – is more a role than a thing. The Peircean *sign* represents something, that something being its subject matter: the *object*. *Objects* can be things, but also qualities, events, ideas, etc.; *objects* are the objects of the *sign* and, by extension of the *interpretant*. In Peircean terms, the *interpretant* is the product of the interpretive process that has the *sign* at its center. The semiotic chain theorized by Peirce is constrained by specific mechanisms but knows no points of departure or arrival. Therefore, within this framework, a *sign* of an *object* leads to an *interpretant* – and the *interpretant*, as a *sign* in a different relationship, leads to yet other *interpretants*.

The sign and the relationships it can forge lie at the core of language ideologies. Within the Peircean paradigm, there are three basic types of signs:

Icon: a sign that stands for its object by virtue of similarity or resemblance, for example, any mimetic image, a pencil drawing or painting of a tree in relation to the tree itself.

Index: a sign that stands for its object by existential or physical connection or contiguity, for example, a weathercock pointing in the direction of the prevailing wind, or the way physical evidence at a crime scene (a bullet hole, blood on the floor) points to the commission of the crime (the bullet that made the hole, the wound that produced the blood).

Symbol: A sign that stands for its object by convention alone, for example, the conventional signs of a language, which must be memorized by rote.

(MANNING, 2012, p. 10)

Indices – signs that stand for their objects “by existential or physical connection or contiguity” (MANNING, 2012, p. 10) – function as the engine of the three semiotic processes through which, Irvine and Gal (2000) argue, linguistic differentiation happens: iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure.

The process of *iconization* is, semiotically speaking, akin to essentialization. It consists of establishing a necessary – and at times naturalized – connection between a given linguistic form (such as a language variety) and a specific social group (IRVINE; GAL, 2000, p. 37-8). *Fractal recursivity* “involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level” (p. 38). This concept might seem somewhat opaque at first, but the recent US presidential elections may help us unpack it. From a partisan standpoint, US presidential elections are articulated around a basic opposition: democrats versus republicans. However, that basic opposition is often projected onto the intra-party level. For instance, claiming to be a democrat was not sufficient to position a given voter within the US political spectrum last year. After all, one could be a democrat supporting Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders, and support their platforms fully or partially. In other words, the basic opposition democrat v.

republican can be further projected onto other, finer, oppositions such as democrat-Clinton-supporter vs. democrat-Sanders-supporter, for instance. Finally, *erasure* is “the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities ... invisible” (IRVINE; GAL, 2000, p. 28).

Webb Keane (2003, 2007) takes Irvine and Gal’s definition of language ideologies as a point of departure and proposes an alternative concept, that of *semiotic ideologies*. According to Keane (2003, 2007), *semiotic ideologies* is potentially a more comprehensive label because (a) ‘language’ might be too western a concept, and (b) the broader term *semiotics* unequivocally extends beyond the verbal realm, and brings words and things to the same field of analysis. According to Keane, semiotic ideologies are:

... basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world. It determines, for instance, what people will consider the role that intentions play in signification to be, what kinds of possible agents ... exist to which acts of signification might be imputed, whether signs are arbitrary or necessarily linked to their objects, and so forth. (2003, p. 419)

As theoretical frameworks, *language ideologies* and *semiotic ideologies* share commonalities, but are also distinct from each other. On the one hand, both take Peircean semiotics as a point of departure, and are particularly concerned with the centrality that indices have in the articulation of ideologies. On the other hand, Irvine and Gal (2000) focus on how (verbal) language ideologies are constructed, whereas Keane’s (2003, 2007) concern explicitly involve religious beliefs and material culture.

At this point, some terminological choices might require clarification:

1) In this essay, I am mainly concerned with metalinguistic discourse on language; however, I will use Keane’s terminology when making my own claims due to its potentially broader scope. I will, nevertheless, use the term *language ideology*

whenever the author I am discussing happens to use the original Irvine and Gal's (2000) term in their work.

2) The material analyzed in this article goes beyond talk and can perhaps be labeled *discourse*. I follow linguistic anthropologist Jane Hill (2008) and use the term discourse as “a shorthand for all varieties of talk and text” (p. 32). In addition, still following Hill (2008), I use the label *discourse* to refer not just to “the material surface of the language ... [but also to] the invitations and clues, the silences, the inferences that the literal content of a text or an utterance invites” (HILL, 2008, p. 33)

3. Linguistic scholarship on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese

Processes of linguistic differentiation have been explored, among others, by linguistic anthropologist Joseph Errington (2007). In *Linguistics in a colonial world*, the author “read[s] linguistic treatises not as records of facts, but as products of interests and imaginations” (ERRINGTON, 2007, p. 9). In the present section, I embark on Errington's enterprise when discussing scholarship on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese. Instead of merely summarizing the findings of the authors I engage with, I use the framework of semiotic ideologies to try and unveil which ideologies animate their theorizations. As Errington (2007) and Irvine and Gal (2000) argue, processes of linguistic differentiation are a privileged site to investigate the ideological constitution of the other as Other.

