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Raciolinguistic approaches and multidimensional analyses of the links among race, language, and power

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Flores and Rosa's proposition of a raciolinguistic approach provides an important political, historical, relational, and sensorial framework for understanding how people become raced and how social action becomes interpretable through a racialized lens. I build on this analysis to underscore the need for scholarship of race and language to consider a multidimensional analysis that is dynamic, historical, and cognizant of the complex power relations involved in linking and unlinking race and language. As I understand, their argument is a call to be wary of approaches that treat race and its relationship to language as decontextualized ahistorical categories across space and time.

Attention to the sensorial interface that impacts how race is interactionally experienced, also means paying attention to the historical circumstances and relations of power that produce race as a perceivable category of social differentiation, be it through aspects of speech and language, physical appearance, genealogical ancestry, and/or whichever characteristics become historically associated with racial categories in a given place and time. This requires a simultaneous acknowledgement and analysis of race as a colonial construct, as an anchor of relations, and a basis for certain forms of identity. In this commentary, I briefly discuss racial categories as complex, multifaceted colonial orders. I then discuss a multi-vector framework that, in acknowledging the multidimensionality of racial instantiation, allows for a grounded analysis of how race and its relationship to linguistic phenomena may be constructed, experienced, reproduced, and challenged.

Thinking of coloniality as productive of the modern social orders that produce race as an important vector of and proxy for sociocultural experiences across different historical and geo-political situations allows us to analytically see how these categories also produce interstices and voids where the limitations and excesses of assumed categories are insufficient, and do not neatly map onto lived experiences and conceptualizations of identity and language. To understand the multifaceted and lasting ways that European colonial projects have structured systems of knowledge, hierarchies, and culture to reproduce

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Eurocentric colonial power we need to ask: what gets erased, left out, or overdetermined in the broad categories of language and race used to demographically trace patterns?

The discussion of race in this context can be understood in relationship to the distinctive forms of organizing differences within coloniality. The concept of coloniality (Quijano 2000) points to the epistemological conditions that are shaped along the political-economic conditions of colonial relations. Angela Reyes (2020) applies this concept to ideas about mixed race and mixed language, to understand them not as attributes of persons and speech, but instead as an attribute of the listening subject position, as defined by Inoue (2006). Reyes offers important insight about how notions of hybridity presume the purity of the categories that form the so-called hybrid: it is the construction of the pure subject that makes possible the hybrid as a category as well as a potential problem. In this light, we can see how Flores and Rosa's essay invites us to think of how the analytical frameworks we choose may end up reproducing the very social categories and processes that our interrogations seek to dismantle. This approach seeks to treat demographic categories and named language varieties not as givens but as processes that require careful attention and disentanglement.

Mignolo's (2007) conceptualization of delinking seems particularly relevant to extending Reyes' insights to Flores and Rosa's argument. With the impetus to "change the terms of the conversation", one strategy within Mignolo's decolonial proposition is to "to de-naturalize concepts and conceptual fields that totalize a reality" (459). This approach emphasizes the exteriorities produced along rhetorics of modernity and locates possibility in a "Geo-politics of knowledge (e.g., emerging from different historical locations of the world that endured the effects and consequences of Western imperial and capitalist expansion)…" (462): a denaturalization of the categories produced by a modern/colonialist logic to unravel its cloak of universality and naturalness. Mignolo (and Quijano's) proposition entails a research praxis that originates in exploring the categories and ways of thinking emerging across different locations of geo-political knowledge.

To delink race as colonial order from the naturalized features that have become associated with racial categories, Mignolo argues that analysts must engage in – drawing on Anzaldua's (1987) concept of "border thinking"— forms of thinking that go beyond given categories to interrogate, interrupt, and move beyond them analytically (497-8). In relation to Flores and Rosa's call to simultaneously consider how race and language have been rendered as separable while also being co-naturalized into joint linguistic and racial hierarchies, the attention to the role of language in these processes becomes not so much about mapping relationships or having one serve as a proxy for another, but about making sense of the ways that race and language locate subjects, rights, and possibilities; and about how different perceptions and ideologies of race erase nuance from discussions of multiple ancestries, unexpected linguistic affects, and other notions of heritage and identity that might anchor and interrupt complicated racial identifications and perceptions. Here, notions of scale are important to make sense of the colonial entanglements that impact how values and rights get determined for different racial categories as well as the attributes associated with them at personal, interactional, and structural levels.

My work (2017, 2021) has sought to understand how ethnoracial categories and orders have been produced and experienced in Puerto Rico to elucidate the tangled,

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complex, and sometimes contradictory ways that communicative ambiguities, different experiences on the ground, and family stories might interrupt totalizing national and colonial identity narratives. From this perspective, I analyze diverse and contested language practices emerging from the range of knowledge frameworks for, and understandings of, history, identity, and language, as well as the political mobilization and activism that arise from these understandings. Through this analytical lens, I approach how the discursive limits and modes of interpreting ethnoracial identity and alterity become produced through the analysis of the role of colonial projects in building contemporary racial and linguistic orders. In considering how colonial racial(izing) logics distribute privilege, marginalization, and erasure through alternating forms of co-optation, celebration, and trivialization, while highlighting the co-emergence of language forms and ethnoracial categories, we see how people navigate and respond to the structural and discursive forms of power that attempt to narrate and delimit them.

