

# LINGUISTIC (DE)COLONIALITY AND INTERCULTURALITY IN THE TWO MAIN ROUTES OF BRAZILIAN STUDENT MOBILITY

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## ABSTRACT

Although attending universities in Portugal and the United States is still a privilege for those from Brazilian families with high economic capital, policies to promote internationalization intensified and diversified this student mobility flows in the last decade. Guided by decolonial studies, we present, in this article, an analysis of the intersectionality of race and mastery of the English language of Brazilian students in Portugal, and the United States. The results refer to two empirical investigations carried out between 2013 and 2020 and point out that Black students participating in the same mobility program with scholarships in these two countries showed lower English proficiency than White scholarship holders. On the other hand, students from a White economic elite did not indicate the insufficiency of English as a decision factor for choosing Portugal. In our view, these asymmetries must be perceived and problematized from the perspective of coloniality in English teaching in Brazil, which has limited choices and (re)produced inequalities in the space of international education. However, in pandemic times that hasten the transition to virtual mobility, the greater ethnic-racial diversity and socioeconomic range of student mobility from Brazil to Portuguese universities raise deeper reflections on the intercultural (face-to-face) interactions arising from these displacements. The experiences of studying in Portugal have been marked by some linguistic mismatches, like the imaginaries of a subordinate Brazilian Portuguese and a superior Portuguese from Portugal. The constraints stemming from these intercultural (mis)communications between students from Brazil and Portugal can be explained by the contemporary reverberation of the coloniality of Portuguese language teaching in both countries. We will argue that these current tensions in the academic spaces of Brazil's former motherland foster what we have called the "decolonial awakening".

## KEYWORDS

student mobility, Brazil, Portugal, United States, linguistic coloniality, interculturality

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# (DES)COLONIALIDADE LINGUÍSTICA E INTERCULTURALIDADE NAS DUAS PRINCIPAIS ROTAS DA MOBILIDADE ESTUDANTIL BRASILEIRA

## RESUMO

Embora frequentar universidades em Portugal e nos Estados Unidos seja ainda um privilégio para quem vem de famílias brasileiras com elevado capital econômico, políticas para o fomento da internacionalização têm levado, na última década, a uma intensificação e diversificação desses fluxos de mobilidade estudantil. Guiando-nos pelos estudos descoloniais, apresentamos,

neste artigo, uma análise da interseccionalidade de raça e domínio de língua inglesa de estudantes de nacionalidade brasileira em Portugal e nos Estados Unidos. Os resultados referem duas investigações empíricas realizadas entre 2013 e 2020, e apontam que estudantes negras/os, participantes do mesmo programa de mobilidade com bolsas de estudo nestes dois países, apresentaram menor proficiência em inglês em comparação com bolsistas brancas/os. Em contrapartida, estudantes de uma elite econômica branca não indicaram a insuficiência no domínio de inglês como fator de decisão pela escolha de Portugal. A nosso ver, essas assimetrias devem ser percebidas e problematizadas a partir da colonialidade no ensino de inglês no Brasil que, no espaço de educação internacional, tem limitado escolhas e (re)produzido desigualdades. Todavia, nos tempos pandêmicos que apressam a transição para a mobilidade virtual, a maior diversidade étnico-racial e amplitude socioeconômica da mobilidade estudantil do Brasil para universidades portuguesas suscita outras e mais aprofundadas reflexões sobre as interações interculturais (presenciais) que resultam desses deslocamentos. As experiências de estudar em Portugal têm sido marcadas por alguns desencontros linguísticos, a exemplo dos imaginários de um subalterno português brasileiro e de um superior português de Portugal. Os constrangimentos que resultam dessas (in)comunicações interculturais entre estudantes do Brasil e de Portugal podem ser explicados, pelo menos em parte, pela reverberação, na contemporaneidade, da colonialidade do ensino da língua portuguesa nos dois países. Vamos argumentar que essas tensões, presentes em espaços acadêmicos da antiga metrópole do Brasil, potencializam o que temos designado de “despertar descolonial”.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

mobilidade estudantil, Brasil, Portugal, Estados Unidos, colonialidade linguística, interculturalidade

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The desirable advent of the post-pandemic time seems to hasten the trend towards a hybrid model of internationalization (b-learning) with an impulse towards virtual mobility (e-mobility). In the space of higher education increasingly permeated by capitalist logic, this new dynamic has raised multiple questions (De Wit & Altbach, 2021), among which we highlight the subordination of the intercultural dimension in studies on internationalization (Kim, 2009; Knight, 2003). We argue that the experiences of face-to-face mobility, in interactions with students from the host country (and from other nationalities), are often accompanied by disagreements (stereotyped views, racism, and other forms of discrimination). However, these tensions and lack of communication in academic spaces foster what we have called “decolonial awakening”: critical thinking (new or expanded) about the manifestations of coloniality of power perceived as latent and intertwined in social dynamics.