For the purposes of this essay, I use the phrase *African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese* to refer to the linguistic features of contemporary Brazilian Portuguese that are usually thought to descend from African languages, or from the contact between Brazilian Portuguese and African languages.

The body of literature on this topic – which often times addresses the intersection between language and race, although not always overtly – tends to focus on one of three main streams: (1) a diachronic account of the African languages that

were brought to Brazil during the slave-trade period; (2) the contact between African languages and Brazilian Portuguese, and (3) the so-called *línguas secretas* ('secret languages') and *línguas de especialidade* ('expert languages'), whose study is primarily concerned with the intersection between language and identity. On the one hand, the label *secret languages* is used to refer to language varieties – or, at times, a set of lexical items – used primarily or exclusively by members of a specific group, usually racially bounded. On the other hand, the term *expert languages* refers to language varieties or a specific vocabulary that is used by those who are – or claim to be – experts on any given area of knowledge. In the literature covered in this section, said area of expertise is often related to religion.

Overall, in the present section I argue that scholarship on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese is informed by understandings of modernity that conceptualize Africanness as an icon of a pre-modern, problematic, and perhaps even un-Brazilian past, whereas racial mixing – which is in fact a process of de-racialization – is seen as the icon of a modern present/future.

3.1 African languages in Brazil

The presence of African languages in what is now the Brazilian territory is inextricably connected to slave trade. After all, approximately 3,600,000 Africans were forcibly uprooted in the years between 1502 and 1860 (when slave trade was officially discontinued) and constituted – along with their Indigenous counterparts – roughly two-thirds of the Brazilian population by the mid-19th century (PETTER; CUNHA, 2015, p. 221-222).

Linguistic scholarship on African languages in Brazil has focused mainly – although not exclusively – on (1) identifying which languages or language groups used to be spoken by enslaved Africans, (2) mapping where such languages were spoken and why, and (3) describing those languages.

The descriptive enterprise seemed to be particularly productive during the colonial years, when one could have direct access to native and enslaved speakers of African languages. In fact, the first published descriptive grammar of an African language spoken in Brazil is probably Pedro Dias's *A arte da lingua de Angola, oferecida a Virgem Senhora N. do Rosario, mãy & senhora dos mesmos pretos* ('The art of the language of Angola, offered to Our Virgin Lady of the Rosary, mother and lady of these same negroes'), published in Lisbon in 1697 – a descriptive study of what contemporary linguists (BONVINI, 2008; PETTER, 2006) believe to be Kimbundu as spoken on the Angolan coast at the time. Pedro Dias's work is systematic and makes no reference to language variation or contact, which seems to align with the larger enterprise of missionary linguistics. According to Errington (2007),

Whether or not they were talented, or inspired by the miracle of Pentecost, missionaries could only produce linguistic descriptions much simpler than the complex worlds of talk they found in their fields of operation. (p. 120)

It is true that Pedro Dias's grammar is no exception to the pattern identified by Errington – although, due to historical and geographical constraints, Dias was probably more inspired by the Portuguese Inquisition than by the miracle of Pentecost. In any event, the erasure of linguistic complexity and historicity found in Dias's work still constitutes the benchmark of most works in language documentation, with few exceptions.²

A different approach can be seen in the works of Margarida Petter (2006) and Emilio Bonvini (2008), who – after producing a careful comparative study – stated that the presence of various Western and Southern African languages throughout the Brazilian territory can be explained by the fact that enslaved Africans from different

² For instance, see Migge and L'Église (2013) for a sociohistorical study of English-lexified creoles in the French Guyana.

ethnic groups were mixed by their masters to prevent revolts. On the one hand, both Petter (2006) and Bonvini (2008) trace connections between the linguistic map of colonial Brazil and the sociohistorical phenomenon of slavery, which represents a departure from earlier works – such as Pedro Dias’s grammar. On the other, the scope of Petter’s (2006) and Bonvini’s (2008) work does not include discussions on the contemporary consequences of slavery to Brazilian language and society.

Tania Alkmim’s (2002, 2006) work stands out within this stream of scholarship, for she studied media representations of the speech of Africans in the 19th century and the language ideologies associated with them. Alkmim (2002) argued that the press of the time conflated speech patterns that were probably exclusive to those whose first language was African (such as the merger of /l/ and /r/, and the realization of /ʒ/ as [z]) with morpho-syntactic patterns – such as the absence of number marking within noun phrases – that were likely present in several other Brazilian vernaculars (2002, p. 397). In other words, 19th century media ideologically linked African speech to the speech of the more popular extractions of the society of the time, possibly erasing ethnic diversity. In a more recent book, Alkmim (2006) analyzed how newspaper advertisements about escaped enslaved Africans treated their linguistic fluency (labeled ‘well spoken’ and ‘crooked speech’, among other categories) as as relevant as their physical appearance. Speech, Alkmim (2006) claimed, was a powerful icon, as strong a tell of African ancestry as phenotypical features.

