LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY IN BRAZILIAN INDIGENOUS ACADEMIC PRODUCTION

IDEOLOGIA LINGUÍSTICA NA PRODUÇÃO ACADÊMICA INDÍGENA

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ABSTRACT

This work maps academic discussions proposed by indigenous researchers within a broader context in which the presence of people from diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds in Brazilian universities have challenged the hegemonic status of Eurocentric concepts and methods of knowledge production. Specifically, we seek to identify which language ideologies – understood as beliefs about language use and structure (Silverstein, 1979) – they mobilize in their discourses and meta-discourses. Our corpus comprises fifteen texts authored by self-declared Indigenous researchers (including articles, undergraduate theses and master's dissertations) in Linguistics and related fields in the Social Sciences. From this material, we found three major recurring themes: (1) the principles guiding academic education for indigenous teachers; (2) efforts towards the preservation and/or revitalization of Indigenous languages; (3) the challenges faced by Indigenous students and scholars within the university setting. The results indicate that indigenous researchers have been expanding the boundaries of academic orthodoxies, particularly with respect to research methodologies and reporting strategies. In their work, language is approached not as an abstract system, but as inextricably linked to knowledge, history, and other social practices. Nevertheless, essentialist notions of language are at times strategically employed in order to facilitate intelligibility and to emphasize cultural distinctiveness.

Keywords: Language ideology, Indigenous academic production, Counter-colonialism.

RESUMO

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Este trabalho pretende mapear discussões acadêmicas propostas por pesquisadores indígenas dentro de um contexto mais amplo, no qual a presença de pessoas de diversas etnias e origens culturais nas universidades brasileiras tem desafiado o status hegemônico de conceitos e métodos eurocêntricos de produção de conhecimento. Especificamente, buscamos identificar quais ideologias linguísticas – entendidas como crenças sobre o uso e a estrutura da linguagem (Silverstein, 1979) – são mobilizadas em seus discursos e metadiscursos. Nosso corpus é composto de quinze textos de autores auto-declarados indígenas (incluindo artigos, dissertações de graduação e dissertações de mestrado) em Linguística e áreas afins nas Ciências Sociais. A partir desse material, encontramos três grandes temas recorrentes: (1) os princípios que norteiam a formação acadêmica de professores indígenas; (2) os esforços para a preservação e/ou revitalização de línguas indígenas; (3) os desafios enfrentados por estudantes e acadêmicos indígenas no ambiente universitário. Os resultados indicam que pesquisadores indígenas têm expandido os limites das ortodoxias acadêmicas, particularmente no que diz respeito às metodologias de pesquisa e estratégias de relato. Em suas obras, a linguagem é abordada não como um sistema abstrato, mas como algo necessariamente ligado ao conhecimento, à história e a outras práticas sociais. No entanto, noções essencialistas de linguagem são, por vezes, empregadas estrategicamente para facilitar a inteligibilidade e enfatizar distinções culturais.

Palavras-chave: Ideologia linguística, Produção acadêmica indígena, Contra-colonialismo.

Introduction

This article seeks to examine perspectives about language in academic works produced by Indigenous scholars. The general aim of the project is to map, describe, and reflect on current academic debates that draw upon sources of knowledge and practices beyond those hegemonic in Western academic tradition. It focuses on how alternative epistemologies advanced by Indigenous researchers in Linguistics and related Social Sciences may offer new insights on long-established debates in the multifaceted field of language studies, namely discussions around the hegemonic analytic concept of "language" and its implications for knowledge production.

In this frame, this work starts from the premise that concepts that shape our worldviews and methods that orient knowledge production have been historically forged within the modern European epistemic tradition, with its self-attributed assumption of universal validity, and, therefore, the exclusion of all other ways of knowing (Baniwa, 2006; Bispo Dos Santos, 2023; Lander, 2005). Thus, deconstructing principles rooted in colonialist legacies would be justified not only because of the inadequacy of such a perspective to deal with issues relevant in southern hemisphere countries (Moita Lopes, 2006), but also due to their self-centered and oppressive nature.

