

Who’s Afraid of the Fluidity in Language?: Can the Trans-Subaltern Speak?

Quem tem medo da fluidez na linguagem?: podem es trans-subalternes falar?

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ABSTRACT: In this article, public space is not considered neutral, but an arena where meanings are contested and also negotiated. Thus, we defend that Linguistic Landscapes (LL) can be used as an educational tool for language learning and for interpreting political and social issues (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, based upon language studies, visual literacies, aesthetics, politics and social inclusion, we call for a redefinition of the process of translanguaging and look for an understanding of this process beyond bilingualism and multilingualism. We defend the need to expand our understanding of translanguaging and situate it also within named and “bounded” languages. In order to tackle translanguaging and gender inclusive language, each section starts with the problematization of one or more Linguistic Landscape(s) from two contexts: The University of São Paulo or the city of São Paulo and we discuss the concepts of Différance and the trans-subaltern, the epistemic and violent representation of the Other, and how the concepts of Police and Politics (RANCIÈRE, 2004; 2010) hugely influence the aesthetics and meaning-making of translanguages and trans-bodies.

KEYWORDS: linguistic landscapes; gender inclusive language; trans-subaltern bodies; translanguaging; language education.

RESUMO: Neste artigo, o espaço público não é considerado neutro, mas uma arena onde significados são contestados e, também, negociados. Como tal, defendemos que Paisagens Linguísticas (PL) podem ser usadas como uma ferramenta educacional para a aprendizagem de línguas e para a interpretação de questões políticas e sociais (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 9). Portanto, com base em estudos de linguagem, letramentos visuais, estética, política e inclusão social, clamamos por uma redefinição do processo de translanguagem e buscamos uma compreensão desse processo para além do bilinguismo e do multilinguismo. Defendemos a necessidade de expandir nosso entendimento sobre translanguagem e situá-la também no âmbito de linguagens nomeadas e “delimitadas”. Para abordar a translanguagem e a linguagem inclusiva de gênero, cada seção começa com a problematização de uma ou mais Paisagens Linguísticas de dois contextos: a Universidade de São Paulo ou a cidade de São Paulo e discutimos os



conceitos de *Différance* e de *trans-subalterne*, a representação epistêmica e violenta de *Outre*, e como os conceitos da *Polícia* e da *Política* (RANCIÈRE, 2004; 2010) influenciam de forma decisiva a estética e a significação das translanguagens e de corpos *trans*.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: paisagens linguísticas; linguagem inclusiva de gênero; corpos *trans* subalternos; translanguagem; ensino de línguas.

1 Introduction

After two years of COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing, one of the most prestigious Higher Education institutions in Brazil, the University of São Paulo, opened the doors of its main campus in the city of São Paulo for the public and its students with welcoming outdoors that read “Bem-vindas, Bem-vindos e Bem-vindes ao nosso campus”¹. It is heartwarming when one of the most important hubs for thinking society in Latin America and worldwide, and a socially and politically contested space decides for the first time to “mark the UN-marked” (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2018, p. 233) gender identities in language amid the gender wars we have been experiencing. The UN-marked binary perception of gender identities in some languages usually reinforces and naturalizes certain ways of living our gender identities. The banners mentioned here carried the official colors of the educational institution marking the space as inclusive gender-wise.

Figure 1 – Gender and language diversity



Source: authors' private collection

Figure 2 – Gender and language diversity



Source: authors' private collection

However, language ideologies in “linguistic landscapes” (LL) or “words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces” (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 1) never come unchallenged as we shall show ahead in this paper. Somehow, some of the linguistic manifestations that appear on outdoors, graffiti and other forms of street art unsettle the ways we perceive our language and reality by establishing forms of communication with passers-by. The field of LL can be of interest to different areas of study. For our own

¹ The three expressions mean “welcome” in English. In the first case, the expression is marked by the female gender, in the second case by the male and in the third one by the suffix *-e* which marks gender inclusive language

purposes, we reflect from the perspective of Critical Applied Linguistics, language education, politics, aesthetics, sociology, philosophy, and decolonial thinking.

Political and social activist forms of socially representing gender diversity in Linguistic Landscapes resist the “officiality” that “can affect language practices”, since “the public space has its own rules and regulations, which are often unique as they tend to defy declared policies” (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 3). Moreover, Linguistic Landscapes contextualize “the public space within issues of identity and language policy of nations, political and social conflicts” (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 4) since “language facts are ‘social facts’ which can be related to general social phenomena” (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 4). As stated by Shohamy and Gorter (2009):

Such language, that can be found everywhere, is closely related to people as they are the ones producing it and who choose the ways to represent and display it in diverse spaces. People are the ones who hang the signs, display posters, design advertisements, write instructions and create websites. It is also people who read, attend, decipher and interpret these language displays, or at times, choose to overlook, ignore or erase them (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 1).

It seems that linguistic landscapes (LL) can be constituted as a scene for an “ecology of knowledges” (SOUSA SANTOS, 2011, p. 66-67) that is emerging “as an innovative practice that works towards the decolonization of our knowledges and the construction of a postcolonial university where the hierarchies among knowledges are deconstructed and in their place a cognitive justice is established” (MIZAN; ALCANTARA, 2019, p. 174). The “ecology of knowledges” approach can impact the “ecology of languages” (HULT, 2009, p. 88) in a specific LL and can be of interest to critical applied linguists who

are interested in understanding the deeper meanings and messages conveyed in language in places and spaces. LL items (whatever ways they are defined) offer rich and stimulating texts on multiple levels—single words with deep meanings and shared knowledge, colorful images, sounds and moving objects and infinite creative representations. These displays shape the ecology in local, global and transnational contexts and in multiple languages (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 1).