In sum, part of the scholarship on African languages in Brazil has erased linguistic diversity and treated languages as virtually static – which is not uncommon within the field of language documentation (DURANTI, 1994; ERRINGTON, 2008; MIGGE; L’ÉGLISE, 2013). Another segment of scholarship has located African languages in the past, for instance in works that analyze the relationship between African languages and the non-longer existent slave trade without analyzing the consequences of slavery for contemporary Brazil. Within this picture, Alkmim’s (2002,

2006) work is exceptional for, by studying language ideologies in the 19th century, the author acknowledged the dynamic character of language practices. In the next subsection, I discuss linguistic literature on the impact that African languages had on contemporary Brazilian Portuguese.

3.2 Language contact in Brazil

According to Margarida Petter and Ana Stela Cunha (2015, p. 241), many linguists have been keenly interested in the hypothesis of a creole origin of Brazilian Portuguese; and the works of Gregory Guy (1989) and John Holm (1987) were particularly representative of this stream of scholarship, besides also being influential. However, this dominant trend identified by Petter and Cunha (2015) seems to be more diverse in recent scholarship. For example, while Alan Baxter and Dante Lucchesi (1997) and Dante Lucchesi (1999, 2003) take the creolization hypothesis as their point of departure, Anthony Julius Naro and Maria Marta Pereira Scherre (2007) proposed that African languages did not influence Brazilian Portuguese to the point of creolization (and made a similar argument regarding Indigenous languages). According to Naro and Scherre (2007), what happened to Brazilian Portuguese is similar to phenomena observed in other situations of contact around the world, in which a handful of phonological and syntactic patterns, and a relatively long list of lexical items, were incorporated into the dominant language – in this case, Portuguese – without altering the structure of the latter significantly.

Other authors have studied specific domains of Brazilian Portuguese and how it has been influenced by African languages. For instance, Esmeralda Negrão and Evani Viotti (2008, 2011) have studied syntactic patterns of Brazilian Portuguese which differ significantly from European Portuguese. According to the authors, impersonal syntactic constructions in Brazilian Portuguese are very similar to passive constructions in Kimbundu, a Bantu language from Angola which was widely spoken

in the Brazilian territory during the slave trade years. This is evidence, Negrão and Viotti (2008, 2011) claimed, that Kimbundu – and possibly other Bantu languages – have influenced the syntax of contemporary Brazilian Portuguese. Also, on the syntactic front, Juanito Avelar and Charlotte Galves (2013, 2014) have noted that certain features, such as locative inversion, are quite common in contemporary Bantu languages, Brazilian and African Portuguese – but not European Portuguese. Avelar and Galves (2013, 2014) claimed that this is evidence that the syntax of Brazilian and African varieties of Portuguese have been influenced by Bantu languages.

Additionally, Yeda Pessoa de Castro (2001) compiled a corpus of 3,517 lexical items of African origin in contemporary Brazilian Portuguese. The author organized the corpus into categories (music, dance, gastronomy, etc.) and produced a careful etymological study to identify not just the language group where those terms originated, but – as often as possible – the exact language. A few years later, Alkmim and Petter (2008) re-analyzed Castro's (2001) corpus, excluded from its religious vocabulary, and submitted the remaining list to subjects from different areas of Brazil (ALKMIM; PETTER, 2008, p. 156-7) in an effort to identify those lexical items that were used all across the nation. Their final corpus contained only 56 items out of the original 3,517 in Castro's (2001) work. In addition, Alkmim and Petter (2008, p. 157) also noted that, out of those remaining 56 lexical items, only 30 “can be used in any social interaction” – the other ones might be perceived as too colloquial or perhaps even taboo.

On the one hand, Alkmim and Petter's (2008) work identified which lexical items are still used in the entire contemporary Brazilian territory, thus acknowledging the lingering African influence in Brazilian Portuguese lexicon. On the other, Alkmim and Petter's (2008) short general vocabulary list put into perspective the importance of African languages in the constitution of a 'general' vocabulary of Brazilian Portuguese, which constitutes a strong response to previous literature on Brazilian Portuguese as

a creole (GUY, 1989; HOLM, 1987). Furthermore, one could also argue that their work constituted an alternative even to studies that were never committed to the creolization hypothesis, such as Castro's (2001). After all, although it seems to be commonsense that most of the lexicon of creole languages comes from their superstrate languages, the role substrate languages in the constitution of creole vocabulary cannot be ignored (HOLM, 2000).