The coloniality of knowledge – pervasive in hegemonic epistemology, ontology, and system of values of European tradition – traces its origins back to the historical processes of colonization. Mignolo (2005) argues that, with the exploration of the American continent, also new symbolic construction of reality became the leading and efficacious strategy making possible the domination of other cultures and peoples by European countries – and its justification. One aspect of this novel symbolic reality consisted of ethnic and racial descriptions (white, black, Indigenous) being attributed based on differences between colonizer and colonized (Lander, 2005; Mignolo, 2005; Bruno, 2019).

In the then newly named continent of America, physical differences and cultural practices were taken to characterize Amerindian people as inferior when compared with the Europeans. As discussed by Diego Barbosa da Silva (2023), during the colonial era, Europeans faced the Indigenous people through four discursive arguments. The first describes Indigenous people as godless, irrational brutes. The second sees them as innocent and ignorant, whose beliefs consist in no more than superstitions. The third, as objects to the colonizer's scientific curiosity, depicts them as exotic, laughable, ugly, and misshapen in comparison to the Eurocentric aesthetic reference. Lastly, the fourth identifies parallel traits and practices between Amerindians and Europeans; these similarities, however, would not be enough to position Indigenous people as equals.

Another powerful construct of modernist European background, according to Lander (2005), is the ontological separation between mind and body, reason and reality, operated by Cartesian scientific formulation and its further developments. In this epistemic frame of reference, knowledge of reality could be objectively conceptualized through logical representations mirrored by human reason. The subject position of the onlooker would not interfere in the apprehension of the facts being observed, creating a "perspective-less" observation of reality. Such ideology, supposedly allowing access to universal truths, was regarded as sophisticated, as opposed to any and all other principles of knowledge production, which were deemed to be flawed, false, outdated, inferior, or labeled as "mere beliefs". Based on these supposed truths, Eurochristian liberal-capitalist societies were believed to represent the best and most advanced forms of social organization.

Eurocentric discourses presuppose universal validity and its own superiority, allowing no room for disputing voices. Barbosa da Silva asserts that, in discourses about the diversity of people in America during the colonial era, "the non-European other is [...] spoken of. They do not speak"[3] (2023, p. 12). The very generalist denomination and adjectivation – "Indian" and "Indigenous" (*índio* and *indígena*, in Portuguese) – served to obscure the multicultural diversity of the numerous native peoples and the particular values and traditions that constitute each of them (Baniwa, 2006). The attempt by Eurochristian colonizers to "save the souls" of pagan Amerindians through Christianization and, later, to "integrate" them into society – an effort lasting explicitly until around the 1970s – became a cultural genocide (Vainfas, 1995). Therefore, according to Baniwa (2006), for a long time, any denomination that pointed to native origin evoked embarrassment and was spurned by Amerindians. Only later did the "Indigenous" characterization become accepted by the Americans, when they began to get politically organized, continues the author, though it should be stressed that the word designates no more than a shared history of resistance to colonial powers and similar interests and demands in the social-political Brazilian context.

"Language" and language ideologies

In language studies, the objectivist idea of knowledge, drawing on an assumed gap between reason and the world, implies a search for the *essence* of things, and is the product of a *will to truth*, in Foucauldian terms (1996[1971]). Language, thus, would be seen as a means of *representation* of the world or the mind; its logical domain should reflect essential meanings by granting access to the true nature of things or the self. As the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1999[1953]) pointed out, this essentialist perspective assumes that the main function of language is to name things and to speak of them. Thus, to speak would be seen as nothing more than to make a direct and often unproblematic description of someone, something or a state of things, as if it were already meaningful in and by itself. Wittgenstein offers compelling arguments that this view is based on a series of *misconceptions* about what language is and does, and urges us to see our linguistic habits as part of the activities that we *do*,

[3] The English translation of direct citations of texts in Portuguese are our own.

being language itself the way we *act* (1999[1953]).

