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## **BETWEEN GRAMMARS AND BODIES: RETHINKING ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA THROUGH ANTIRACIST LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

**ENTRE GRAMÁTICAS E CORPOS: REPENSANDO O INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA FRANCA  
ATRAVÉS DA EDUCAÇÃO LINGÜÍSTICA ANTIRRACISTA**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) through the lens of antiracist language education, challenging the persistent idealization of the native speaker and the linguistic norms rooted in whiteness. Drawing on decolonial theory and racial literacy, the paper examines how racialized bodies are marginalized in English language teaching (ELT) practices, revealing the entanglement of language, power, and identity in second language teacher education (SLTE). The discussion foregrounds the epistemic resistance enacted by teachers and learners who disrupt hegemonic discourses and legitimize diverse linguistic repertoires. By interrogating the symbolic inclusion of racialized identities in teaching materials and curricula, the article highlights the limitations of superficial diversity and calls for structural transformation in ELT. It argues that ELF-informed teacher education must critically engage with issues of race, coloniality, and linguistic justice to foster equitable pedagogical practices. The paper also reflects on the implications of profiling the ELF-informed teacher of English, emphasizing the need for transcultural awareness, multilingual sensitivity, and a commitment to dismantling racial hierarchies in language education. Ultimately, this contribution seeks to enrich the ongoing debate on ELF and SLTE by proposing a framework that integrates racial literacy into the professional development of English language teachers.

**Keywords:** English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Racial Literacy, Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE).

**RESUMO:** Este artigo explora o inglês como língua franca (ILF) sob a perspectiva da educação linguística antirracista, desafiando a persistente idealização do falante nativo e as normas linguísticas enraizadas na branquitude. Com base na teoria decolonial e no letramento racial, o texto examina como corpos racializados são marginalizados nas práticas de ensino de inglês (ELT, em inglês), revelando o entrelaçamento entre linguagem, poder e identidade na formação de professores de línguas (SLTE, em inglês). A discussão destaca a resistência epistêmica promovida por docentes e aprendizes que rompem com discursos hegemônicos e legitimam repertórios linguísticos diversos. Ao

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interrogar a inclusão simbólica de identidades racializadas em materiais didáticos e currículos, o artigo evidencia as limitações da diversidade superficial e propõe uma transformação estrutural no ensino de inglês. Argumenta-se que a formação docente informada por ILF deve engajar-se criticamente com questões de raça, colonialidade e justiça linguística para promover práticas pedagógicas equitativas. O texto também reflete sobre as implicações de se traçar o perfil da/o professor/a de inglês informada/o por ILF, enfatizando a necessidade de consciência transcultural, sensibilidade multilíngue e compromisso com o desmantelamento das hierarquias raciais na educação linguística. Em última instância, esta contribuição busca enriquecer o debate atual sobre ILF e formação de professoras/es de línguas ao propor um modelo que integra o letramento racial ao desenvolvimento profissional de professoras/es de inglês.

**Palavras-chave:** Inglês como Língua Franca (ILF), Letramento Racial, Formação de Professores de Línguas (SLTE).

## INTRODUCTION

English language education is deeply entangled with colonial histories, racial hierarchies, and epistemic exclusion. As English continues to function as a global lingua franca, its pedagogical frameworks often reproduce ideologies that privilege whiteness and native-speaker norms. This article engages with English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) through the lens of antiracist language education, arguing that Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) must confront the racialized structures embedded in its practices and discourses.

To ground this inquiry, and in order to confront epistemological racism and decolonize scholarly knowledge (Kubota, 2020), I agree with Diniz de Figueiredo and Martinez (2019, p. 4) when they state that “by truly assuming who we are and exposing how we localize other scholars and their theories, we might be able to shift the universality of white Eurocentric knowledge.” In other words, we should make our loci of enunciation clear. For this reason, I bring myself to the fore with the objective of expressing where the knowledge I produce comes from. I am a white man from southern Brazil. My parents are smallholder farmers and I spent my childhood, adolescence and early adulthood with them and my three sisters in the countryside, in a neighborhood of Italian descendants, a community I am part of. I write about antiracist education herein from a white locus. Even if my family’s economic circumstances were not the best, I acknowledge all the privileges I have had for being white. My engagement with epistemic justice started when I began to question some of the universalized ways of social

interaction within my community. I observed incoherences between the ways people spoke about Black individuals, and the ways they actually behaved in specific relational contexts. Whereas everyday discourse was usually framed in friendly terms, some implicit boundaries emerged regarding the types of relationships considered acceptable, particularly in romantic contexts. These contradictions made me realize that there was a hierarchization of human beings based on ethnicity in that context. Such dynamics are not confined to this local setting, but they mirror global patterns of exclusion, such as demonstrated by Quijano:

Social relations founded on the category of race produced new historical social identities in America – Indians, blacks, and mestizos – and redefined others. Terms such as *Spanish* and *Portuguese*, and much later *European*, which until then indicated only geographic origin or country of origin, acquired from then on a racial connotation in reference to the new identities. Insofar as the social relations that were being configured were relations of domination, such identities were considered constitutive of the hierarchies, places, and corresponding social roles, and consequently of the model of colonial domination that was being imposed. In other words, race and racial identity were established as instruments of basic social classification. (Quijano, 2000, p. 534).

The classification pointed out by Quijano has several impacts on widespread concepts and the way we understand the universe. In other words, the racial hierarchization of human beings established by coloniality forms the dominant cosmology that produces the valid relations that may be established in the modern world. It happens through racialization which is “the process that dehumanizes, the processes of dehumanization that reduce people by putting them in situations and relations that stripe them of their humanity.” (Veronelli, 2015, p. 113).

Within the broader field of SLTE, questions of racialization and the hierarchization of Englishes have long shaped how teachers and learners are positioned. Traditional approaches often reproduce native-speakerism and privilege standardized forms of English, reinforcing racial and linguistic hierarchies. While ELF scholarship has challenged the dominance of native norms, it has rarely engaged directly with the racialized dimensions of these hierarchies. This paper seeks to bridge that gap by examining how racialization, epistemic justice, and market dynamics intersect in SLTE. By linking ELF critique to racial literacy, the discussion highlights how teacher education can move beyond symbolic inclusion and address the structural inequities that sustain coloniality in language education.

Having said that, there is no need to say that coloniality affects all realms of existence, therefore, SLTE may also be analyzed by means of a decolonial look. The first aspect that could be taken into consideration is that even if I talk about ‘*second* language’, I am aware that “*languages, conceptions of languageness and the metalanguages used to describe them are inventions.*” (Makoni; Pennycook, 2007, p. 1). As a field of inquiry, SLTE studies processes linked to the way language teachers become teachers, yet the word *second* is inserted in the colonial idea that languages have boundaries and are completely separate entities. As Makoni and Pennycook (2007, p. 1) state, “languages were, in the most literal sense, invented, particularly as part of the Christian/colonial and nationalistic projects in different parts of the globe.” Racialization plays a key role in separating languages and human beings and classifying them into real or lesser.

Drawing on decolonial theory and racial literacy, this paper critiques the native speaker ideology and its entanglement with whiteness, neoliberalism, and linguistic exclusion. It explores how racialized bodies are marginalized in English language teaching (ELT), and how symbolic inclusion often masks deeper structural inequities. Through the concept of ELF *feito no Brasil* (Duboc, 2019; Duboc; Siqueira, 2020), the discussion centers the body as a site of knowledge and resistance, challenging the structuralist separation of language from identity.

The article argues that SLTE must integrate racial literacy and decolonial pedagogy to prepare ELF-informed teachers who are critically aware of how race, power, and language intersect. It proposes a framework for profiling such teachers, emphasizing the need for transcultural awareness, multilingual sensitivity, and a commitment to dismantling racial hierarchies in language education. Ultimately, this contribution seeks to enrich the ongoing debate on ELF and SLTE by reimagining English as a site of epistemic resistance and pedagogical transformation.

#### DELINEATING KEY CONCEPTS

This text draws on several interrelated but distinct frameworks, namely, antiracist language education, racial literacy, critical language education and decolonial pedagogy. While these terms share a commitment to challenging inequities in language teaching, they are not synonymous. Defining their meanings and relationships is essential to avoid conceptual overlap and to strengthen coherence.