In addition, the framework of semiotic ideologies can provide us an additional interpretation of Alkmim and Petter's (2008) study: it is possible to argue that, through the dismissal of religious terms and lexical items deemed regionalisms, the authors promoted the very idea of a 'general' vocabulary of Brazilian Portuguese in which there is not much room for terms of African origin. In previous studies, Castro (1967, 1980, 1981) argued that the usage of so-called African lexicon is particularly vibrant in religious contexts, a claim that is corroborated by anthropological scholarship (see CARNEIRO, 2008; SILVA, 2005). What is more, one of the – possibly unwanted – effects of Alkmim's and Petter's (2008) methodology is the erasure of African features from a perceived 'neutral' national language (i.e. free from 'regionalisms' and 'religion'). By discursively erasing the Other – in this case, Africanness – the authors help create a Self that is positioned at a different time, and with weak ties to its African ancestry.

Erasure, or relativization, of the importance of African ancestry is certainly not exclusive to linguistic scholarship and constitutes one of the strategies of what the late black scholar and activist Abdias Nascimento called "the cultural genocide of Afro-Brazilians" (NASCIMENTO, 2016, p. 111-121). In the next subsection, I will discuss other ways in which linguistic research can be aligned with dominant racial ideologies.

3.3 The place of Africanness in contemporary Brazil: expert, sacred and secret languages

A third stream of scholarship on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese treats African languages as a cultural heritage of contemporary Afro-Brazilians and can be divided into two sub-streams: (1) the study of sacred languages, and (2) the study of *comunidades quilombolas*.

Studies within the first stream focus on Afro-Brazilian religions and on the usage of African lexicon, phrases and chants used in them – usually of Kimbundu or Yoruba extraction. Here, the connection between language and identity – especially as it relates to claiming African ancestry and religious expertise – are particularly privileged. For instance, Elizabete Umbelino de Barros (2007) investigated how the proper ritualistic use of specific lexical items and the mastery of African chants indexes both one's expertise in Candomblé – an Afro-Brazilian religion that celebrates its African origins – and one's affiliation to African ancestry despite phenotypical features. On a more recent piece, Iya Monadeosi (2015) claimed that the contemporary increase in the usage of African lexicon and chants among practitioners of Candomblé is a reaction to the longstanding whitening of the religion itself – noticeable, for example, in the significant numbers of Candomblé priests and priestesses who cannot claim African ancestry (MONADEOSI, 2015, p. 255). In addition, Monadeosi (2015) argued, being able to pronounce certain lexical items 'properly' is an index of proper mastery of a religious concept. For instance, the Africanized pronunciation of the name of God as [nzambi] instead of the brazilianized [zã^mbi]³ indexes that a given practitioner has understood the Candomblé concept of God properly (MONADEOSI, 2015, p. 274-5).

The second stream of research within this realm is related to *comunidades quilombolas* ('quilombola communities'). *Quilombo* was the name given, during the

³ There are no pre-nasalized consonants in Brazilian Portuguese.

years when slavery was legal in Brazil, to remote and usually small rural villages formed by enslaved Africans who had managed to escape their masters' plantations. The reminders of those communities are called *comunidades quilombolas*⁴. The scholarship on this topic usually combines traditional linguistic documentation with an attention to how language practices can function as markers of identity and resistance. This trend has produced a handful of book-length monographs, such as Ana Stela Cunha's (2011) and Sônia Queiroz's (1998) comprehensive studies of communities from two distinct Brazilian states (Maranhão and Minas Gerais, respectively). However, the book co-authored by linguist Carlos Vogt and social anthropologist Peter Fry (2014) is possibly the most popular one – and one that also provides a great window into the correlation between academic work and widespread ideologies.

Vogt's and Fry's *Cafundó: A África no Brasil* ('Cafundó: Africa in Brazil'), was first published in 1996 and became quite famous for various reasons: (1) it combined Linguistics and cultural Anthropology, which was not common at the time; (2) it was based on over 10 years of fieldwork and contained a significant amount of carefully collected and catalogued data; (3) it documented the usage of an African-influenced variety of Portuguese in 20th century São Paulo State, a time and a place where people believed those varieties were no longer available.

On the strictly linguistic front, *Cafundó ...* presents a description of *Cupópia*, the language variety spoken in the rural community of Cafundó. According to its speakers, Cupópia is a language; according to Vogt and Fry (2014), it is a rural dialect of Brazilian Portuguese that contains extensive African lexicon – around 400 nouns and a handful of verbs. From a cultural anthropology standpoint, *Cafundó* places heavy emphasis on the role that language practices play on identity building. For instance,

⁴ The phrase *terras de preto* ('negro country') can also be used to refer to the same communities, although it tends not to be used in recent linguistic scholarship on the topic.

the authors claim that it is through Cupópia – treated by its speakers as a *secret language* – that locals negotiate Africanness, Brazilianness and ruralness. Far from being committed to erasing the linguistic and social complexities of Cafundó, Vogt's and Fry's work embrace them. According to the authors, Cafundó is African and rural, mythical and real, weird and distant due to its status as a 'secret language'; yet familiar and close due to its social relations of production (p. 45).