Similarly, theories of identity and language that are taken up in the classrooms in the Humanities affect the ways future academics are educated: is language a system or a structure that is fixed and should be taken as something sacred to be carefully preserved? Or is language a sociocultural practice that constantly seeks to reflect the changes that are taking place in society in different historical moments? Moreover, in other fields of knowledge² in the classrooms of any university, the question of marking the gender in language practices emerges, since fluid and trans-identities that are looking for emancipation are everywhere and seeking to experience the spaces they circulate as places where they can project their fluid processes of identification and their transition processes.

We propose to give some answers to questions we think are of great importance nowadays in language studies, visual literacies, aesthetics, politics, and social inclusion: Is gender inclusive language strictly

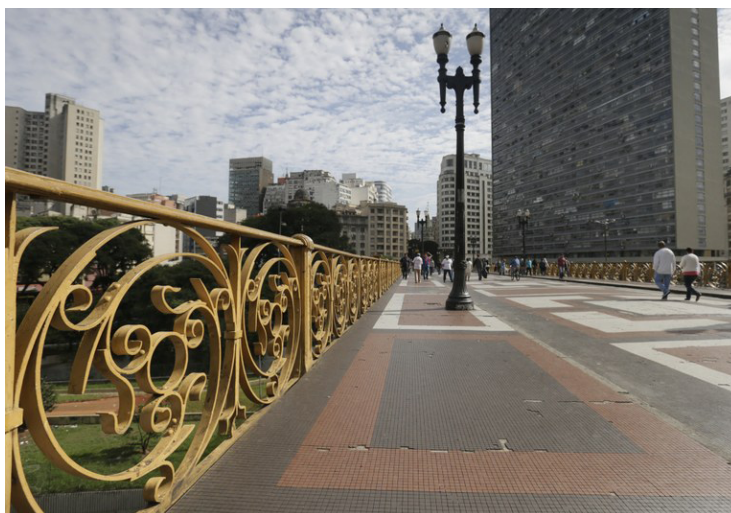
²Professors from all areas of knowledge (chemistry, engineering, anthropology, mathematics etc.) are always approached by students who don't want to be called as they are listed in the attendance list, but wish to use their social name in the institution.

a language question? Is gender inclusive language used broadly, in most social practices, or just in ‘contact zones’ in a political act of inclusion of identities and their difference? Who decides which *loci* of enunciation are accepted as true and which ones are excluded, erased from the ‘language game’? How can grammar become more human and less violent? Can language education form educators capable of reflecting on language diversity and literacy practices from a critical perspective?

In this article, public space is considered “not neutral but rather a negotiated and contested arena; as such [we] argue for the use of LL as an educational tool for language learning and for interpreting political and social issues, especially in contested societies” (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 9).

2 Différance and the trans-subaltern

Figure 3 – Santa Ifigênia Viaduct (city of São Paulo)



Source: São Paulo City Hall – photo by Cesar Ogata³

If one has a chance to cross the iconic *Viaduto Santa Ifigênia* (Santa Ifigênia Viaduct) right in the heart of the city of São Paulo (at least since March 2022), one will be able to see three gigantic faces, three astonishing works of art representing faces of three women (an indigenous woman, a transgender woman and a black woman). In one of them we were able to recognize the image of Maite Schneider, a transgender woman and activist whose work has transformed the images and lives of transgenders in Brazil: “She is at the forefront of social projects aimed at employability and education of transgender people and is the godmother of many other initiatives, such as Casa Florescer” (LIMA, 2022, our translation).

³ Available at: <https://www.capital.sp.gov.br/noticia/prefeitura-inicia-revitalizacao-do-viaduto-santa-ifigenia>. Accessed on: 30 May 2022.

Figure 4 – Viaduto Santa Ifigênia



Source: authors' private collection

There are some lessons we can take from this image and its presence right in the downtown area of the city. The first one is that although many people in Brazil symbolically and physically attack the transgender non-hegemonic bodies⁴, these bodies do exist; still, it has been difficult for many to understand that there are other ways (non-heteronormative) of experiencing genders and sexualities and this image of Maite Schneider remains as a legacy of their/our fight; and finally, this very image allows us to philosophically problematize the difference put forward by trans-subaltern bodies and voices.

There are some lessons that modernity taught us that we find very difficult to do away with: homogeneity, abstraction, generalization, binary thinking, and fixed truths. Epistemically speaking, the fields of knowledge established together with the foundation of modern university, have attempted to organize each field using frameworks that were based on approaches that privileged the gaze produced in the Global North⁵ and ignored perspectives that didn't follow the rules of the game of modernity. In many ways, the Global South per se and the one that has always existed in the Global North – the poor, the socially and culturally excluded, the bodies marked by gender difference, racial and class differences, and all identities that may be labeled as the subaltern – wants to break free from the binary relation it has historically constructed

⁴ Available at: <https://www.brasilefato.com.br/2022/01/23/ha-13-anos-no-topo-da-lista-brasil-continua-sendo-o-pais-que-mais-mata-pessoas-trans-no-mundo>. Accessed on: 30 May 2022.