Based on this question, this article seeks to contribute to decolonial studies in the sociology of education, with critical reflections on how the coloniality of English language teaching in Brazil has had repercussions on socio-racial inequalities in student mobility in the United States and Portugal. Furthermore, in the specificity of Portuguese higher education, we reflect on the coloniality of the Portuguese language and the silencing of educational policies and practices in Brazil and Portugal that fail to demystify

the imaginary of a hierarchy between the language varieties, leading to intercultural dialogues between students from these two countries<sup>1</sup>, strained by linguistic constraints.

The results presented and discussed in this article are the unfolding of an investigative path that began in 2013, focusing on the United States (Borges, 2015), the main route of student flows departing from Brazil, and concluded in 2020 in Portugal (Borges, 2021), another important destination<sup>2</sup> country. We based our research on an intersectional methodology that prioritized the combined analysis of the racial identity informed by the students<sup>3</sup> with the proficiency in the English language acquired during the school trajectory. Our interest (and main objective) was to show a more accurate perception of how the spaces of international education in the United States and Portugal are intersected by (im)possible choices and (re)production of overlapping levels of inequalities that “at first sight, are invisible” (Lutz, 2015, p. 39). Social asymmetries (educational and racial) were more or less accentuated depending on the country of destination (the United States or Portugal) and the condition of participation in internationalization (student with a scholarship or paying the fees charged by the institutions).

The double investigative path also led us to perceive different expressions of linguistic coloniality in the dynamics of internationalization that, in the case of the English language, has produced and reinforced socio-racial selectivities and, in the case of the Portuguese language, “linguistic racisms” (Nascimento, 2019). Thus, this article also seeks to contribute to decolonial reflections by pointing out and addressing constraints that have come to light in recent intercultural experiences of Brazilian students in Portugal.

In methodological terms, we used qualitative-quantitative intersectionality (Borges, 2021) to analyze statistical data and reports collected through four surveys by online questionnaires and 12 face-to-face interviews with mobility students in Portugal. The answers obtained followed the ethical procedures in research in social sciences, totaling the voluntary and anonymous participation of 1,845 students<sup>4</sup>. The SPSS supported the statistical analysis, and the qualitative analysis technique, of an interpretive and comparative nature, was guided by the decolonial theoretical contribution, focusing on the key concept of “coloniality of power” (Grosfoguel, 2008; Mignolo, 2017; Quijano, 2014).

Bearing in mind that inequalities, coloniality, and linguistic racism are interrelated issues in the investigated student mobility routes and modalities, we present a brief discussion about coloniality in teaching English and Portuguese languages in the first part

<sup>1</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this article, the *decolonial awakening* at the interface with *linguistic coloniality* should also be investigated of students from former Portuguese colonies in Africa and speakers of Portuguese language variants (Roldão, 2019) all legitimate that should not ranked should also be analyzed. In these cases, the Portuguese language coloniality (of teaching) in the constitution of nation-states in Africa must be problematized as a language of power that shifts from a colonial instrument of domination to a mechanism of anti-colonial emancipation considering the plurilingualism in these territories. As Inocência Mata (2019) points out, “Africans who speak a single language represent a minority in Africa, although this ‘advantage’ is never taken into account because, in most cases, the second or third language is not a European language” (p. 214).

<sup>2</sup> Investigations were carried out on the academic paths of master’s and doctoral degrees, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> In this article, we adopt non-sexist/inclusive language. When it was not possible to avoid binarism, we prioritized the feminine.

<sup>4</sup> Statistical analyzes start from samples with different amounts and correspond to different modalities of internationalization carried out by Brazilian students in the United States and Portugal. The samples and the respective studies are detailed in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 to facilitate understanding.

of this article. The following section discusses social/racial inequality at the intersection of English language proficiency among Science Without Borders (SWB) students in the United States. In the third part, we argue that “global coloniality” (Grosfoguel, 2008) in the Lusophone-European geopolitical space has contributed to Portugal becoming a destination increasingly sought after by Brazilian students belonging to historically favored social segments.

## 2. UNDER THE COLONIALITY OF THE ENGLISH AND PORTUGUESE LANGUAGES

Higher education institutions in the United States and Portugal have received, in the last decade, a growing flow of international students in mobility. In the United States, the most sought-after<sup>5</sup> destination, Brazilian nationality stood out among the 10 with the greatest presence<sup>6</sup>. In turn, among international students in Portugal, the group coming from Brazil stood out for being numerically the most expressive<sup>7</sup> and which, in the 6 years before the pandemic crisis, more than doubled (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2019). Since 2021, the displacement of students from Brazil to Portuguese higher education has been boosted by the reduction of restrictive border measures and the resumption of face-to-face activities (Amorim, 2021).

Bearing in mind that the United States and Portugal are significant poles of attraction for students, we reflected on the influence of knowledge of the English language on these choices and how they are interrelated to different historical processes. On the one hand, it is necessary to consider the construction of the hegemony of the English language based on “the conquests, colonization and commercial impositions of the British Empire, over two centuries” (Forattini, 1997, p. 4) and the military and technological leadership of the United States in the post-World War II (1939–1945). On the other hand, one must consider the strategic neglect of Brazil’s English language teaching policy. We refer, in both cases, to the coloniality of power and its effects on (re)producing inequalities in higher education internationalization. However, coloniality is also imbricated in the expansion and differentiation of the Portuguese language, which brings intercultural tensions, as we will see, in student mobility from Brazil to Portugal.