In addition to being comprehensive and embracing sociolinguistic complexity, Vogt's and Fry's book also offer a window through which one can understand broader ideologies of Africanness and modernity. For instance, the authors mention that the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) was interested in making a documentary about what they perceived as "an authentic African tribe located in the vicinities of São Paulo, the biggest and most industrialized city in the country" (p. 25) – a project that was later aborted when the BBC personnel realized that the "African tribe" in question was way too Brazilian. BBC's interest and subsequent disappointment are indicators that Africanness can be perceived as an icon of the past, especially when contrasted to benchmarks of modern times such as urbanization and industrialization. In fact, Vogt and Fry acknowledge that Cafundó can be a puzzle to many; according to the authors,

The violence of the development of a [urban] center like São Paulo and the existence, in its vicinity, of a group of people who actively preserve a vocabulary of African origin generate a certain paradox. (2014, p. 36)^{5,6}

By acknowledging the potential for paradox inherent to the sociohistorical positioning of Cafundó, Vogt and Fry demonstrate that scholars are also members of the broader society, and share – or at least understand – some of its semiotic ideologies.

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all translations presented in this paper are mine.

⁶ "A violência do desenvolvimento de um centro como São Paulo e a existência nas suas redondezas de um grupo de pessoas que conservam ativamente um vocabulário de origem africana geram uma espécie de paradoxo" (2014, p. 36).

In this case, an ideology that contraposes Africanness and modernity. In other words, Africanness is an icon of things past, whereas São Paulo is an icon of development – and the two cannot possibly co-exist within the same matrix of intelligibility.

However, Africanness – or race – does not always occupy a prominent position in scholarship on Brazilian Portuguese. In the next section, I discuss how other linguists have favored *social class* over *race* when analyzing contemporary varieties of Brazilian Portuguese.

4. Language and race or language and class?

Several linguists have engaged *social class* as a useful analytical category when analyzing linguistic variation within Brazilian Portuguese. Some used it alongside *race*, whereas others used it in lieu of *race*. In this section, I discuss some of this work and discuss how the theoretical perspectives adopted by selected authors relate to broader ideologies of modernity and race.

At this point, a note of clarification is necessary. In this essay, I follow authors such as Pierre Bourdieu (1979) and Penelope Eckert (1990) and use the phrase *social class* to refer to the bundle of features that, when combined, can locate one in different class positions in relation to others. These features include, but are not restricted to, income, level of education, taste, place of origin, and place of residence. Therefore, in this section, I can and will refer to an authors' use of *social class* as an analytical category in their work even if they do not use the phrase themselves. This perspective is not entirely foreign to Brazilian sociolinguists; for instance, Bortoni-Ricardo (2004, p. 48, *apud* FREITAG, 2011, p. 50) asserts that one's level of education, the quality of one's schooling, and one's linguistic repertoire are intimately related to one's socioeconomic standing. Although Bortoni-Ricardo (2004) restricts her claim to the Brazilian, it is easy to see how similar claims can be made about distinct parts of the world – for example, Bourdieu (1979) conducted his study in France, whereas Eckert (1990) did her

ethnography in the United States. Furthermore, this article extends beyond the realm of variationist sociolinguistics, a realm in which it is not only relevant but also necessary to assume and control discrete and quantifiable categories. In this essay, such a necessity is not present.

Rodolfo Ilari and Renato Basso (2006) drew a comprehensive panorama of the Portuguese language since its grammatization in the Middle Ages until its contemporary Brazilian incarnation. The authors highlighted the linguistic hybridity that, according to them, has always been a feature of the Portuguese language even before the foundation of the Kingdom of Portugal. For instance, Ilari and Baso (2006) argued that Iberian Romance languages had been influenced by Arabic and Germanic languages before the fall of the Roman Empire – and influenced one another even after the formation of modern nation states (2006, p. 137-138). The authors also highlighted that the first lingua francas of what is now the Brazilian territory were Indigenous (p. 62), and that African languages from various language families influenced Brazilian Portuguese since the dawn of the Portuguese occupation of America⁷ (p. 74-75). In other words, far from treating the Brazilian linguistic history as exceptional, the authors treat it as the continuation of the history of linguistic mixing already found in Vulgar Latin. For Ilari and Baso, the so-called ‘Brazilian speech norm’ (*norma brasileira*) – otherwise known as ‘Standard Brazilian Portuguese – was not a reality until the nationalist movements of the 19th century, which not only precipitated the independence from Portugal but also began to forge a national identity that was somewhat hostile to the former metropole (p. 213-223).