⁵ The Global North, for Sousa Santos, is the locus of scientific knowledge, of modernity, rationality and universal truths. On the other hand, the Global South is the place where the struggles against patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism and heteronormativity should be fought.

with what is supposed to be its opposite. This for Argentinian semiotician and literature professor Walter Mignolo would be a decolonial perspective on organizing reality that demands border thinking:

The internal variability of “differe/a/nce” cannot transcend the colonial difference, where deconstruction has to be subsumed and transformed by decolonization. In other words, the transcending of the colonial difference can only be done from a perspective of subalternity, from decolonization, and, therefore, from a new epistemological terrain where border thinking works... Border thinking can only be such from a subaltern perspective, never from a territorial (e.g., from inside modernity) one. Border thinking from a territorial perspective becomes a machine of appropriation of colonial differe/a/nces, the colonial difference as an object of study rather than as an epistemic potential. Border thinking from the perspective of subalternity is a machine for intellectual decolonization. (MIGNOLO, 2000, p. 45)

We suggest in this article that subaltern studies have a lot in common with trans-studies, such as transgender studies, translation studies, translanguaging, transexual bodies and other trans configurations. Those trans phenomena that are part of human experience are the ones that the abyssal lines (SOUSA SANTOS, 2007), created by the epistemologies of modernity, have turned invisible, peripheral and thought of as non-existent. Thus, the neologism trans*⁶ tries to include all those human expressions, although abjection and transgendered bodies, in a post-structuralist approach, are a threat to the *status quo*:

Abjection, as Kristeva describes it, “disturbs identity, system, order” (1982, p. 4) and encompasses a kind of borderline uncertainty – ambiguous, horrifying, and polluting. Transgendered bodies, then, especially when viewed as physical bodies in transition, defy the borders of systemic order by refusing to adhere to clear definitions of sex and gender. The abject can thus serve as a cleaving point of abstruseness and unease – separating, pathologizing, and psychologizing trans subjectivity. The anxiety at the root of this unease with transgender subjectivity can be traced back, in part, to a fear of the ambiguous. (PHILLIPS, 2014, p. 20)

We consider that there is an urgent need to enter in touch with difference through translation processes in order to avoid assimilationist approaches to intercultural contact that seek the containment of difference (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2012, p. 71). Admitting that we all know some things while we are ignorant in others, is an attitude of opening up that has the potential to overcome the desire to reduce difference to sameness while positioning it as inferior in the binary frame of understanding gender. Translation processes won’t necessarily take us to a clear understanding of languages we know little about. Yet, the openness to translate in the other’s own terms the languages that emerge among trans-subjectivities, reveals a decolonial attitude that seeks to learn with difference:

The need for translation implies the need to know what one does not know. Translation, like the knowledges interconnected horizontally in an ecology, rather than signifying a complete transference of meaning, implies incompleteness and ignorance and the need to overcome both; translation refers also to the fact that overcoming both of these in order to attain the desire of completeness is beyond realization. (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2018, p. 20).

⁶Trans* (trans with an asterisk) is thus meant to include not only identities such as transgender, transsexual, trans man, and trans woman that are prefixed by trans- but also identities such as genderqueer, neutrois, intersex, agender, two-spirit, cross-dresser, and genderfluid (TOMPKINS, 2014, p. 27).

The processes of “resignification and recontextualization” (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2018, p. 25) of “standard” language norms take place among non-hegemonic gender groups who fight to mark the “previously unmarked” (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2018, p. 233) hegemonic binary and, at the same time, predominantly masculine language. The norm is exclusionary since it was constructed from a hegemonic position:

[...] the critical objective of calling attention to loci enunciation is to *contrast and confront hegemonic loci of enunciation, previously unmarked and universalized, with non-hegemonic loci of enunciation*. The critical strategy embedded in this is to *unleash previously invisible knowledges*. This unleashing makes apparent the entanglement between the hegemonic and non-hegemonic, their mutual constitution, and therefore deconstructs the claims to unmarkedness and hegemony of the hegemonic. (MENEZES DE SOUZA; GUILHERME, 2018, p. 233) (Emphasis in the original)

The entanglement between hegemonic identities and non-hegemonic “abject” trans-identities can unleash an epistemological process that is geared by what Andreotti and Menezes de Souza (2008) have called “Learning to UN-learn”, which is a critical approach to learning that asks us to unlearn the truths we have been constituted by. In language studies, this critical epistemology that also involves “Learning to Listen”, “Learning to Learn with the other” and “Learning to Reach Out”, necessarily drives us away from structuralism and takes us to unknown territories of the trans-subaltern who desires to speak (SPIVAK, 1988). Seeing the world through other eyes is a political attitude of entanglement and engagement with gazes, perspectives and languages we know nothing or very little about. Moreover, this epistemology is not only the result of a critical attitude but also comes as a consequence of globalization processes:

Many of these theorists of language seem to agree that in the context of globalization, language study has moved away from a focus on *languages* as structured, independent units, linked to specific cultures and nations, to a focus on *language* seen as a set of resources of linguistic semiotic features that can be assembled and reassembled into *registers* and *repertoires*... this change of focus should be expected to reflect a change of perspective from that of regulation to that of solidarity or in other words, a move away from the perspective of the rule-maker to that of the user of language. (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2018, p. 26) (Emphasis in the original)