From the outset, the greater Brazilian presence in Portuguese higher education has been explained by the combination of “Brazilian policies to promote international student mobility; the promotion of strategies for attracting foreign students by higher education institutions in Portugal and, above all, sharing the Portuguese language between the two countries” (Iorio & Fonseca, 2018, p. 3). Although the Portuguese language usually has a

<sup>5</sup> For example, of the 3,700,000 students in mobility in 2017, within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries, 985,000 chose the United States in 2017, 26.6% (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019, p. 234).

<sup>6</sup> In the academic year 2019/2020, 16,671 students from Brazil attended higher education in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Of the 22,194 internationals in the country in 2017, 35% came from Brazil. Students from Portuguese-speaking African countries, mainly Angola and Cape Verde, also have an important participation in the mobility of entry into Portugal: 31.4% (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, n.d.).

considerable weight in the choice of where to study abroad<sup>8</sup>, the decision for Portugal does not necessarily mean a lack of proficiency in the English language. Students mainly from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds claimed to have a good command of the English language and have chosen to attend a higher education course in Portugal, among other aspects, because of the comfort of the Portuguese language (Borges, 2021).

However, this experience of mobility, which, a priori, seems to ensure intercultural tranquillity due to historical-cultural and linguistic approximations, can be surprised by constraints arising from a blurred vision, from common sense, about *different speech* or *speaking wrong* Brazilian. Such existing “Brazilianisms” are considered to some extent in Portugal as adulteration “of a single norm of a vernacular Portuguese” (Venâncio, 2022, p. 29). However, they should be understood as singularities the Portuguese language in Brazil has acquired, compared to a supposed canon since colonialism, from the contact with the linguistic plurality of native peoples and Africans trafficked as enslaved people, until all other sociolinguistic interactions with immigrants from many different countries. It is worth considering that the Portuguese language is dynamic, and its variants, including the Portugal one, are permeable to constant influences. Therefore, these cultural mismatches between Portuguese-speaking students can be interpreted as pulsations of *vivid coloniality* that discriminate and subordinate the variants of those from countries with a colonial legacy.

The considerations presented so far allow us to perceive that the linguistic coloniality that reverberates, in different ways, in the Brazil–United States and Brazil–Portugal student mobility routes demands a critical, broader, and deeper look at the structuring mechanisms of power that (re)produce, in these privileged spaces of education, socio-racial inequalities, and discrimination by the language of the other. This section focuses on the intersectionality of race and educational policies in Brazil aimed at acquiring (or not) the English language, which has repercussions on inequalities and limits choices in the Brazil–United States student mobility.

According to Gabriel Nascimento (2019), the Brazilian State has always promoted “excludable language policies when it comes to those who are not White in the country” (p. 15). This abyssal line would have been even more striking in the period of the military dictatorship with the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (Education Law) of 1971, which encouraged the optional offer of teaching foreign languages in public schools when private centers of language expanded across the country. In the author’s view, this political action imposed on Black and poor people, who began attending public schools, “precariousness and abandonment” by denying them, due to economic conditions, the learning of English as a foreign language (Nascimento, 2019, p. 16).

Historically in Brazil, from the imperial period, when law and medicine courses were implemented until very recently, the teaching of English was relegated to the level of a secondary subject in the public schools’ curricula, used as a mechanism to ensure privileged training paths for young Whites from the country’s political-economic elite.

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<sup>8</sup> Of the sample of 394 students from Brazil in Portugal, 48.6% indicated the Portuguese language as the main decision factor in choosing to study in the country (Borges, 2021).

Only with the approval of Provisional Measure 746 of 2016<sup>9</sup>, which introduced changes to Law 9.394 (Lei n.º 9.394, 1996; the current Education Law), English became a mandatory subject from the sixth grade onwards. Until then, it was mandatory to offer a foreign language, not necessarily English.

In this problematization, it is worth noting that the Brazilian State, at the height of the 1990s neoliberal policies for education, disregarded orality among the skills/competencies that should be acquired in the guiding documents for foreign language teaching. The understanding was that “only a small portion of the population [had or would have] the opportunity to use foreign languages as an instrument of oral communication, inside or outside the country” (Secretaria de Educação Fundamental, 1998, p. 20). Therefore, a vision of elitist coloniality that, throughout the history of educational policies in Brazil, “reinforced discrimination against the popular classes, who only relied on public schools to learn a second language” (Borges & Afonso, 2018, p. 66).

It was only in the 2000s, in the wake of the educational reforms demanded by the processes of economic globalization, that we observed a shift in the policy of teaching English in Brazil. To analyze this change, one needs to understand how the concept of “coloniality” is associated with the modern and hegemonic languages(s) within the scope of this article, which focuses on the mobility of students leaving Brazil to study in the United States or Portugal, problematized regarding the English and the Portuguese languages. For the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2014), to whom the term is originally credited (Mignolo, 2017, p. 2), “coloniality of power” designates the socially hierarchical relationship based on the European invention of racial classification of human beings.