This essentialist and referential view of language, hegemonic in language studies to this day, was a key element in the establishment of 18th Century nation-states. As Blommaert puts it, named languages (such as Portuguese, English etc.) are "a powerful language-ideological effect, the result of long historical processes of construction and elaboration of a metaphysics of mind vs. world" (2006, p. 511). The author further explains that this notion of language, materialized in a bundle of specific structures, is the object of normative control and points towards centers of authority, which marks "particular forms of speech as emblematic of group belonging and identity" (Blommaert, 2006, p. 512). On these grounds, Fiorin (2013) asserts that the Portuguese Empire decreed Portuguese as the official language of public affairs in the colonies, including Brazil, following the notion that the construction of national identity is based on the assumption that the members of a national community should belong to a given linguistic field.

That was the rise of an ideology of language that equates, supposedly unproblematically, a language, a people, and a nation. Consequently, not only were several Indigenous languages in Brazil demeaned and regarded as mere dialects, in contrast to a "superior" Portuguese language, but many native communities were also prohibited from speaking their traditional languages. As a result, a number of these languages were deeply changed and suppressed, along with their practices, forms of life, and knowledge systems (cf. Braz, 2016; Lopes, 2016; Abreu, 2016; Baniwa, 2006).

The monolingual ideology, along with the hegemonic knowledge system, poses a challenge for Indigenous communities to have access to other social and political spheres, as well as to resist further invasion of non-indigenous language practices and customs in their ways of living (Baniwa, 2006; G. Tapirapé, 2018; 2020). In Brazil, in the early 2000s, as a result of the demand by Indigenous teachers for qualification in higher education, public policies started to be implemented to ensure access and permanence of Indigenous people at both public and private universities and faculties (Ciaramello, 2014; Gorete Neto, 2018; Kludash and Bollettin, 2022).

The presence of these people of traditional Brazilian background at universities sparks conflicts of perspectives on language, knowledge, education, and identity. The emergence of alternative epistemologies, ontologies, and knowledge systems in

academia adds to the effort to rethink higher education aiming to prevent it from perpetuating the historical devaluation and subjugation of certain groups (Gorete Neto, 2018; Nascimento, 2014; Kludash and Bollettin, 2022), including in linguistic policies (Palmeri and Machado, 2023). Moreover, it offers the possibility to enrich the theoretical understanding of questions that have been prominent in the academic tradition, as well as to formulate new possibilities to deal with issues endemic to the context of the global south (Dollis, 2018; El-Jaick and Servelati, 2024; Faustino, Novak and Rodrigues, 2020; Bollettin, 2023).

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to start to map academic debates related to language raised by Indigenous researchers. Specifically, we wish to identify which *Language Ideologies* emerge, understanding the concept in Silverstein's terms, as "any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (1979, p. 193). It is important to note that these language ideologies can be manifold and may, as we shall see, contrast with one another. In other words, the concept of language ideology offers the analytical flexibility to encompass a wide range of different perspectives on language, not being restricted at all to the objectivist language concept. A previously noted with reference to Blommaert (2006), this includes questioning the powerful "artefactual ideology of language" – the most influential ideology about language among both language experts and the wider public. In addition, the concept allows for a critical interrogation of solidified assumptions of such notions as "mother language", "foreign language" and "bilingualism". Ultimately, we expect to observe how these discourses position Indigenous scholars in relation to hegemonic knowledge in the academic environment.

Methodology

This research began by searching online academic databases using keywords such as "language conflict" [*conflito linguístico*], "bilingualism" [*bilinguismo*] and "indigenous languages" [*línguas indígenas*], containing "Brazil" as a restrictive logical operator. A search on Scielo database yielded 55 relevant results, while Google Scholar produced over 2,000 references, from which only a few were selected in order to produce a qualitative analysis of these academic productions.

From an initial review of selected abstracts and texts, we were able to identify academic works by *self-declared Indigenous scholars*, from which a growing body of Indigenous-produced literature emerged. We narrowed our analysis down to fifteen texts – among peer-reviewed articles, undergraduate monographs and master's dissertations – authored by Indigenous people from different ethnic groups: Tapirapé, Karajá, Pataxó, Tupinambá, Xakriabá, Xavante and Xerente. Most of the dissertations originated from the same few universities, and several articles were published in recurring academic journals. Therefore, our selection criteria prioritized ethnic diversity of individuals over institutional or geographic distribution.