- Antiracist language education refers to pedagogical practices that actively confront racism in language teaching and learning. It emphasizes dismantling racial hierarchies in classrooms and curricula, ensuring that linguistic diversity is valued rather than marginalized.
- Racial literacy is a specific competence within antiracist education. It is the ability to recognize, analyze, and respond to racial structures and hierarchies. It equips teachers and learners to identify how race shapes linguistic legitimacy and to intervene against inequitable practices.
- Critical language education situates language teaching within broader social struggles, highlighting how language can both reproduce and resist inequality. It provides the overarching critical orientation that connects linguistic practices to issues of power, identity, and justice.
- Decolonial pedagogy foregrounds the dismantling of colonial epistemologies and the validation of marginalized knowledges. It challenges Eurocentric universals and insists on pluriversal approaches that recognize diverse loci of enunciation.

Taken together, these frameworks inform the analysis in this text. Racial literacy is proposed as a lens within SLTE, antiracist language education provides the pedagogical orientation, critical language education situates the work in broader struggles, and decolonial pedagogy anchors the epistemological stance.

## **1 INCLUSION, MARKET, AND THE PERSISTENCE OF COLONIALITY**

The repetition of discourses that subordinate linguistic forms diverging from whiteness becomes internalized even by individuals whose own linguistic performances are marginalized. This mirrors what Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243) describes about coloniality: “as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday.” Resistance to these processes begins with identifying the various colonial discourses that constitute us. As Gomes (2025, p. 10) states, “resistance lies in the (re)cognition of diverse discursive strategies and languages, since the primary form of control is discourse.”<sup>2</sup> Beyond resisting coloniality, true change occurs through the interruption of these logics.

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<sup>2</sup> All citations were translated to English by the author. Original in Portuguese: “a resistência está no (re)conhecimento de diversas estratégias discursivas e de linguagens, uma vez que a principal forma de controle é o discurso”.

However, interruption does not happen solely at the subjective level. As Colaço and Alencar (2016, p. 86) argue, “the ‘de-alienation’ of Black individuals does not occur only in the subjectivity impregnated by colonialism, but through the transformation of their objective and material conditions”<sup>3</sup>. Without objective and material change, no system of oppression can be dismantled.

In relation to English, beyond the discursive system that continually legitimizes an exclusionary standard, there are economic forces tied to major publishing houses that sell these discourses in textbooks used worldwide. Within a neoliberal logic, economic interests focus solely on profit, disregarding the material conditions that hierarchize social groups. The inclusion of Black, Indigenous, and non-Western characters in teaching materials may appear to diversify representation, but it does not interrupt exclusionary logics. When analyzing the presence of these groups in textbooks, it becomes evident that this is often market-driven inclusion, where marginalized groups generate profit for publishers but are still conditioned to engage with language through exclusionary frameworks. It reveals itself as a colonial strategy of adding diverse people to a discourse that validates hegemonic forms while subjugating both racialized or minoritized linguistic expressions and the same people it claims to include.

While the inclusion of diverse characters may signal a positive attitude toward mitigation of inequities, it often remains symbolic. Without structural changes in how language is taught and assessed, such inclusion risks becoming a market strategy rather than a pedagogical commitment. True transformation requires rethinking whose language practices are validated and how curricula can dismantle, rather than reproduce, colonial hierarchies, as they so often do. ELF helps with this transformation when it legitimizes learners’ practices and states that meaning is built into each interaction (Jordão, 2023). If the way meaning is produced necessarily needs a context, textbooks need more than just images representing oppressed minoritized groups, but stories that express their struggles.

SLTE is pivotal to deconstruct such logics. While textbooks continue to tokenize diversity, the responsibility of breaking with this cycle of working through superficiality relies on language teachers. Critical racial literacy needs to be encouraged by means of

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<sup>3</sup> Original in Portuguese: “a ‘desalienação’ da pessoa negra não se dá apenas na subjetividade impregnada de colonialismo, mas na transformação de suas condições objetivas e materiais”.

questioning possible problems such as the mere presence in textbooks of people who are different from the white standard without much thought on their struggles, culture, linguistic characteristics, or constructed illegitimacy. SLTE must also make teachers aware that they will never be able to handle all the different possibilities regarding accents in English that exist in the world, yet they should know that irrespective of what they know, all possibilities are legitimate, given their status in certain communities throughout the planet. SLTE should also make explicit the fact that standard language forms are connected to a privileged white group, and that disrupting this association first requires critical awareness.