Epistemic disobedience for Mignolo demands a “perspective of geo- and bio-graphic politics of knowledge” (MIGNOLO, 2009, p. 4). The trans-subaltern, as the *knower*, is geographically and bodily implicated to the *known* since they speak from a certain *locus* of enunciation which is epistemic while seeking to break away from normative language structures of modern epistemology, that turns them into invisible entities and submits them to the will of a neutral specialist on language, a rational, objective researcher that is committed to “the hubris of the zero point” (CASTRO-GÓMEZ, 2007) epistemology that keeps turning into non-existent social movements and struggles. For Mignolo (2009)

Changing the terms of the conversation implies going beyond disciplinary or interdisciplinary controversies and the conflict of interpretations. As far as controversies and interpretations remain within the same rules of the game (terms of the conversation), the control of knowledge is not called into question. And in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the

knower rather than on the known. It means to go to the very assumptions that sustain locus enunciations. (MIGNOLO, 2009, p. 4)

Although the concept of translanguaging (GARCÍA; KLEIFGEN, 2019) is mainly approached from the bilingual or multilingual perspective, we would like to propose here the translanguaging process as possible also in the many languages that Brazilian Portuguese is used. In other words, and in a broader sense, translanguaging can be thought of as internal to bounded conceptions of named languages. The *trans* prefix can be interpreted as a movement of transgression (GARCÍA; KLEIFGEN, 2019, p. 4), of transformation of the society and identities, of chances to transition and of going beyond literal and imaginary language rules and epistemological borders. Translanguaging as an approach that situates “teaching and acting in the society in the intersection of language and social justice” (CASTRO, 2020, p. 1) may open up space for thinking these processes otherwise. Rocha (2019) cites the work of Canagarajah (2017) who “presupposes an understanding of linguistic resources as constitutively mobile and as generators of new meanings and grammars” (ROCHA, 2019, p. 19).

In summary, this image/LL in downtown SP of Maite Schneider (and the problematizations it made us develop) remind(s) us that:

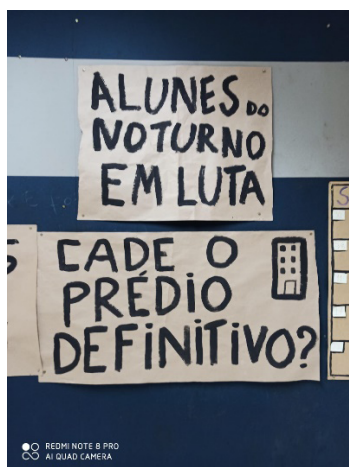
- We need to question the modern abyssal lines which place trans-bodies and voices as invisible, and when visible, seen as despicable, as abject;
- There is a(n) (urgent) need of translation, recontextualization and re-signification of non-hegemonic bodies; this work can and should be done through education along with all other hegemonic modern institutions (medicine, law, religion, official governmentality);
- At the same time, Schneider’s image and presence is an example of epistemic disobedience in times of ultra-alt-right conservatism in Brazil;
- We call for a redefinition of the process of translanguaging: we need to expand our understanding of translanguaging beyond bilingualism and multilingualism and situate it also within and across named languages. In the case of Portuguese, we insist upon the re-envisioning and reviewing of some of its grammar aspects (such as the binary gender language).

3 From the violence of representation to epistemic and cognitive violence

Going back to the campus of the University of São Paulo (USP), if we enter the first floor of the Faculty of Philosophy, Languages and Human Sciences (FFLCH), the oldest and largest faculty of that university, amongst the many official notes and documents, and visual protests (like “Out Bolsonaro!”⁷), one can see the following visual board:

⁷Jair Messias Bolsonaro is the Brazilian politician and retired military officer who was the president of Brazil from January 1st 2019 to December 31st 2022. During his presidency he fought free thinking in public universities and restricted resources for research.

Figure 5 – Protest, FFLCH, USP



Source: authors' private collection⁸

Besides the protest above that demands the new and definite building of FFLCH, the word “students” which in Brazilian Portuguese is only possible in the masculine (*alunos*) and feminine (*alunas*) genders, is written with the vowel -e (*alunes*), which is the contemporary language solution that the subaltern minoritized non-hegemonic bodies have found to claim their existence in language (and society) and, as defended here, to mark the UN-marked.

Silva (2019) defends that the political violence of representation is sustained by the maintenance of “regimes of truth” (RANCIÈRE, 2004, p. 38) of certain social groups that somehow crystalize and disseminate prejudice and advocates that “it is necessary to leave the sensation of comfort cherished by our truths supposedly unquestionable and, consequently, violent, since they obliterate other ways of seeing, feeling and interacting (in) the world” (SILVA, 2019, p. 169). She goes on and reiterates that “the process of meaning-making interconnects signifier (word, image, gesture) and signified (concept, object), through a cultural and historical-social referent” (SILVA, 2019, p. 171) that is the *locus* of enunciation any subject occupies. Violence of representation, hence, is a form of “symbolic violence of power relations that is hidden in the erasure of the other when s/he ceases to exist socially and does not have the right to narrate themselves” (SILVA, 2019, p. 172).