In parallel, employing the same selection strategy, we gathered and examined other articles by Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics, not specifically focusing on language policies, but who comment and reflect upon the presence, challenges, contributions and agency of indigenous researchers at universities in Brazil. These complementary bibliographical sources provided further contextual support for understanding the impact and academic positioning of Indigenous voices in higher education.

For the reading, note-taking, reflection and analysis stages, we kept a structured document in which each text was summarized, its key strengths and limitations were noted, and potential contributions to the objective of our project were sketched. This methodology allowed us to produce a qualitative reading of the text, underlying their aspects of interest for this research and their specificities. Throughout the process, the concept of *Language Ideology*, as defined above, served as a productive analytical lens, guiding the observation and interpretation of the perspectives on language articulated within the selected works.

Results

Three major topics were found to be recurrent in the Indigenous academic texts. These researchers have been especially concerned with (1) the academic education of Indigenous teachers to act at the schools in their communities, with particular sensibility to valuing their traditional languages, practices, knowledge, oral tradition and ways of learning; (2) the preservation and/or revitalization of their

traditional languages practices, which have been invaded and continuously affected by influences from Brazilian Portuguese; (3) the challenges they have encountered both in the selection processes and during the actual university courses, at undergraduate and graduate levels, in terms of dealing with prejudice, language barriers, Western academic knowledge, research methodologies and report. It is relevant to note that these themes are interwoven: they appear in almost all the works we have examined and are given different emphases depending on the objective, interests and aims of each Indigenous researcher.

Indigenous teacher education

Many of the Indigenous students at universities are also teachers or are getting licensed to teach in their communities. This is one of the reasons they have claimed for public policies to guarantee their access to higher education (Gorete Neto, 2018). Initially, Indigenous communities desired to acquire certain literacies to deal with non-indigenous people and ascertain their active position in the socio-political Brazilian context, fighting for their rights to land and other resources (Baniwa, 2006). Thus, the effort made by many Indigenous communities to demand access to basic education is a part of a wider process of collective resistance. For example, Iranildo Tapirapé states that the Avá-Canoeiro group, with whom he worked and lived, were motivated to have their own school due to their need to

> learn and master the writing codes, both of their mother tongue and of the Portuguese language, to record the social, cultural and linguistic knowledge of their people, and also to prepare certain types of documents to fight for their rights to land, as well as to learn how to prepare a note and letter, which they need in order to interact and communicate with non-indigenous society, mainly with FUNAI and SESAI, with which they maintain contact on a daily basis (I. Tapirapé, 2020, p. 32-33).

Similar necessities are also reported by other Indigenous authors (Braz, 2016; Silva, 2017; G. Tapirapé, 2020; for a different experience, cf. Moritu, 2022). Then, however, with formal education came the need for adequate materials, methodologies, and well-prepared teachers to fill in the positions at the schools. Gilson Tapirapé argues that, upon implementation in the 1970s, schools in Tapirapé/ Karajá communities worked as a "colonizing instrument and extinguisher of indigenous knowledge, since they were taught nothing but non-indigenous knowledge and writing" (2020, p. 59).

Gersem Baniwa (2006) adds that bilingual education, as carried out by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in the 20th Century, had the aim to identify and level the diversity of Indigenous languages in Brazil and to establish the Portuguese language as dominant at schools and in villages. Braz (2016) reports that, even recently, although a part of the curriculum is dedicated to teaching their traditional language and customs, most of the school time is focused on learning the Portuguese language and other subjects which are taught in this language.

The core concerns in this aspect appear to be related with how to better prepare indigenous teachers to act in their schools, to design strategies and materials that are adequate to their realities, and to develop meaningful teaching practices according to the specificity of their contexts, ways of learning, oral tradition, and traditional language practices. More generally, the aim is to avoid making the teaching of Western knowledge a colonizing practice, and it is argued that higher education for Indigenous teachers (though not only for them) must operate a shift in a series of notions that still uphold an epistemology of exclusion. The notion of "language" and its derivative concepts are one focus of attention (Carvalho and Schlatter, 2022; Gorete Neto, 2018; Nascimento, 2014).