It is from this moment on that their analysis shifts gears. Here, Ilari and Basso’s racialized – or at least ethnicized – rhetoric of language contact and lexical borrowing leaves the stage in favor of a different rhetoric; one that promotes unity in diversity

⁷ In this essay I use the term *America* to refer to the whole continent. I use the term United States – or US for short – to refer to the North American country called United States of America.

and describes a de-racialized language in the years since the romantic literature of the 19th century. In other words, the acknowledgment of a racial component in Brazilian Portuguese, either in the lexicon or in the syntax, is something Ilari and Basso did only when analyzing a time that no longer exists: the colonial days and the years that succeeded the Brazilian independence. In their description of contemporary Brazilian Portuguese, there is room for regional, educational and – especially – class differences; but racial and ethnic differences are not mentioned.

Errington (2008) and Irvine and Gal (2000) showed how linguistic scholarship and narratives of nationhood (and Empire) can be intrinsically connected – and their work can provide a useful lens through which we can approach Ilari and Basso’s work. The erasure of selected aspects of sociolinguistic complexity are instrumental in the construction – through iconization – of a coherent national state, which can be coherent and cohesive not only in strict political terms, but also in ethnic ones. Consequently, Ilari and Basso’s erasure of race in the years since the Brazilian independence should come as no surprise – one could argue that the authors are simply reflecting dominant ideologies of nationhood in their scholarship. In fact, the erasure of racial markers – which, in the Brazilian context, is usually conceptualized along color lines– is not exclusive to Ilari and Basso (2006); various authors (BAGNO, 2013; BORTONIRICARDO, 2005, 2011; FARACO, 2008; LUCCHESI, 2015) who investigated the sociolinguistic dynamics of Standard and Vernacular dialects of Brazilian Portuguese adopted a similar approach. What these studies have in common is an emphasis on the correlation between linguistic varieties and social class belongings instead of other social markers of difference. This fact, however, should not lead one to think that racial lines do not exist in contemporary Brazil. According to sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014):

From the standpoint of colonialist social markers, the poor is a form of sub-humanity, a degraded form of being that combines five forms of degradation: to be ignorant, to be inferior, to be outdated, to be

vernacular or folkloric, to be lazy or unproductive. The common sign to all of them is that the poor do not have the same [skin] color of the rich. (<https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Coluna/Brasil-A-Grande-Divisao/32167>)⁸

In other words, Sousa Santos argues that, in the Brazilian society – which, according to him, emerged in the midst of colonialism and slavery – social class and race are intertwined for ‘the poor’ – the unmodern subject par excellence – are also marked by a different skin color: a darker one. But if this is the case, and if some linguists tend to take social class seriously, why is it that they often do not factor in race – or the social meaning of skin color – when investigating linguistic variation in the Brazilian context? A possible answer can be found in Dante Lucchesi’s *Língua e sociedade partidas: a polarização linguística no Brasil* (‘Fractured language and society: the linguistic polarization in Brazil’).

Lucchesi (2015) described and analyzed the Brazilian case of quasi-diglossia. According to the author, there is a significant linguistic divide between “the language of power” (p. 191) and vernacular dialects because there is a significant economic divide between the upper classes – who speak “the language of power” – and other social groups, as well as the affordances such a divide offers. For instance, a higher social standing allows one access to better education and a specific linguistic repertoire deemed Standard. In other words, the Brazilian linguistic situation of quasi-diglossia reflects a more encompassing social issue. And this divide, Lucchesi argued, is not necessarily a racialized one. According to the author:

The end of the slave trade, the abolition of slavery and arrival of millions of European and Asian immigrants between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century slowly blurred the ethnic

⁸ “Na ótica dos marcadores sociais colonialistas, o pobre é uma forma de sub-humanidade, uma forma degradada de ser que combina cinco formas de degradação: ser ignorante, ser inferior, ser atrasado, ser vernáculo ou folclórico, ser preguiçoso ou improdutivo. O sinal comum a todas elas é o pobre não ter a mesma cor que o rico”.

matrixes of the sociolinguistic polarization. And the processes of industrialization and urbanization of the Brazilian society, which took effect from the 1930's onwards, ended up defining the current contours of the sociolinguistic polarization of the country. (LUCCHESI, 2015, p. 35)⁹