How should the area of Critical Applied Linguistics study the changes in language and the defense of language fluidity that certain members of our society are pushing for? Are we implied in those struggles as scientists and language professors? Are we supposed to take responsibility for the violence that certain “regimes of truth” (RANCIÈRE, 2004, p. 38) perform? Why isn’t a variety of regimes of truth being valorized either in the academy or in society if we need this diversity in perspectives in order to construct our informed point of view?

The images of the visual representations we discuss in the opening sessions of this paper dialogue, in an antagonistic attitude, on the question of the right to exist in language. In a symbolic way, these visual presences, are signs of the fact that there are narratives that society has silenced, oppressed, and declared nonexistent. Gustafsson, Bäck and Lindqvist (2015, p. 1) agree that “new words challenging the binary gender

⁸ Our translation: Students of the evening shift in fight. Where is our Building?

system evoke hostile and negative reactions, but also that attitudes can normalize rather quickly”. Language conventions do exist in every sociohistorical time and the binary way of thinking concepts, and, in our case, gender identity have been dominant, but are nowadays being challenged.

The visual texts we are analyzing here reveal that there is a certain “distribution of the sensible” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 95) that defines “who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (RANCIÈRE, 2004, p. 12). Which groups can have a say on how language represents gender identity? Can the trans-subaltern speak or even think? In the Linguistic Landscapes we’ve been discussing here, the political texts that emerge are socially and artistically polemic and, “like forms of knowledge, construct ‘fictions’, that is to say material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done” (RANCIÈRE, 2004, p. 39). Moreover, this aesthetics that is, in fact, politics has an effect in the “distribution of sensible” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 95) inside the society:

They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies. They thereby take hold of unspecified groups of people, they widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognize their images. (RANCIÈRE, 2004, p. 39)

If we are open to listen carefully what certain identities have been struggling to show us about dominant regimes of gender representation in language and their regimes of truth, we will notice that in most language usage these changes mainly occur when bodies are demanding gender fair language. Gustafsson *et al.* (2015) define two types of gender fair language: on the one hand, “*feminization* implies the use of gender-appropriate forms, and is more often used in languages with grammatical gender” (p. 2) and on the other hand, “*neutralization* is more commonly employed in so called ‘natural gender languages’ (e.g., English, Swedish, Norwegian), and implies that gender-neutral forms are preferred over gendered forms” (p. 2). An example of the process of feminization in the Portuguese language would be the occurrences such as *Presidenta*,⁹ the feminine version of *Presidente*, while the process of neutralization would be the change from the UN-marked *mankind* to the more inclusive *humankind*.¹⁰ The authors explain the emergence of “the gender neutral third person pronoun, *hen*, as a complement to the Swedish words for she (*hon*) and he (*han*)” (p. 2). The similarities between this approach and the Brazilian Portuguese use of “*bem-vindas*, *bem-vindos e bem-vindes*” (discussed in the introduction) and “*alunes*” (discussed in this section) are quite evident. However, the Portuguese language has not yet added a third gender-neutral pronoun (although the *elu* system that uses the marked pronoun *elu* instead of the unmarked gender pronouns *ele* and *ela* has been gaining ground¹¹), something that has occurred up to now, as far as we know, only in the Swedish language. Moreover, the implementation of new gender fair words is not always welcome, since opponents

⁹ A feminine occupational title that was negatively evaluated here in Brazil, during the mandate of President Dilma Rousseff, the first Brazilian female President, in relation to its masculine traditional form.

¹⁰ We are aware that we are inevitably trapped in the structures of language. Although humankind seems more inclusive it inescapably includes the word “man” in its structure.

¹¹ Available at: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sistema_elu. Accessed on: 30 May 2022.

to these natural changes defend that gender is a natural category and that gender fair language proponents seek to destroy biology and end up disorienting children in relation to their gender (GUSTAFSSON *et al.*, 2015, p. 2-3). Buenos Aires has recently forbidden, for example, gender inclusive language at schools since the education secretary defends that inclusive language violates the rules of Spanish language and hinders students' reading comprehension.¹²

We assume that language changes take a long time to be implemented because aesthetically language has constituted us to be favorable to certain modes of speech that follow certain regimes of distribution of the sensible. We, as critical applied linguists and as citizens in a society that seeks to become more inclusive and democratic, cannot adopt a de-politicized stance. The gendered structure of the Portuguese language has created abyssal lines (SOUSA SANTOS, 2007) that seek to eliminate realities that are lived by bodies that occupy the other side of the abyssal lines, becoming invisible and non-existent to the bodies and minds that are situated in this side of the abyssal lines where rational, objective and scientific minds (without bodies) make the decisions.

Sousa Santos (2018) defends the emergence of the Epistemologies of the South, or the welcoming into the academy and in the Eurocentric scientific thought, of knowledges that emanate from bodies that historically have been turned into invisible or irrelevant, by following two strategies: the Sociology of absences and the Sociology of emergences. The sociology of absences pursues possibilities of "turning absent subjects into present subjects as the foremost condition for identifying and validating knowledges that may reinvent social emancipation and liberation" (SOUSA SANTOS, 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, "the sociology of emergences concerns the symbolic, analytical, and political valorization of the ways of being and knowing made present on the other side of the abyssal line by the sociology of absences" (SOUSA SANTOS, 2018, p. 28). In this manner, victims of exclusion have chances to go through "the process of setting aside victimhood and becoming resisting people practicing ways of being and knowing in their struggle against domination" (SOUSA SANTOS, 2018, p. 28).