Moving beyond symbolic gestures toward a linguistic racial-informed stance requires an approach that is not based on deficit. In language teaching/learning, deficit is usually described as a lack of vocabulary and/or the ability to produce syntactic constructions that are considered standard. Deficit itself is racialized, since having a “perfect” English means being able to write and speak the white standard. Through SLTE, it is possible to shift this deficit to unequal relationships such as ELT materials that do not respond to the constant challenges lived by certain populations on a daily basis. This awareness helps teachers recognize major acts of global violence, and also the microaggressions that may occur in classroom settings. Critically assessing the world helps with the interruption of injustices perpetuated by coloniality, and SLTE is key to form teachers with such an awareness.

The persistence of coloniality in market-driven inclusion demonstrates how diversity is often commodified without dismantling the hierarchies that sustain exclusion. These dynamics reveal that symbolic gestures of representation do not interrupt the deeper structures of inequality. Instead, they reinforce the privileging of certain linguistic forms and bodies. This same logic is evident in the constructions of the native speaker ideal, where whiteness operates as the unmarked standard and racialized repertoires are marginalized. Moving from the market’s commodification of diversity to the ideological construction of nativeness allows us to see how coloniality permeates both economic and discursive dimensions of English language teaching.

## **2 DECONSTRUCTING THE NATIVE SPEAKER AND WHITENESS IN ELF**

The colonial logics that shape market-driven inclusion also underpin the construction of the native speaker ideal. Just as diversity is commodified without disrupting hierarchies, the figure of the native speaker reproduces whiteness as the unmarked standard of legitimacy in English. This imagined figure (often associated with white, middle-class, heterosexual identities) functions not only as a linguistic benchmark but also as a cultural and racialized construct. In this way, the native speaker becomes a symbol of exclusion, erasing the linguistic and bodily diversity of those who do not conform to the dominant norm. Examining nativeness through the lens of racial literacy reveals how deeply racialization and coloniality are embedded in ELF discourses, and why SLTE must confront these dynamics to foster more equitable pedagogical practices.

The field of ELF began with studies that, to some extent, could be considered structuralist, as they focused on phonological (Jenkins, 2000) and lexicogrammatical (Seidlhofer, 2001) aspects of language. Later on, influenced by the field of World Englishes (WE), the primary focus became the description of varieties spoken in different countries. Over the years, the influence of WE diminished, contributing to a shift in the field. Concepts that were once widely accepted began to be questioned. Examples that have significantly impacted the field include the deconstruction of the native speaker concept and the problematization of linguistic belonging. Jenkins (2015) identifies three distinct phases in ELF research, the most recent of which involves challenges such as translanguaging and discussions of language as a semiotic repertoire without clearly defined boundaries.

The deconstruction of the native speaker concept in ELF can be approached through antiracist language education, as the essence of this concept is based on a fictional figure shaped by a white stereotype. The image of the native English speaker is commonly associated with a white, middle-class American man. This image is often accompanied by others: middle-class neighborhoods with freshly painted houses in “neutral” colors, a heterosexual family with school-aged children, a front yard, surrounding grass, a new car, and an entire imagery constructed through media and discourse about what it means to be a U.S. citizen. The native speaker is the epitome of a national identity essentialized through stereotypes that erase any aspect deemed negative by neoliberalism. In this imagery, there are no scenarios of inequality involving Black, Indigenous, or gender-nonconforming bodies, i.e., those who do not fit the socially imposed heterosexual norm.

Race should always be analyzed as “produced in conjunction with class, gender, sexuality, religion, (trans)national, and other axes of social differentiation” (Alim, 2016, p. 6), so that multiple means of oppression linked to race are carefully examined. The native speaker is an imposition rooted in power relations that erase all other bodily possibilities, marginalizing not only people but also the linguistic forms associated with these social groups.

These racialized constructions of the native speaker also shape how English teachers are educated and evaluated. The idealization of whiteness and ‘native-like’ proficiency often influences curricula, assessment, and hiring practices. Even when teachers are aware of linguistic differences as legitimate forms, the type of assessment provided by proficiency tests, and how standard their skills must be in order to be hired by certain institutions remain very traditional, as a response to market pressures. Profiling the ELF-informed teacher requires a shift toward racial literacy and critical awareness of how power operates in pedagogical spaces, such as the economic forces that influence their linguistic performances.