Language preservation

The majority of Indigenous researchers included in this study have the preservation of their traditional language practices as a primary concern. Some authors explain that their people still speak their languages, but these have been suffering from contact with Portuguese (G. Tapirapé, 2018; 2020; I. Tapirapé, 2020; Karajá, 2016). Others report that their languages have been mostly changed or lost, but are still present somehow in the way they speak in the Portuguese language (Braz, 2016; Lopes, 2016; Baniwa, 2006).

Silvia Xerente (2018) characterizes her people as bilingual, that is, they speak both their traditional language and Portuguese, and such use is determined by necessity. This means that her people associate each language with certain contexts and activities. For instance, she explains that activities like hunting, fishing, agricultural work, craftwork, rituals, home, and other social interactions within the village are associated

with the *Akwe* language. On the other hand, discussions on politics, lessons at school, dealings with non-indigenous people, and activities like playing soccer are carried out using the Portuguese language (E. Xerente, 2022; G. Tapirapé, 2020; N. Tapirapé, 2020; Karajá, 2016).

However, these borders and fluidity in language use are not clear all the time and everywhere. These authors point out that, although parents speak their native language with children at home, and learning the Portuguese language is confined at school, with increasing exposure to television and the internet, children are acquiring fluency in Portuguese long before starting formal school education. Moreover, G. Tapirapé (2018) contends that, with the consumption of material resources such as food and clothing, and cultural products such as sports and television programs, some traditional practices, like children's plays, have been left aside. As a result, not only has the Portuguese language "invaded" their linguistic practices to an alarming extent, with vocabulary slipping into their everyday speech and changes in language structure, but also the language, discourse and knowledge that goes with those traditional practices have been affected as well.

In the context of those who now speak "a variety of Portuguese", Braz (2016) reports that naming their children with traditional Indigenous names is an act of resistance. In addition, the author proposes the production of pedagogical materials to strengthen the teaching, revival, and use of their native language at school, given that most of their formal education activities are carried out in Portuguese. Abreu (2016) tells of a cultural exchange a Xacriabá family has undertaken to a Xerente village to do historical-linguistic research on their ancestral language and to learn the Xerente language (the closest linguistic relative to the Xacriabá group). Lopes (2016) reflects on the social and educational values attached to the practice of "playing Loas", a kind of poetic performance in rhyming verses spoken especially at wedding ceremonies, and expresses concern about how younger generations have not been engaged in this kind of practice and about the linguistic and cultural consequences. Likewise, Meira (2020) discusses the ubiquitous presence of singing practices in Pataxó culture and emphasizes the pedagogical potential of the use of traditional songs in the indigenous school context, contributing not only to the strengthening of youngsters' *patxohã* language practices but also as a valuable teaching resource of traditional values and knowledge.

Academic challenges

As mentioned above, Indigenous people are finally accessing universities and have been taking part in the processes of debating and producing knowledge; this process, in turn, generates a series of frictions (Bergamaschi, Doebber and Brito, 2018; Kawakami, 2018; Kludash and Bollettin, 2022; Bollettin, 2023). An initial challenge for Indigenous scholars is getting access to this academic environment. Although there are now policies that establish their right to higher education, such as the Federal Law No. 12.711/2012, the "*Lei das cotas*", some of these Indigenous scholars are still dealing with barriers in entry assessment due to lack of familiarity with required literacies. Nubia Silva explains that simply an alternative entry test is not sufficient: what is necessary is to "look to understand another's ways, ways of thinking, seeing and reading the world, and their beliefs about existence itself" (2017, p. 33; cf. also Nascimento, Moritu and Xerente, 2022). In this respect, Maria Gorete Neto (2018), as a university professor engaged in Indigenous higher education, reports on different experiences, both failed and successful, in preparing entry assessments for different Indigenous groups at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. The scholar shows awareness of the fact that other epistemologies should be also validated in the academic environment, attempting to offer equivalent opportunities to people of different native backgrounds, upon understanding that Indigenous people are not all the same. This topic becomes even more urgent when considering the promulgation of the Law 11.645/2008, which preconize the teaching of Afro Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture in the schools in Brazil, raising demands for an effective linguistic symmetry (Bollettin *et al*., 2024)