Campanella (2021) discusses that "since the 19th century, philosophers and scholars from different fields have explored the concept of recognition and its implications for the formation of personal identities and even for the transformation of society" (p. 284). Honneth and Margalit (2001) call the expressive gestures of recognition of the other "the demonstration of 'emotional readiness to engage morally with the other'" (HONNETH; MARGALIT, 2001, p. 122 *apud* CAMPANELLA, 2021, p. 287). How can we create horizontal processes of recognition of subjectivities, bodies and identities that have been shouting out their desire to be heard in relation to the right they have to be represented in language?

In summary, a "simple" visual protest at a Faculty of Philosophy might engender the philosophical language questions we wish to have debated in this section:

- The "regimes of truth" (RANCIÈRE, 2004, p. 38) of certain social hegemonic groups crystallize and disseminate prejudice by advocating that the world has to be binary, as in "biology", therefore heteronormative, heterosexual and preferably white, male and "rich";
- These regimes of truth distribute the sensible and if we, as language specialists and as citizens

¹² Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2022/07/buenos-aires-proibe-linguagem-de-genero-neutro-em-escolas-e-abre-batalha-com-ativistas.shtml>. Accessed on: 30 May 2022.

seek to become more inclusive and democratic, we cannot adopt a de-politicized stance in relation to language(s);

- Finally, we need to pay attention to the Sociology of absences and the Sociology of emergences, in the case of the image of this section, what is absent is the very naturalization of the grammar of the Brazilian Portuguese (considered, as many languages, sexist and patriarchal), what emerges is the new non heteronormative/heterosexual language of ONE word, *alunes*.

4 Police and Politics on the aesthetics of languages and bodies

As mentioned above, Linguistic Landscapes are contested spaces and our drive through the streets of the aforementioned Higher Education Institution took us to the Sports Complex where the layering of signs on the walls at the entrance attracted our gaze by drawing our attention to the languages that emerge in this public space and by raising our language awareness that “showed us how LL is a most important indicator capable of providing relevant information about societies, vitality and the inter-relationship of groups, especially in linguistic contested regions” (SHOHAMY; GORTER, 2009, p. 2).

In the images below (Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10), taken on the same day the images in Figures 1 and 2 of this article were shot, at the University of São Paulo (Butantã Campus), outside its Sports Complex, we can see wall paintings representing “symbolic messages about the importance, power, significance, and relevance of certain languages or the irrelevance of others” (SHOHAMY, 2006, p. 110), as some traditional thinking on gendered language manifests itself as violence. Our visual data collection described here seeks to contextualize the “gender fluid language wars” that have been taking place for some time now in Brazil and worldwide, and analyze how visual discourses on gender neutral suffixes interact and finally make a critical reading of this hotly contested area of language studies.

The wall paintings were made by a graffiti artist during the revitalization of the Sports Complex wall in 2014 and they represent people practicing sports. It can be seen in the image below - taken from an official site of the institution - that the paintings in the original project contained no verbal language and for years this is the way they remained.

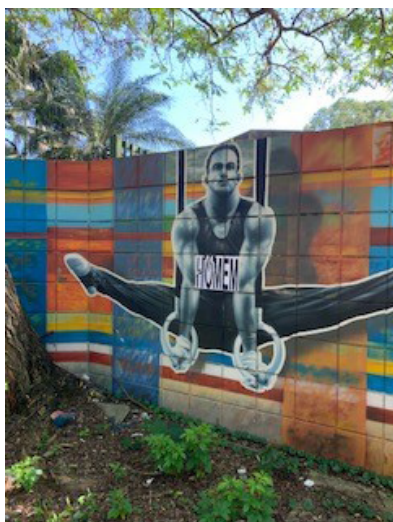
Figure 6 – Project for the revitalization of the Sports Complex



Source: official site of the institution¹³

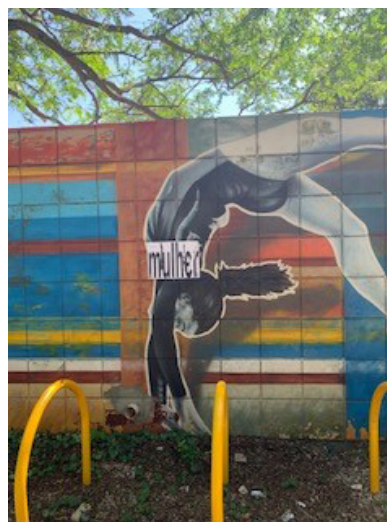
However, after the 2-year-long pandemic, and with the official reopening of the university and the courses taught in the Sports Complex, the graffiti paintings were found marked with the words *homem* (meaning man) and *mulher* (meaning woman). It has been more than two months after this act of vandalism was conducted and the authors of this article still could not find any report on this incident¹⁴. We would expect for example the students' association to have voiced its condemnation of the UN-marked gender identity being Re-marked since socially it has been threatened by non-binary, transgender or gender queer groups.

Figure 7 – marking the UN-marked



Source: authors' private collection

Figure 8 – marking the UN-marked



Source: authors' private collection

¹³ Available at: <https://imagens.usp.br/editorias/artes-categorias/projeto-de-revitalizacao-do-muro-do-cepeusp/>. Accessed on: 30 May 2022.