Thus, the concept translates into “the idea that there is no comprehensive logic of capitalist accumulation that can instrumentalize ethnic-racial divisions prior to forming a colonial, Eurocentric global culture” (Grosfoguel, 2008, p. 134). In another more recent text, Grosfoguel (2016a) states that it is the relations of racism, and not economic relations, that are the “structuring logic of all social structures and relations of domination in modernity” (p. 158). From this perspective, Nascimento (2019) considers that “language is a position in this structure” (p. 19). Therefore, racism would bring, in definition, the scope of plurality (Grosfoguel, 2016b; Grosfoguel et al., 2015). In other words, depending on the different colonial histories, the superiority/inferiority hierarchy that characterizes the coloniality of power is constructed through different racial markers, such as skin color, ethnicity, *language*, culture, and religion.

Although in Brazil, the Portuguese language, imposed as a *national language* by the Portuguese State in 1757<sup>10</sup>, brings with it the legacy of colonial violence regarding the subordination and extermination of indigenous and African languages, *the coloniality* that we mobilize in this text is that of *language racism* towards *Brazilian Portuguese* felt or witnessed by students in Portugal. It must be borne in mind that the Brazilian language, in its idiosyncrasies, has much more than regional accents and its own words, but also

<sup>9</sup> Converted into Law 13.415 (Lei n.º 13.415, 2017). On the mandatory provision of the English language, see Article 35-A, § 4.

<sup>10</sup> The document *Directorio dos Índios* (Directory of Indians; 1758) determines the replacement of the general language (the language of *Tupinambá* origin used by the Portuguese to dialogue with the native peoples of Brazil) with the Portuguese language.

the soul, memory, and linguistic resistance of indigenous and African people. In the classic book *Línguas Brasileiras* (Brazilian Languages), Aryon Dall’Igna Rodrigues (1986) draws attention to the incorporation of words of *Tupinambá* origin into the Portuguese language, mainly in the nomenclature of fauna and flora, due to the “prolonged coexistence” in the 2 first centuries of colonization (p. 21).

It is worth remembering here the neologism “pretuguês” created by Lélia Gonzalez (2020), “which is nothing more than a mark of the Africanization of Portuguese spoken in Brazil” (p. 128). With this, the anthropologist and precursor of the Black and feminist movement in Brazil questions the criticism of the “wrong Portuguese” in Brazil, especially that spoken by the poorest people with less education. She explains that

the tonal and rhythmic character of African languages brought to the New World, and the absence of certain consonants (the L or the R, for example), point to a little-explored aspect of the black influence in the historical-cultural formation of the continent as a whole. (Gonzalez, 2020, p. 128)

According to Gonzalez, “pretuguês” is Brazilian Portuguese, which, as we have seen, is involved in a historical process rooted in colonial power structures.

However, since the early 2000s, this “process of silencing the *pretuguês*” (Melo & Mira, 2021, p. 1401) has been broken with advances in Brazilian educational policy, such as the mandatory teaching of history and culture of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous people in schools (Lei n.º 11.645, 2008). Thus, teachers incipiently and growingly adhere to anti-racist pedagogical practices aligned, above all, with decolonial perspectives. Within this vision, the teaching of Portuguese, as a mother tongue, must be oriented towards overcoming the ideological-political apparatus still “conditioned by a policy of linguistic colonization and, therefore, by process of racialization” (Melo & Mira, 2021, p. 1397). This mechanism of colonial violence, according to the authors, acted both to “crystallize” the “fiction of a linguistic homogeneity” and to “stigmatize” the linguistic variations of racialized people, subordinating or making their identities, cultures, beliefs, and epistemologies invisible (Melo & Mira, 2021, p. 1397).

It is in this sense that Walter Mignolo (2003) states that languages “are also the place where knowledge is inscribed” (pp. 632–633). As discussed, Brazilian indigenous languages are very different from each other and present “a unique system of human expression, in which the effects of a life experience and intelligent analysis of the world accumulated through the countless generations of a people crystallized” (Rodrigues, 1986, p. 27). This reading of Rodrigues (1986), which approaches a critical decolonial perspective, is important because it not only informs us those Brazilian languages are very different from Portuguese but that they also translate “multiple views of the world of Brazilian indigenous peoples [developed] with complete historical independence regarding Asian and European cultural traditions that characterize Western civilization” (p. 27).