Furthermore, Indigenous researchers reveal a more subjective approach in dealing with knowledge in comparison with non-indigenous academics, which can be challenging, given the objectivist perspective still dominant in academia. Gilson Tapirapé (2020), when comparing Indigenous academic performances with their non-indigenous peers, argues that the former have a more fluent attitude of debating ideas, due to their oral tradition. His claim is that they can more easily build a connection between the academic content and their real experiences, feeling confident to bring forward contributions based on their traditional knowledge practices. As Gilson

Tapirapé asserts,

> what counts in academia is so-called scientific knowledge, ideas by great authors. They are colonizing writers who do not take into account diversities existing in the universe. So, I tried to use the opportunity many times to oppose it, because science is not unique; there are several sciences, thus putting specific Apyãwa knowledge into debate (2020, p. 17).

What comes to the forefront here is the emphasis on making knowledge meaningful from a subjective standpoint — an approach that contrasts with the objectivist perspective still valued by many scholars in the Human and Social Sciences. In opposition to essentialist views, the researcher affirms the legitimacy and diversity of ways of knowing, living, and being. To ignore such epistemic plurality within the academic environment is to perpetuate the coloniality of power, knowledge, and self.

Discussion

In this array of topics and issues being brought to attention by Indigenous researchers, it is possible to observe how different language ideologies are at play in their discourses. The discursive style and research methodologies employed are far from the canonical ones at universities, that distant and supposedly impersonal position in academic writing (Carvalho and Schlatter, 2022). Most, if not all, Indigenous academics write vivid *autoethnographic* works (cf. Ellis and Bochner, 2000). They resort to their oral tradition and value the interactions with elders and peers for gathering necessary information, debating ideas, shaping their views, and, as a result, they distill all of it in academic reports in which the agency of the researcher is highly visible to the reader, still making use of other references whenever necessary and relevant (Primo Dos Santos Soares, 2022; Dollis, 2018).

In this sense, Indigenous researchers effectively challenge the graphocentrism we are prone to in Western academic practice. Oral traditions, the wisdom and the stories of the elders, as well as their own practices and experiences play a crucial role in this panorama, constituting valuable and essential sources of knowledge (El-Jaick and Servelati, 2024). They become the subject matter of their research and/or the bases on which they develop their critical assessment of a matter of choice. In fact, Eneida Xerente (2022) disputes the very notion of "literacies" [*letramentos*, in Portuguese] as

social symbolic practices and technologies restricted to the written register, especially those taught in formal school education. Having as reference the forms of life of her people, the scholar proposes that the concept might be broadened further, arguing that a person may be literate in countless ways, and this can be manifest "in seeing, listening, and feeling" (2022, p. 15). For instance, she contends that dancing, singing, "reading" different body paintings, listening to the sounds in the natural environment for orientation, for seeing and identifying plants and the stages of their development, learning how to do craftwork are all examples of meaningful practices which comprise the knowledge and education of the individuals in her group (for a similar argument, cf. Bispo Dos Santos, 2023). In sum, the critical point being made is that valid knowledge would not be solely that which is conveyed by the written word, but many other practices are also legitimate means of expressing experiences related to Indigenous Lands (Xikrin and Bollettin, 2022) and engagements with the academic sphere (Xikrin *et al*., 2024).

The monolingual ideology is also attacked on several fronts. Indigenous scholars understand that this colonialist construct crystallizes cultural and social identities, which, in turn, tends to undermine those who do not fit in their ideals. Braz (2016) denounces this essentialist ideology of language that serves to question Indigenous rights when their language practices do not coincide with an idealized notion of what "real indigenous people" should be like (cf. Baniwa, 2006; Silva, 2017). He uses the metaphor of a new tree that sprouts from the roots of an older one that has been felled to argue that, although his community speaks now a variety of the Portuguese language, their linguistic practices, beliefs, knowledge, discourses – therefore the very notion of who they are – are strongly rooted in their native indigenous tradition. Lopes (2016) also provides an enlightening description of how the Xakriabá group's linguistic practices in Portuguese are as much a part of their traditional forms of life as any other.