In relation to Flores and Rosa's argument, I highlight four vectors of analysis (among many potential others) in thinking about the multifaceted relationships between identity, race, and language - concepts fraught with the complex relationships that different people have to race, as both identity and social category, within a broader system of hierarchical racial orders. These vectors help to analytically disentangle race as subjectively experienced, as structural category, and as a form of relation. I underscore these vectors as they are sites of debate with respect to how people define race and its role in their lives, offering different anchors for understanding the relationship among race, language, and identity.

The first vector proposes a historical analysis that shows how debates, ambiguities, and ambivalences about race are the result of colonial processes producing social orders, and how they have rendered race interpretable through modes of seeing and knowing rooted in sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory geohistorically distinctive epistemological grounds (Saldaña-Portillo 2016). The processes that produce, silence, and discipline the epistemological and semiotic fields that generate and organize the sensorial, material, historical and hierarchical relations of racial interpretability are a key site for understanding contemporary debates regarding the relationship between language, race, ancestry, identity, and political subjectivity. For example, within the U.S. context, how does the hypervisibility, invisibility, or audibility of racial categories relate to the complicated ways in which racial orders have attempted to contain different groups in service of imperial political and economic projects rendering some people as labor, others as obstacles to land appropriation, and yet others as the embodied borders of the nation?

The second vector considers the relationship that specific persons may have to social categories of race. In this respect, John L. Jackson Jr.'s (2005) concept of "racial sincerity" is relevant. He suggests using racial sincerity, which is analytically distinguished from notions of racial authenticity, and to consider "how people think and feel their identities into palpable existence, especially as such identities operate within a social context that includes so many causal forces beyond their immediate control" (11). This perspective shows the complicated relationships that individuals have to their known and unknown ancestries, their assigned and their claimed racial categories, and the multiple ways of thinking race and racial orders across the geohistorical trajectories and political borders. This aspect of how people relate to race reminds us that the relationships among race, self-identity, and

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language are neither stagnant nor always easily assessed through acts of external perception.

The third vector deliberates the relationship of perceiving others to the perceivable and knowable aspects of racially assessing and assigning others to racial categories. This vector, for example, highlights how colonial racial orders and hierarchies are structurally reproduced regardless of whether social actors experience an interaction in terms of race, as in the experience and production of racial prejudice. Work such as Jane Hill's *Everyday Language of White Racism* (2008) and others (Chun 2016, Pardo 2013) show how different theories about the origins of racism shed light into the mechanisms and scale at which racism is assumed to operate—be it individual, interpersonal, or structural. Highlighted in this approach, as well, is the insight of how both institutional and interactional perceptions of race impact social actors who are racialized within specific categories along with the ways this leads to the reproduction of racial categories and effects, regardless of a person's racialized self-identification.

The fourth vector contemplates the interplay of the previous two relationships by also considering the historical formation of groupings and traditions around racialized experiences. How do such geohistorical groupings, if formed, define inclusion based on shared histories and experiences? How do these relate to self and other perception of racial categories, racial inhabitance, and related racial orders? Here, is where we might see debates around race in terms of categories and belonging—perhaps closer to the debates about "authenticity" that Jackson's concept of sincerity contrasts with. Rather than an interior relationship to racial categories and claims, we see relational assessments of racial identity and identification that often work within what Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose as a framework of identity and interaction. This process is always fraught with the potential for disjuncture (Meek 2011) and differences in how actors ground racial categories and interpellations.

A consideration of the different processes and vectors involved in experiencing and reading the body as a site of racial materialization and contested categorization within broader colonial racial orders, allows us to dynamically locate the processes involved in co-articulating racial categories and racialized bodies, linguistic varieties and instantiated voices (Smalls 2020), as well as how people relate (or not) to different forms of racial subjectivity and identity within these contexts. In this regard, careful analysis of speech alongside other relevant interactional, temporal, and geopolitical contexts is necessary to make sense of debates that attempt to anchor race and racial belonging across criteria ranging from perceptible to physical characteristics, to physical and vocal stylizations, to conceptualizations of genealogical ancestry, to ideas about traditions, practices, and heritage. Such an analysis offers us insight into the ways that movement within and across geopolitical borders might differently highlight or obfuscate prior ways social actors have been positioned within racial and linguistic orders. It also allows us to discern the different and complex ways people orient to racial, ethnic, and linguistic categories and boundaries. Lastly, it makes perceptible how linked racial and linguistic orders may shift over time and space in service of different political economic projects.

Analyzing these racial anchors helps us engage with the polysemous, ambiguous, indeterminate, sometimes incommensurable, and often contested forms of meaning and

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interpretation of race, racial possibility, and their dynamic relationships to language varieties as people move across spatiotemporal scales and geohistorical political borders - whether forced or of their own volition, invited or not, or across different positions of power. It enables us to consider contestations and their stakes from the perspective of the racial logics that differently distribute rights, access, and value for different human beings, as accorded to them by the politico-economic and socio-cultural processes that have historically emerged in different locations. Ultimately, the aim is to disentangle the relationships that people may have to ancestral, lived, and ascribed racial categories and historical communities (whether overlapping or not with racialized categorizations), to pay attention to what aspects of embodiment, culture, language, and social practice become associated with race and racial orders, and to understand race not as an internal and static category but as a dynamic emerging in complex ways and in grounded situations with distinctive racial logics.

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