In today’s Portugal, which, to some extent, has sought to decolonize from the epic of *discoveries and conquests*, it is important to listen to these Brazilian student voices because they denounce, among other, the reverberation of the Brazilian Portuguese

language coloniality, which has been considered a “Portuguese subaltern” (Borges & Afonso, 2018). As we see it, these criticisms emerging during the mobility experience, in cultural (mis)encounters with Portuguese speakers (here we are also thinking of students leaving African countries affected by Portuguese colonialism), flag a decolonial awakening. Such is the case in the following excerpt from the testimony of a Brazilian student who declared herself to be White and who attended the Education course at the University of Minho in the academic year 2019/2020:

I think there is a lot of historical prejudice. Our Portuguese mixed with many other things, and it has, of course, many differences compared to the Portuguese here. While they have European Portuguese as a nicer, more formal thing. It is the Portuguese of the colonizer, that European figure. (as cited in Borges, 2021, p. 23)

It is necessary to reflect on the origin and reason for this common sense in Portugal that Brazilians speak *Brazilian*. At first glance, this distinction seems to reinforce a linguistic hierarchy of subordination of the language spoken and written by Brazilians, which could be interpreted as *linguistic racism*. As we have discussed, knowing the Brazilian Portuguese language means being aware of the linguistic plurality of Brazil and the *linguistic coloniality* of (European) Portuguese that led to an imperial “linguicide” (Nascimento, 2019, p. 39), that is, to the extermination of native languages<sup>11</sup> and those of African peoples trafficked in the following centuries to colonial Brazil.

In decolonial critical thinking, the Brazilian subaltern is perceived much more than a colonial legacy of the language of Camões because it aggregates the linguistic contributions of different peoples, including other Europeans, Asians, and Arabs. Thus, even though Portuguese in Brazil contains “a European memory”, it “has been historicized differently due to the contact with different languages and due to the historical-social formation itself and subsequent political transformation of the colony into an independent nation” (Mariani, 2004, p. 22). Brazilian Portuguese is a plural language impregnated with memories of linguistic resistance. Indeed, to know its history is to walk through the decoloniality of the Portuguese language.

As we know, linguistic coloniality in Brazil did not end with the end of colonialism. In contemporary times, it persists, for example, in the absence of decolonial policies aimed at informing and valuing the linguistic plurality of the country. To a large extent, at the institutional level and interactions of daily life, one can see the spread of an image of Brazil as a nation where only Portuguese<sup>12</sup> is spoken. By producing linguistic hierarchies and erasures, the coloniality of the Portuguese language in Brazil also leads to linguistic racism beyond national borders. Thus, the prejudices that Brazilian students in Portugal sometimes suffer or witness in academic spaces (and not only) “may still be remnants

<sup>11</sup> It is currently estimated that between 150 and 180 indigenous languages are spoken in Brazil. When the Portuguese settlers arrived, 5 centuries ago, there were estimated to be something close to 1,200 indigenous languages (Museu do Índio, n.d.).

<sup>12</sup> The Portuguese language was officially recognized by the Brazilian State in the 1988 Constitution. On that occasion, there was a debate as to whether the official language should comply with the nomenclature of Portuguese or Brazilian language (Universidade Estadual de Campinas, n.d.).

of the past”, says anthropologist Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, in a report by Mariana Durães (2021) published in the *Público* newspaper, in the edition of May 5, 2021. According to the researcher, linguistic racism is expressed, for example, in the belief that the influences received by (subaltern) Portuguese in Brazil made it “less pure than European Portuguese, which is sometimes associated with its own identity, associated with the country’s antiquity in Europe” (Durães, 2021, para. 20).

The “purity” of the so-called European Portuguese is also a myth, the result of a “primary, irrational anti-Brazilianism” that has been fought by a linguistic approach that “faces” the influence of Brazilian Portuguese “with no moods, as a natural phenomenon” (Venâncio, 2022, pp. 13, 15). Carlos Fino (2019) wrote a thesis on the roots of Portugal–Brazil estrangement and (mis)communication. He argues that the intensification of flows of people and business between the two countries in recent decades may have contributed to a mutual overcoming of intercultural linguistic barriers. However, “the core of the Brazilian imaginary about Portugal and the Portuguese imaginary about Brazil does not seem to have undergone substantial changes”. That usually translates into “criticism, contempt, disdain, ignorance, oblivion” (Fino, 2019, p. 50) on both sides of the Atlantic.

These linguistic constraints experienced in contexts of student mobility in Portugal enhance, among other aspects, what we have called “decolonial critical awakening” (Borges, 2021). An awakening, in general, that is partial and gradually growing as the readings and academic experiences, added to life stories and family memories, allow a broader and deeper critical look at “the historical continuities of coloniality in the contemporary education” (Roldão, 2019, p. 163). In general, according to Roldão (2019), this coloniality in Portugal is imbricated in a policy of linguistic assimilation that has prioritized programs to reinforce *European Portuguese* for immigrants and students arriving from former African colonies, thus hindering the “recognition of other Portuguese standards” (p. 175). A critical look to which we can add the importance of decolonial pedagogical projects in Brazil and Portugal, oriented towards the appreciation of the varieties of the Portuguese language and the fight against linguistic racism.

On the other hand, considering the global panorama of knowledge-based economies, linguistic coloniality must be analyzed as establishing a matrix of power that contemplates the capitalist logic. In this light, the process of linguistic coloniality presents hierarchies on the world map of the internationalization of higher education, with the English language acting as a vehicle for the dissemination of excellent scientific production and contributing to strengthening the United States and other countries. English speakers as the “global centers of intellectual influence” (Larson, 2018, p. 521). That is where, as international statistics show, the flows of Brazilian student mobility have followed, which is now seen as a potential and profitable niche market (Spears, 2014).