It would be incorrect to say that Lucchesi (2015) ignored the correlation between race and class. The author did state that most inhabitants of favelas and lower-income neighborhoods are black or mixed race (2015, p. 23). In fact, Africanized Brazilian Portuguese does figure in Lucchesi's (2015) theory of a continuum between vernacular and standard dialects. For instance, when describing the rural-urban axis of vernacular dialects, Lucchesi (2015) argues that there is a continuum amongst the following dialects: Afro-Brazilian Portuguese; popular rural Portuguese; countryside popular 'rurban' Portuguese; countryside popular urban Portuguese; big-city popular 'rurban' Portuguese; big-city popular urban Portuguese (p. 218). But although 'Afro-Brazilian Portuguese' is a category present in Lucchesi's (2015) work, it was in a previous book (LUCCHESI et al., 2009) that he defined it more completely:

[The phrase] *Afro-Brazilian Portuguese* refers to a [linguistic] variety that comprehends patterns of linguistic behavior from rural communities [that are] mostly composed by direct descendants of African slaves who settled in remote locations in the outbacks of the country. (LUCCHESI et al., 2009, p. 32)¹⁰

Similarly to what we saw in Vogt and Fry (2014), in Lucchesi's (2015) taxonomy Afro varieties are those most closely tied to past: they are not only Africanized – and

⁹ “O fim do tráfico negreiro, a abolição da escravatura e o ingresso no país de milhões de imigrantes europeus e asiáticos, entre o final do século XIX e o início do século XX, foram esmaecendo os matizes étnicos da polarização sociolinguística. E os processos de industrialização e urbanização da sociedade brasileira, que se iniciaram efetivamente a partir de 1930, acabaram por definir os contornos atuais da polarização sociolinguística do país”.

¹⁰ “O *português afro-brasileiro* designa ... uma variedade constituída pelos padrões de comportamento linguístico de comunidades rurais compostas em sua maioria por descendentes diretos de escravos africanos que se fixaram em localidades remotas do interior do país”.

therefore vestiges of a politico-economic reality that no longer exists – but are also rural, that is, remnants of a pre-industrial Brazil. In fact, the space occupied by Afro-influenced varieties is so marginal in Lucchesi’s rural-urban taxonomy that one cannot be surprised to realize they have no place at all in a complementary taxonomy proposed by the author and organized solely along social-class lines (p. 283). But Lucchesi (2015) is not the only scholar to privilege social class over race. For instance, Marcos Bagno (2013, p. 59) argues that:

... there is prejudice against the characteristic speech of certain regions just like there is prejudice against the speech of certain social classes. For instance, the way Northeastern speech is depicted in telenovelas is a true attack on human rights.¹¹

When moving beyond social class, Bagno (2013) directs his attention to media representations of regional differences – and one stigmatized region in particular: the Northeast. Sousa Santos (2014) has argued that the internal colonialist dynamics in Brazil happens mainly between the colonialist South(east) and the colonized North(east). In addition, linguist Daniel do Nascimento e Silva (2010) has demonstrated that since the early 20th century Southeastern media outlets have depicted Northeasterners as the epitome of the pre-modern subject: the Northeast is usually represented as a rural, pre-industrial, and outdated land full of ignorant people who look different from their Southernmost counterparts. In other words, the Northeast is everything the Southeast is not – and would never want to be (Silva, 2010). Given these facts, it would be no exaggeration to say that Southern depictions of the Northeast are quite racialized; after all, from a Southern perspective, Northeasterners are those who look, speak and behave like undesirable Others. However, Bagno (2013)

¹¹ “... do mesmo jeito que existe o preconceito contra a fala de determinadas classes sociais, também existe o preconceito contra a fala característica de certas regiões. É um verdadeiro acinte aos direitos humanos, por exemplo, o modo como a fala nordestina é retratada nas novelas de televisão”.

adopted an alternative standpoint: he did not racialize the region, and instead treated region-based linguistic discrimination under the umbrella of class-based linguistic discrimination. According to Bagno (2013), the fact that Northeasterners are perceived as ignorant – that is, as people who do not have access to a proper education – is, ultimately, a marker of social class.

Another influential author who has investigated language variation in Brazil is applied linguist Stella Maris Bortoni-Ricardo. In her 2005 book, *Nós chegemu na escola, e agora?* ('We made it to school, now what?'), Bortoni-Ricardo built on the research she started in her doctorate (1985), and argued that three different *continua* need to be considered when analyzing variation within Brazilian Portuguese: the rural-urban continuum, the orality-literacy continuum, and the stylistic monitoring one. According to the author, the ability to move along each continuum might be an index of one's social positioning. For instance, educated middle-class individuals tend to be more successful at navigating the stylistic monitoring continuum, young urban speakers tend to be exposed to more dialects – and thus navigate a longer stretch of the orality-literacy continuum –, whereas rural folks tend to struggle with urban dialects. On the one hand, Lucchesi (2015) seems to be aligned with Bortoni-Ricardo when he emphasized the importance of considering more than one axis when analyzing linguistic variation. On the other, Bagno (2013) was arguably more influenced by the emphasis Bortoni-Ricardo (2005) placed on *region* as an analytical category. For Bortoni-Ricardo (2005) – as it would be for Bagno (2013) – region and regional varieties may serve as an index of education and, indirectly, an index of social class. Additionally, and similarly to Bagno (2013), Bortoni-Ricardo (2005) did not racialize regional differences.