¹⁴ The concepts researched on Google were: graffiti; cepeusp; homem; mulher.

Figure 9 – marking the UN-marked



Source: authors' private collection

Figure 10 – marking the UN-marked



Source: authors' private collection

We are definitely witnessing visual and linguistic battles for the representation of certain gender identities and the university context provides an excellent space for this “ecology of knowledges” (SOUSA SANTOS, 2011, p. 66-67) and its linguistic manifestations. What we describe above, is “a symbolic event ...that strikes a blow to the existing regime of relations between the symbolic and the real” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 97). When it comes to social struggles that cause dissensus in a particular community, Rancière (2010) defends that there are forces that affect the “distribution of the sensible” (p. 95). On the one hand, “*police* designates not an institution of power but a distribution of the sensible within which it becomes possible to define strategies and techniques of power” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 95). Undoubtedly, “a single way of knowing the world, the scientific-technical rationality of the Occident, has been postulated as the only valid episteme, that is to say the only episteme capable of generating real knowledge about nature, the economy, society, morality and people’s happiness” (CASTRO-GÓMEZ, 2007, p. 428). This means that

Politics exists insofar as the people are not identified with a race or a population, nor the poor with a particular disadvantaged sector, nor the proletariat with a group of industrial workers, etc., but insofar as these latter are identified with subjects that inscribe, in the form of a supplement to every count of the parts of society, a specific figure of the count of the uncounted or of the part of those without part. That this part exists is the very stake of politics itself. Political conflict does not involve an opposition between groups with different interests. It forms an opposition between logics that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways. (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 35)

Still in the words of the philosopher, “The essence of the police lies in a partition of the sensible that is characterized by the absence of void and of supplement” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 36) in which “politics, before all else, is an intervention in the visible and the sayable” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 37). It is quite

interesting to mention that, according to Rancière, if someone does not wish to be recognized as a political being, this person has to first of all erase all signs of politicity. This seems to be the case of Brazil in 2022, this is also the case of the 2018 elections in which the former president Jair Bolsonaro was elected as not only representing the new politics, but also the man of the people, the humble man who eats bread with condensed milk and white coffee, like every ordinary Brazilian. Rancière (2010) insists that

Political argumentation is at one and the same time the demonstration of a possible world in which the argument could count as an argument, one that is addressed by a subject qualified to argue, over an identified object, to an addressee who is required to see the object and to hear the argument that he 'normally' has no reason either to see or to hear. It is the construction of a paradoxical world that puts together two separate worlds. (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 37)

The project of erasing all signs of politicity can be very dangerous for democracies of the Global South since it promotes “the enlightened project of normalization” by “constructing the profile of the ‘normal’ subject that capitalism needed (white, male, owner, worker, heterosexual, etc.) necessarily required the image of an ‘other’ located in the exteriority of European space.” (CASTRO-GÓMEZ, 2007, p. 429). “The transcendent apparatus of the Enlightenment constructs a unified European identity that requires the figure of the ‘colonial Other’” (HARDT & NEGRI 2001, p. 149 in CASTRO-GÓMEZ, 2007, p. 430). This Other may be someone from inside the dominant group that does not fit into the molds of gender identities accepted in their community and is thought of as not deserving a decent representation in language.

For traditional linguistics in the Portuguese language, the approach to the question touches upon the linguistic structure and examines the strategies that are being used in our society to represent gender fluid identities and the probabilities of these changes becoming normative. According to Dos Santos (2019), there are three forms or strategies of marking gender fluid identities in the Portuguese language: the use of “@”, “-x” or “-e”. The resistance in accepting these changes emerges from a supposition that we seek to contest by marking the UN-marked (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2018), since “many linguists assume that the male suffix is a neutral generalizing and NON-marked, while the female suffix is marked and specific, according to seminal proposal of Câmara Jr. (2006[1970], 1973)” (DOS SANTOS, 2019, p. 161, our translation). On the other hand, the ones that are pushing for the acceptance of these interventions in language oppose this perspective:

This view is criticized by those who defend an inclusive language, as it is understood that the use of the masculine as a generalizer operates a sexist position in the discourse that is structurally socio-historically fixed. On the other hand, proposals for an inclusive language see language as a social vehicle (which it also is, but not only), without considering the constraints of the internal organization of language, or taking only traditional studies as a reference. (see, for example, Rio Grande do Sul, 2014) (DOS SANTOS, 2019, p. 162)

Dos Santos (2019, p. 162) inquires, in relation to the adoption of a grammatical gender neutralization strategy among those already used, “which would be the best, according to the rules that govern Brazilian Portuguese and the theoretical apparatus available? Furthermore, would it be plausible to adopt

a strategy?”. Then, the author explains the two tendencies in examining language phenomena nowadays: structuralist theories of language, on the one hand, and theories of language in use, on the other. The first tendency seeks “to explain the internal organization of language, describe the rules that govern it and that are internalized by the speakers” (DOS SANTOS, 2019, p. 163). And she explains the second tendency as follows:

Linguists interested in the study of language in use focus on phenomena such as the way in which the speaker decides to organize a sentence according to his/her attitude, intention or position towards the subject, which are social factors external to the language system. It is in the field of usage, therefore, that the speaker places his attitude, biasing his speech through the choice of words, voice intonation, sentence construction and the content of ideas expressed. (DOS SANTOS, 2019, p. 163)