Nevertheless, how can it be explored if there is a gap in the mastery of the English language in Brazil? The coloniality engendered in the Brazilian educational agenda, which historically postponed, as we have seen, the teaching of English to the poor and Black student population, reveals its side effects and paradoxes in the capitalist dynamics of internationalization (Borges & Garcia-Filice, 2016). In the next section, the analysis of data from participants in the SWB in the United States, a mobility program recognized

as the Brazilian State's largest investment in the policy for higher education internationalization, demonstrates the inequalities in the intersectionality of race and proficiency in the English language.

### 3. STUDYING IN THE UNITED STATES: THE (IM)POSSIBLE CHOICES

The SWB program, launched in 2011, within the political-ideological spectrum of a new economic and social developmentalism of the Brazilian State, translated the euphoria of the ruling elites into the aspiration to see the country inserted, actively and competitively, in the global economy of knowledge panorama. In this context, the English language leaves the position of complementary discipline to join the most prestigious curricula. However, despite the efforts and interests in the sphere of government policies, there was neither time nor breath in the public budget to overcome the historical negligence in the teaching of English in Brazilian public schools.

From the start, the SWB faced the lack and urgency of policies aimed at increasing proficiency, especially in speaking and writing skills, of students applying for internationalization. In order to meet the audacious goal of sending 100,000 scholars abroad in 4 years, the government needed to increase the financial contribution to pay for classes in English (or another foreign language) in the host country for scholars who had insufficient command of the language. From a sample out of the 1,283 this program scholarship holders<sup>13</sup> who completed part of their undergraduate studies in United States institutions between 2012 and 2015, 40.8% declared that they had taken an English course for up to 16 weeks abroad to “improve language proficiency” (Borges, 2018, p. 134).

This study showed that English language proficiency was closely associated with racial self-identification. As detailed in Table 1, the conversation was the least dominant among the language skills analyzed<sup>14</sup>, especially among poorer Black students who attended public schools.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY	RACIAL CATEGORY MEAN	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE ( $p \leq 0.05$ )
Reading	White = 4.58 Black = 4.10	( $p = 0.000$ )
Writing	White = 4.03 Black = 3.48	( $p = 0.000$ )
Conversation	White = 3.67 Black = 3.16	( $p = 0.000$ )

**Table 1** English language skills of Science Without Borders scholarship holders in the United States

Source: Borges, 2015

<sup>13</sup> The sample stems from the feedback to a virtual research survey (Borges, 2015) sent via email linked to the profile of each fellow, information publicly accessible on the internet through the platform of the Science Without Borders – Scholars Around the World Program.

<sup>14</sup> Responses to an online survey question, using a six-point interval scale, where the student was told to tick between 1 (*lowest mastery*) and 6 (*highest mastery*) for English language skills. The average thus points to the central tendency of the scholarship holders' scores on that scale. Statistical significance from comparing the difference in means (*Student t-test*, with  $p$ -value less than or equal to 0.05) was calculated with the support of the IBM SPSS Statistics 18 software (Borges, 2015). In Tables 2, 3, and 4, obtained in a later investigation, version 25 was used (Borges, 2021).

In addition to racial identity, students' knowledge of the English language was intersectionally analyzed with other variables, such as income and family education, school trajectory, and ways of acquiring the language (Borges, 2015), revealing that greater or lesser proficiency is linked to other factors that interfere in mobility choices. Therefore, the coloniality that intertwines race and class/income in Brazil must be considered by public policies for granting scholarships abroad, correcting historical injustices, and contributing to disrupt the mechanisms of (re)production of inequalities.

More recent research (Borges, 2021), referring to a sample of 263 SWB scholarship holders who completed mobility in the so-called “world-class universities”<sup>15</sup>, indicates a considerably higher level of proficiency in English, as we observed when comparing the data in Table 1 with those in Table 2.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY	RACIAL CATEGORY MEAN	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE ( $p \leq 0.05$ )
Reading	White = 5.83 Black = 5.75	( $p = 0.200$ )
Writing	White = 5.34 Black = 5.19	( $p = 0.189$ )
Conversation	White = 5.33 Black = 5.16	( $p = 0.146$ )

**Table 2** English language skills of Science Without Borders scholarship holders in world-class universities

Source. Borges, 2021

As can also be seen from the reading of the two tables, who self-referenced as White indicated greater mastery of the language, denouncing, along with other studies and statistics, how many educational inequalities in Brazilian society are connected to the historical process of coloniality of power, that is, of racial hierarchy and social exclusion of the Black<sup>16</sup> population. This critical look at student mobility from Brazil to the United States within the scope of SWB impelled us to investigate student mobility to Portugal, having an initial interest to understand the interrelation of the absence of the language barrier to a possible greater presence of students coming from disadvantaged social contexts.