SLTE is a space with the potential to challenge racialized norms, preparing ELF-informed teachers who are racially literate. In SLTE, “*knowledge for teaching* must be understood holistically, and the interdependence between *what is taught* and *how it is taught* becomes crucial to both the processes of learning-to-teach as well as the development of teaching expertise.” (Johnson; Golombek, 2011, p. 3). As with any type of teacher education programme, we should always pay attention to the possibility of reproducing inequalities that are present in society in SLTE, since our colonial subjective constitutions usually prevent us from seeing beyond the universalized and normalized contexts. ELF awareness is a good step to break cycles of linguistic injustice, since it sheds light on aspects that tend to reproduce linguistic hierarchies in terms of what is considered to be correct and what is not. However, the discussions about ELF usually do not consider the racial aspects that are present in language. For this reason, racial literacy should be inserted in the realm of concerns addressed by ELF, such as ELF should always be present in SLTE.

By exposing how the native speaker ideal reproduces whiteness and delegitimizes racialized repertoires, we see that coloniality is not only discursive but pedagogical. These hierarchies shape how teachers are trained, how learners are evaluated, and how

legitimacy is assigned in classrooms. For SLTE, this means that confronting native-speakerism is not optional but essential, since teacher education must prepare educators to recognize the racialized foundations of linguistic hierarchies and to challenge them in practice. Linking ELF critique with racial literacy thus provides a pathway for SLTE to move beyond the reproduction of exclusionary norms and toward the cultivation of pedagogies that validate diverse repertoires and dismantle racialized structures.

### 3 ENGLISH, POWER, AND EPISTEMIC RESISTANCE

There is an inextricable relationship between body and language, as they mutually constitute each other in social practices. A crucial aspect, however, is that the discursive construction of race shapes social relations in such a way that skin color is perceived, therefore judged, before any spoken or signed words are enunciated. Thus, the body is also word, text, and discourse. As Gomes (2025, p. 6) affirms, “texts and discourses are not impartial.” As a partial discourse, the body demands attention to the privileges attributed to bodies that are socially constructed as neutral and unmarked, namely, white bodies. This social construction of unquestioned privilege enjoyed by white bodies, combined with the tendency to dominate non-white bodies, is referred to as whiteness (Laborne, 2014).

To deconstruct the racist mechanisms that dominate Black, Indigenous, Asian, and other racialized bodies, it is necessary to engage with antiracist language education. Within such an educational approach, racial literacy plays a crucial role. As Bonfim (2023, p. 48) states: “white individuals must develop and/or be engaged in processes of racial literacy and, as a consequence, begin to enact changes in their micro-loci of power and action, contributing, within language teaching, to an antiracist applied Linguistics”.<sup>4</sup>

Racial literacy processes not only serve to denounce racial injustice but also raise awareness of the non-neutrality of whiteness’s socially, economically, and symbolically privileged positions. These positions manifest in countless ways, including linguistically. Racialized bodies are often viewed through a lens of presumed lack of education or knowledge, with even their syntactic constructions being marginalized. This is evident in standardized English when considering the native speaker myth, whose linguistic

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<sup>4</sup> Original in Portuguese: “é preciso que sujeitos brancos(as) desenvolvam e/ou sejam interpelados por processos de letramento racial e que, como consequência disto, passem a efetuar mudanças em seus microlugares de poder e atuação contribuindo, no âmbito do ensino de línguas, para uma Linguística aplicada antirracista.”

constructions align with dominant norms that differ from the linguistic performances of racialized or economically disadvantaged individuals. As Rosa and Flores (2017, p. 5) state, “even when colonized subjects complied with the imposition of European languages, they continued to be positioned as racial Others who would never be fully European – and, by extension, fully human.”