In a book that was published after her 2005 study, but was based on her doctoral fieldwork carried out in the 1980's, Bortoni-Ricardo (2011) focuses on one of the aforementioned continua, the rural-urban one, and on its relationship to social

networks. The author investigated the language practices of migrant workers who had migrated to the areas surrounding Brasília, the national capital, during the years in which the city was being built, and who settled in the area after the new capital was inaugurated in 1960. According to Bortoni-Ricardo, the gap between the dialects spoken by those who built the city and those who were supposed to occupy government positions was such that it could even be analyzed in terms of intercultural communication (2011, pp. 241-259) – a claim that resembles Lucchesi's (2015) thesis of quasi-diglossia. In addition, Bortoni-Ricardo (2011) engaged gender in her monograph and challenged the assumption that urban women tend to orient more toward overtly prestigious forms and lead language change (TRUDGIL, 1972). According to Bortoni-Ricardo (2011), the women she studied had more restricted social networks (a fact that was reflected in their less flexible linguistic repertoire) when compared to those of their male counterparts within the same age group (TRUDGIL, 1972, p. 178). Their position, closer to the rural end of the continuum, Bortoni-Ricardo (2011) argued, was more related to the limitation of their social network than to linguistic insecurity or orientation towards overtly prestigious linguistic forms. Similarly to Bagno (2013), Bortoni-Ricardo mentioned the importance of regional background in how her subjects were perceived – as more rural –, and did not racialize such differences.

Taking Bortoni-Ricardo's (2005) work as a point of departure, Carlos Alberto Faraco (2008) investigated the sociopolitical factors that informed the creation of the so-called *norma culta brasileira* ('Brazilian Standard [linguistic] Norm') – which the author also called *norma curta brasileira* in a pun that implies that *Standard* ('cult') and *short-sighted* ('curta') are quasi-synonymous. According to Faraco (2008), the so-called Standard was imposed primarily by the literate economic and political elite of the 19th century – whose power and influence were inversely proportional to its size – and enforced by the other elite groups who succeeded that first one. Although Faraco (2008) agreed with Bortoni-Ricardo (2005) that three continua (urban-rural, orality-

literacy, stylistic monitoring) need to be factored in in the study of language variation, his main sociohistorical thesis about the connection between a Standard Brazilian Portuguese and economic elites place him closer to Lucchesi (2015) and the emphasis the latter places on the correlation between groups who control power and the language they impose onto other social groups. However, unlike Lucchesi (2015) and similarly to Bortoni-Ricardo (2005), Faraco (2008) did not place racial matters at the center of his theoretical preoccupations.

In sum, it seems that the main trend in scholarship on language variation in Brazilian Portuguese is not to use *race* as an analytical category, and to use *social class* instead – or other categories that serve as indices of social class, such as *ruralness* or *level of education*. When authors do engage with race, such as Lucchesi (2015) or Ilari and Basso (2006), they tend to limit its importance to previous times, prior to the transformation of Brazil into an ethnically diverse and miscigenated nation in which the importance of *race* has greatly diminished, or even become irrelevant – a claim which is in accordance with the Brazilian myth of racial democracy.

5. Conclusions

In sum, in this essay I have discussed how linguistic scholarship on African continuities in Brazilian Portuguese and on language variation within Brazilian Portuguese have approached *race* – and, in particular, *blackness*. In spite of some variation, it was possible to find a common trend among scholars who investigated such distinct topics as African languages in Brazil, language contact between African languages and Brazilian Portuguese, *Quilombola* communities, and language variation and change in Brazilian Portuguese: (1) Despite occasional references to Indigenous languages, racialized speech is often equated with *blackness* or *Africanness*, (2) *Africanness* is commonly treated as an index of old, pre-modern times, and (3) due to its indexicality, *Africanness* does not belong in the modern national present.

Additionally, it is worth noting that several scholars who have investigated the aforementioned continuities believe that *social class* is a more relevant analytical category than *race*, and thus favor the former over the latter. In this essay, I suggest that this position might derive from an alignment with the myth of racial democracy, which locates racial difference in the past, and claims that the modern Brazilian state has been constructed through continuous racial miscegenation. Put differently, this stream of scholarship claims that social class differences are the most relevant ones due to the Brazilian history of racial mixing – and the consequent virtual erasure of race as a relevant analytical category. These commonalities among different streams of research, I claim, cannot be dissociated from broader narratives of racial mixing, and the consequent de-Africanizing effects of these ideologies.

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