#### 4. STUDYING IN PORTUGAL: LINGUISTIC PRIVILEGE AND RACISM

Although internationalization has become “a distinct and exclusive attribute of elite education in Brazil” (Windle & Nogueira, 2015, p. 178), it is necessary to investigate whether the new opportunities for student mobility in Portugal, following the end of the

<sup>15</sup> This sample consisted of fellows who completed mobility in 24 universities in Australia, Canada, South Korea, the United States, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom. The selection criterion was based on research universities listed among the 30 best ranked in two prestigious international rankings taken as a reference within the scope of the Science without Borders Program in 2011: the QS World University Rankings and THE World University Rankings.

<sup>16</sup> Although *Black* is not a category of color/race classification officially adopted in Brazil, it is usually used in statistics from official bodies and surveys to group people who declared themselves Black and Brown.

SWB program, are not reinforcing the historical<sup>17</sup> trend of race and class privilege in the Lusophone-European space of international education. Considering that Portugal stands out among the main destinations for Brazilian students, we cannot fail to consider to what extent the coloniality in teaching the English language in Brazil is interposed as a linguistic border for English-speaking countries. Consequently, we indirectly ask whether Portugal does not represent the possible choice for a specific profile of students who do not master English or any other foreign language.

Table 3 brings together the averages in English language skills of 205 scholarship holders of the SWB program in Portugal.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY	RACIAL CATEGORY MEAN	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE ( $p \leq 0,05$ )
Reading	White = 4.73 Black = 4.35	( $p = 0.013$ )
Writing	White = 3.70 Black = 3.14	( $p = 0.002$ )
Conversation	White = 3.75 Black = 3.26	( $p = 0.010$ )

Table 3 English language skills of of Science Without Borders scholars in Portugal

Source. Borges, 2021

When comparatively analyzing them with the data in Table 2, related to students who completed mobility in “world-class universities”, we noticed they had a lower command of the language. However, it should be noted that the English proficiency of this group of fellows in Portugal was quite like that of program participants who attended universities in the United States (Table 1).

There are political-administrative explanations within the scope of the SWB to understand the reason why students with relatively little knowledge of the English language were selected for mobility to the United States. As the command of English proved to be a problem for the program to reach the goal of funding 100,000 students abroad, the Brazilian government decided to accelerate actions to expand the offer of English language teaching in public universities while setting less stringent selection criteria in terms of English proficiency. Added to these measures is the possibility of attending English classes abroad. In short, all this alignment in the program has opened opportunities for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds to study in the United States.

It is worth remembering that, given the strong demand for Portugal in the first public calls, placing the country even ahead of the United States among the most chosen destinations, the Brazilian government banned sending scholarship holders to Portuguese universities. In a controversial decision, 10,336 students previously sent to Portugal were

<sup>17</sup> Between 1700 and 1771, the increased mobility flow to the University of Coimbra ranked Brazilian students “in the top positions of the hierarchy of the places that had the most graduates among their natives” (Fonseca, 1999, p. 527). They were sons (men) of the landowning elite, formed by sugar mills and coffee plantations owners.

relocated to eight non-Portuguese-speaking countries, including the United States, which received 27.6% of scholarship recipients from this group (Borges, 2021, p. 190). The following testimonies from students who transferred from Portugal to the United States illustrate our argument about coloniality in English teaching (Borges & Afonso, 2017, p. 82):

the language course represents a big step towards acquiring the scholarship because, for example, if you are proficient in English, you can apply for the scholarship in several countries. It was not my case because I was not proficient in any language and had applied for Portugal. (White student, public school graduate)

In my case, I was relocated to the US because I had applied for a scholarship in Portugal. Thus, if it were not for this relocation of students to other countries, I would not be able to get the scholarship to the USA, as I never had the opportunity to take an English course. (Brown student, public school graduate)

In effect, Brazil granted the United States “a position of evident preference within the framework of the then newly created Science without Borders Program” (Santos & Almeida-Filho, 2012, p. 56), giving it the primacy of moving forward with its “expansionist economic and cultural policy” in the field of international education (Borges, 2015, p. 104). From a critical decolonial perspective, we can interpret the political decision to prioritize and reorient mobility flows to English-speaking countries as a passive insertion of Brazil into the (capitalist) knowledge economy. For Grosfoguel (2008), this dynamic goes by the name of “global coloniality” (p. 126). According to this view, the “post”-colonial world is a myth because constitutive elements of the colonial matrix of power were not extinguished with the end of colonial administrations, like the Eurocentric/Euro-American forms of knowledge. Thus, global coloniality implies considering that countries located in the global south, in the case of Brazil, are kept in “colonial situations” of oppression and exploitation “by dominant ethnic-racial groups” (Grosfoguel, 2008, pp. 126–127).

In the competitive global context of internationalization, universities from different countries have sought to achieve and maintain excellence in scientific research production and teaching, attracting international students counts in the main classification rankings. In this way, student displacements from Brazil to the United States are part of the gears of global coloniality. Furthermore, English, the hegemonic academic language, should also be perceived as representative and a voice for the political-economic power of global coloniality in the space of internationalization. Nevertheless, this coloniality of the English language has been, to some extent, contested in the field of applied linguistics by authors who adopt theoretical/decolonial perspectives of English as a translingual practice (Haus & Albuquerque, 2020).