In this context, trying to revive the traditional language of a group, as Abreu (2016) reports the Xakriabá have been doing, can be perceived as an act of resistance. Not only can it be understood as reclaiming something that was taken away, but, by playing the "essentialist identity card" back, if a group speaks their traditional language, it is believed that their fight will be strengthened and that it "will help in the process of

reclaiming territory" (Abreu, 2016, p. 8). When discussing language preservation, Indigenous accounts are adamant in showing that language form, discourse, knowledge, and action cannot be conceptualized separately (Nascimento, 2014). For example, Nivaldo Tapirapé shows that their traditional rituals keep their language alive, not only from a formal perspective but from a discursive one: "the ritual brings to the present mythical narratives and historical facts of the Apyãwa people" (2020, p. 6; cf. G. Tapirapé, 2020; Meira, 2020). E. Xerente (2022) and Moritu (2022) both point out the role played by their traditional languages and the way they behave when sitting down with elders to listen to the stories of their people.

These academics show full awareness that certain linguistic and discursive repertoires have specific *functions* to them (G. Tapirapé, 2018; S. Xerente, 2018). Their claim for basic education, as stated above, was based on the need to acquire specific literacies and linguistic resources that would allow indigenous communities to act more assertively and self-sufficiently when dealing in different social and political areas. Learning the Portuguese language and other kinds of Western knowledge are strategies that build autonomy in planning and executing actions in the social-political Brazilian context, contributing to one of their main goals of securing their legal right to land. At the same time, their participation in the written "language games", in a Wittgensteinian sense, and their entry into the Western "order of discourse", to use a Foucauldian term, enable them to dispute narratives about who they are and who they are not, to register and share their knowledge – to build legitimacy for their traditional forms of life and values (Baniwa, 2006). If, for centuries, the voice of the colonizers resonated uncontested, Indigenous people have now been able to occupy positions of protagonists within and without Academia (Bollettin, 2023; El-Jaick and Servelati, 2024), bringing visibility to their causes, acquiring power to their voice and knowledge, and creating meanings that counter the colonial force of the Eurochristian tradition.

In all these accounts, whether they explicitly reflect on language use or not, it becomes clear to us that the prevalent ideology of language is coherent with the Wittgensteinian understanding that speaking a language "is part of an activity and of a form of life" (1999 [1953], §23). The language people speak is never thought to be separable from what they do, how they act. This view is supported by analysis by Nascimento (2014). The author, in dialogue with his Indigenous students at the Federal

University of Goiás (UFG), looks to understand how their conceptions of linguistic practices contrast with our analytic categories of "language" [*língua*], "mother tongue" [*língua materna*] and "writing" [*escrita*]. He observes that, differently from the Western perspective, the indigenous conceptions encompass the discursive practices which take place in their life/actions/relations. When asked which notions come closer to what the hegemonic concept of "language" conveys, they point to such notions as "'knowledge', 'thought', 'wisdom', 'identity', 'culture articulation', 'orality', 'custom', 'ritual', 'tool', 'education', 'sustainability', 'movement', 'communication', 'history', 'beliefs', 'myths', 'music', 'territory'"[4] (2014, p. 114). In addition, in lack of a correspondent term to the analytic category "language" [*língua*], the students say that the term used to refer to the linguistic repertoire of their people would be something like "our speech", "the speech of the X people" (2014, p. 113), showing that the notion of *a* language as a unit and a finite bundle of abstracted linguistic forms is absent from their use.

Even so, it is possible to find uses of the notions we are questioning here. These uses should not be seen necessarily as incoherent. As Nascimento (2014) argues, the use of the term "language" – in the formalist and essentialist sense – is resorted to as a means of facilitating intelligibility in academic works – or "strategic essentialism" (2014, p. 118)[5]. Moreover, Oliveira and Nascimento (2018) suggest we should understand the use of the essentialist ideology in some analyses as a way to emphasize differences that constitute Indigenous groups whenever simplistic generalizations erase their particularities (Silva, 2017; Shulist, 2017).