Dos Santos also declares and insists that in traditional linguistics “the grammatical form known as masculine is actually **non-marked** by gender, expressing both neutral and masculine gender depending on the context” (DOS SANTOS, 2019, p. 163, emphasis in the original). This is why the adding of the labels “man” and “woman” in the athletes images of the Sports Complex at the University of São Paulo signifies the RE-marking of the *status quo*, therefore the naturalization of heteronormativity. This provocation – even if subtle to lay eyes – insists on erasing and eliminating non-hegemonic bodies through language. For Butler (2011, p. xvii), “the construction of gender operates through exclusionary means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, racial erasures.” This could not have come unnoticed, provided that

- “If the materiality of sex is demarcated in discourse, then this demarcation will produce a domain of excluded and delegitimated sex” (BUTLER, 2011, p. xviii);
- Even though police designates not an institution of power but a distribution of the sensible within which it becomes possible to define strategies and techniques of power (RANCIÈRE, 2010), police has an important role in defining what is visible and what is invisible by (not) sharing the sensible and by constituting the supplement as void, inexistent. In the case of genders, both in language/linguistic and social/performative (BUTLER, 2011) senses, police punishes non-hegemonic, non-heteronormative, non-heterosexual human beings.

5 Conclusion

Throughout this reflection, we have asked many questions we would like to briefly answer in the conclusion of this article. Before that and based upon the work of Miguel (2021) who has defended that, similarly to Linguistic Landscapes, we should also pay attention to Digital Linguistic Landscapes – the images that are spreading fast in the digital world –, we end this article with these two images (Figures 11 and 12), the first

one a critique¹⁵ by a radical alt right conservatist and the second one an image in which the transgender champion is ignored by the other swimmers:

Figure 11 – Teachers from the right



Source: authors' private collection

Figure 12 – Isolation of the transgender swimmer



Source: UOL site¹⁶

These images present some of the challenges we have discussed in this text: language, language genders and social genders are intertwined in complex ways: they show that languages and bodies matter! In the words of Andrade (2015), the first transgender travesti who became a Ph.D. and professor in Brazil, these complexities – in the case above transphobia – appear in every discursive formation, school (mostly) included:

[...] the symbology of the plague, as we can see, does not refer to the disease alone; the plague is a sign to represent what society conventionally calls pathology, a social pathology of behavior, an incongruence with official values and customs. This metaphor can be used to understand how transvestites and homosexuals are treated at school. (ANDRADE, 2015, p. 165)

As stated throughout the paper, the theories of identity and language that are taken up in the classrooms in the area of the Humanities affect the ways the future academics are educated. This means that language as a system or structure that is fixed (for example, within the traditional binaries) is usually taken as something sacred and to be carefully preserved (this might explain why the protestors added the words man and woman to the murals in the Sports Centre). However, another possibility is to see language as a sociocultural practice that constantly seeks to reflect the changes that are taking place in society in different

¹⁵ This post was taken from a Facebook group called “Teachers from the right” and comments the image from a swimming competition by asking: “Find the trans... You see? We’re all equal.”

¹⁶ Available at: <https://www.uol.com.br/esporte/ultimas-noticias/bbc/2022/03/23/foto-de-trans-isolada-no-podio-reacende-debate-sobre-inclusao-no-esporte.htm>

historical moments (this explains the official outdoors of gate 1 at USP, and the protest poster at the Faculty of Philosophy).

We have also questioned how the area of Critical Applied Linguistics should discuss the changes in language and if it should defend language fluidity that certain members of our society are pushing for. Our answer is a big yes. We, language specialists, critical applied linguists, teacher educators, language teachers (and students!) are **all** implied in these struggles; this means we are supposed to take responsibility for the violence that certain “regimes of truth” (RANCIÈRE, 2004, p. 38) perform through language. We could and should debate with students and society the reasons why some (non-hegemonic) regimes of truth are not being valorized either in the academy or in the society. We claim that we need diversity in (language) perspectives in order to construct an informed view of an equitable society. We claim that each person and community has their own right to language. In many ways, language both reflects and creates the gender inequalities that exist in society: the way we speak affects the way we think and the way we interpret the world around us. So, as we are working to reimagine our defaults around gender and build a more socially-conscious and inclusive culture, we also need to reckon with language.¹⁷ Gender has been colonized in patriarchal societies, and according to Rancière:

In my view something gets lost in this opposition between an institution and a transcendental horizon. What disappears is democracy as a practice. What disappears is the political invention of the Other or the heteron; that is the political process of subjectivation, which continually creates ‘newcomers’, new subjects that enact the equal power of anyone and everyone and construct new words about community in the given common world. (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 59)

Thus, as we have shown gender inclusive language is not and cannot be simply a language question as it has usually been reflected upon, and should be studied in a situated way in social practices, in “contact zones”, and in official contexts (such as the images discussed here), in social media, in mass media, etc., and all contexts that are engaged in political acts of inclusion of identities and differences. The ones to decide which *loci* of enunciation are accepted as true and which ones are excluded are the ones who think they control the “language game”. However, owners of the language, let us reiterate time and again that grammar can become more human and less violent. Language education can educate professionals capable of reflecting on language diversity and literacy practices from a critical perspective.

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¹⁷ Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20201006-are-some-languages-more-sexist-than-others>

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