In the Lusophone-European geopolitical space of the internationalization of higher education, global coloniality shows its hidden face in the sequence of policies and

strategies that have resulted, in the last decade, in the intensification of student flows from the former colonies, mainly from Brazil (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2019). Recent research results (Borges, 2021), attentive to student flows from Brazil to Portugal since the end of the SWB program in 2016, inform us that those Portuguese institutions are configuring themselves as privileged spaces for White student mobility, composed of students from families with high economic capital. This profile has been characteristic of students who use the national high school exam (ENEM) scores as an entry method. Since 2014, with the regulation of the Estatuto do Estudante Internacional (International Student Statute) by Decree-Law no. 36 (Decreto-Lei n.º 36, 2014), public and private institutions of higher education in Portugal are authorized to create actions to “strengthen the capacity to attract foreign students, through a special competition for access and entry into the undergraduate and integrated master’s study cycles” (Preamble, para. 3). The University of Coimbra was the first to sign an agreement with the Ministry of Education (MEC) of Brazil to use ENEM grades. Since then, 51 Portuguese institutions have offered this form of admission (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2021).

The MEC has positively reported these agreements and interpreted them as an international appreciation of ENEM. In 2016, as president of the Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, Maria Inês Fini, identified as the creator of the exam, said that “it is an honor for Brazil that students can circulate with a Brazilian credential recognized by universities abroad” (Borges, 2021, p. 193). However, the Brazilian government has not shown interest in using ENEM to implement a policy to encourage international mobility, which could benefit students from historically subordinated social groups and unable to pay the tuition fees charged by Portuguese universities.

Therefore, unlike SWB and private or institutional mobility programs that offer scholarships, the student who decides to study in Portugal through ENEM will have to pay the tuition fees of the institutions. On a website, the Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, linked to the MEC and responsible for the preparation and application of the ENEM, makes this condition clear by highlighting that “inter-institutional agreements do not involve the transfer of resources and do not provide for student funding by the Brazilian government” (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2016, para. 7). It should be noted that, even in mobility programs that result from bilateral institutional agreements with fee and tuition waivers, students will have to pay expenses such as food and accommodation.

Although affirmative action policies in Brazil have contributed to “the current situation of massification and expansion of educational opportunities to new audiences” (Nogueira, 2017, p. 233), studying abroad is still a privilege of race and social class. Even in the case of Portugal, where language is not a barrier, attending a higher education course in one of its institutions is a financial issue that requires budget planning, as reported by a 26-year-old White student from a low-income rural family in the South of Brazil, who had

to save part of her salary as an English teacher for almost 3 years, to accomplish her goal to study for 5 months in Portugal: “society only works effectively for those who can pay, and it makes no sense. It’s totally wrong, it’s not fair” (Borges, 2021, p. 224).

Based on a sample of 94 students who enrolled in Portuguese higher education institutions through ENEM, Table 4 below shows that the level of proficiency in English is higher in the group of those who self-identified as White.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY	RACIAL CATEGORY MEAN	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE ( $p \leq 0.05$ )
Reading	White = 5.28 Black = 4.38	( $p = 0.001$ )
Writing	White = 4.69 Black = 3.81	( $p = 0.006$ )
Conversation	White = 4.86 Black = 3.81	( $p = 0.001$ )

**Table 4** English language skills of national high school exam students in Portugal

Source. Borges, 2021

However, in a comparative analysis with SWB scholarship holders (see Table 3), students who enroll in Portuguese universities through ENEM tend to be more proficient in English, regardless of racial identity. Therefore, in the context of student mobility to Portugal, 2 centuries after the end of colonialism in Brazil, we see the interface of coloniality of power in reverberations of linguistic racism and educational disparities, unveiled by the intersectionality of race and English proficiency. We are faced, therefore, with a complex question on which we had already reflected before:

thus, if, on the one hand, the Portuguese language is subordinate in the dynamics of the hegemonic globalization of education, on the other hand, it stands as a counter-hegemonic option for socially disadvantaged groups of students who are visible on international mobility routes. (Borges & Afonso, 2018, p. 69)

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

... The ellipsis we used to initiate this paragraph should be interpreted less as a sign of disobedience in writing and more as an emphasis for the last reflection. The three-point graphic sequence imprints the sense of movement, strangeness, and critical thinking. With this, we want to emphasize that in the decision/action of moving from Brazil to study in another country, students from different racial identities and socioeconomic contexts see an increased possibility of conquering, from cultural (mis) encounters, a decolonial awakening. Thus, the experience of linguistic racism reported and critically reflected by some students in Portugal who, as we have seen, is part of

the historical process of the coloniality of the Portuguese language potentiates new or deeper ways of thinking. In this sense, student mobility in its intercultural dimension has the power to denounce, transform, and liberate, contributing to the decoloniality of both the minds in intellectual formation and of practices and policies in education that promote and reproduce inequalities and discrimination. Finally, the results we present, based on data collected during two sequential academic investigations (Borges, 2015, 2021), followed the objective of making visible the interrelationships of English language teaching with the coloniality of power and inequalities in the two main internationalization routes taken by students from Brazil: The United States and Portugal.

**Translation: Fernanda Moreira Ferreira**

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