In some works we do find formalist analyses (I. Tapirapé, 2020; S. Xerente, 2018). However, when we situate these works within the broader context of Indigenous studies, it becomes clear that the general objective they serve is not simply the study of language for its own sake, their interest is not in language *by itself*. For instance, I. Tapirapé (2020) examines the syntactic constructions realized in the *Apyãwa* language, looking to understand which syntactic orders are most recurrent in which interactional contexts. As the author states, his general objective, as a teacher, researcher and leader,

[4] In Portuguese, as in Nascimento (2014, p. 114): *"'conhecimento', 'pensamento', 'sabedoria', 'identidade', 'articulação da cultura', 'oralidade', 'costume', 'ritual', 'ferramenta', 'educação', 'sustentabilidade', 'movimento', 'comunicação', 'história', 'crenças', 'mitos', 'música', 'território'"*.

[5] So have we used the term "language", as a unit, all along in this paper – the very notion we are trying to question. Again, it is a resource we turn to for practical intelligibility. This inevitability shows once more how powerful a construct it is in our academic tradition. Still, the value of this analysis and similar ones is in trying to indicate limitations of this concept and to step in other directions beyond it.

is to “work on valuing and strengthening our cultures, languages and traditions through our inter-epistemic socio-political research actions” (2020, p. 31). As a result, he was able to show “the influence that the SVO preferential order of the Portuguese language is exerting on the syntactic orders of the *Apyãwa* language in certain communicative contexts” (2020, p. 142), and also contribute to the school education of his people, pointing out unjustifiable normative over-corrections in their linguistic practices.

Conclusion

In this work, we aimed to start to map academic discussions by self-declared Indigenous researchers in the field of Linguistics and related Social Sciences. Our objective was to identify which Ideologies of Language emerge from Indigenous discourses and meta-discourses. Three major discussions were found to be recurring in many of the works: (1) the principles of academic education for Indigenous teachers; (2) the preservation and/or revitalization of their traditional languages; (3) the challenges Indigenous people have faced in undergraduate and graduate studies at universities in Brazil. As we noted, these topics are interconnected and appear in a number of works, with different focuses depending on the objective stipulated by each researcher.

We understand that Indigenous participation in the academic environment is another form of political resistance, as they take up active positions in the symbolic domain of discourse. Thus, some of the efforts they have been making are to document knowledge, history and practices; dispute meanings created by the Eurochristian tradition; produce new knowledge envisaging the development in Indigenous teacher education to act in their community schools, with special consideration for their traditional forms of life and valuing their linguistic practices, along with appropriate strategies to acquire Western knowledge; they also elaborate on the challenges they have faced in getting access to and in being at university.

In the present study, it becomes apparent the prevailing *Ideology of Language* in Indigenous intellectuals’ and academics’ works: *to speak is to act*. Language and discourse are not conceptualized separately. In all these actions they have been building visibility and legitimacy for their people and knowledge in the wider national and international context, since historically they were always a referent of discourse. Consequently, these efforts amount to increasing the strength and power they may exert

in posing their demands for defense and acquisition of resources necessary for their lives.

This study constitutes an initial attempt of mapping these demands and claims raised by Indigenous academics and intellectuals regarding the linguistic experiences and policies affecting their individual and collective trajectories. It provides a first step in the direction of a pluralization of possible perspectives, and a wider survey, with the inclusion of a more exhaustive number of thesis and papers produced by these authors, can enrich further the panorama, complementing our reflections with additional debates. Furthermore, it indicates the complexity of the linguistic experiences by these Indigenous authors, pointing out toward the possible extension of the debates to additional fields beyond academia, such as the use of Indigenous language in social medias, in literature, and others. As mentioned at the beginning of this work, the Indigenous people emerging protagonism is gaining visibility on different domains, and all of these appear to be the ground for linguistic negotiations.

In this panorama, we opted to focus on the growing Indigenous presence in Academia and how this enforces a counter-colonialist attitude (Bispo Dos Santos, 2023) in questioning notions and practices that have been hegemonic in our Western Eurocentric tradition. The research methodologies and discursive strategies employed by Indigenous academics contribute to the decentralization of the monolingual ideology, along with the graphocentric and supposedly impartial perspectives in research methodologies and reports in the fields of Human and Social Sciences.

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Recebido em: 01 de fevereiro de 2025
Aceito em: 02 de março de 2025