These dynamics are especially evident in language assessment, where deviation from white linguistic norms is often penalized. Standardized testing and classroom evaluations tend to privilege dominant accents and syntactic patterns, reinforcing racial hierarchies in language learning. ELF challenges these norms by recognizing linguistic differences as legitimate and communicatively effective, even though it has not attributed several inequities to a racialized dimension. Recognizing race as a structuring factor in perceived “deviations” from linguistic norms (through a lens of racial literacy) opens a pathway to linking such inequities to ELF critique, with SLTE serving as the mediating space for this connection.

Approaching ELF through racial literacy goes beyond legitimizing English learners as individuals with rich linguistic repertoires. It also reveals the power dynamics between white and racialized individuals in social practices involving English. The set of semiotic resources accessed during a linguistic performance may be validated or marginalized depending on its association with racialized bodies. English learners often face the imposition of white linguistic standards, despite the fact that most of the world diverges from these norms. This imposition devalues knowledge, generating frustration and insecurity. Through ELF as an attitude (Haus, 2024), learners are legitimized irrespective of their origins or ethno-racial positions.

SLTE may play an important role in the development of racial literacy in ELF by establishing discussions that consider the stigmatization of linguistic practices produced by racialized populations “regardless of the extent to which these practices might seem to correspond to standardized norms” (Rosa; Flores, 2017, p. 3). Taking this element into consideration in language teacher education is a step toward the assurance of less unjust racial relations involving English, acknowledging that while such interventions can mitigate epistemic injustice, they cannot fully eliminate it within the structures of the modern/colonial world system. Complete elimination of epistemic injustices would require systemic transformation beyond the scope of language education alone.

English, as a named language (Makoni; Pennycook, 2007), that is, as a strictly bounded set of semiotic resources, is commonly associated with hegemonic groups, given its global spread through colonization. When English is labeled as “belonging” to the colonizer, the fluidity of language is overlooked, and linguistic repertoires, formed from a myriad of semiotic resources often associated with different languages, are ignored. When we treat language as social practice (Brahim et al., 2021), we recognize that English is not merely a vehicle for white-hegemonic ideals of global elites, but it also allows resistance and connection among groups and individuals who are racially subalternized by colonial power structures. In this way:

English can provide access to knowledge and exchanges with thinkers around the world who share similar struggles and theoretical-epistemological paradigms. (...) It is possible to appropriate English, even as an ideological instrument of Western white consumer culture, and reframe it as a language of resistance to dominant ideologies, a language of denunciation against human rights violations, and a language of existence amid the logic of extermination targeting those who reject neoliberal ideology and expose its violence. (Mulico; Costa, 2021, p. 1277)<sup>5</sup>.

Discourses surrounding the native speaker are tied to the very construction of English as a language, establishing a pattern that disseminates white ways of pronouncing words, structuring ideas, and being/acting in the world. Racial literacy offers a way to reflect on these aspects, “as one of the means to denaturalize racism among white individuals” (Bonfim, 2023, p. 48)<sup>6</sup>. The racism embedded in the native speaker concept and hegemonic discourses about English must be exposed as mechanisms that uphold privileges linked to whiteness. This maintenance occurs not only through the defense of white norms as correct but also through the lack of critical engagement with the privileges that these norms generate to whiteness. As Borges (2021, p. 832) states, “silence is a point of attention in the performativity of whiteness because it is performative of racism, in the complacency of the narcissistic pact (...), understood as the disguised white complicity

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<sup>5</sup> Original in Portuguese: “a língua inglesa pode possibilitar acesso a conhecimentos e trocas de saberes com pensadores/as do mundo inteiro que compartilham das mesmas pautas de luta e paradigmas teórico-epistemológicos. (...). é possível nos apropriar do inglês, ainda que instrumento ideológico de consolidação da cultura de consumo ocidental branca das elites econômicas, e ressignificá-lo como língua de resistência às ideologias dominantes, língua de denúncia contra as violações de direitos humanos e de existência em meio à lógica do extermínio de quem não adere à ideologia neoliberal e denuncia suas violências”.

<sup>6</sup> Original in Portuguese: “como uma das maneiras de desnaturalização do racismo por parte das branquitudes”.

that guarantees privileges”<sup>7</sup>. Silence regarding the privileges of whiteness is itself performative of racism, as it ensures the perpetuation of those privileges.

The critical racial literacy proposed by Bonfim can be understood as a component of critical language education, which is “an approach that aims not only at language teaching but also at developing a critical awareness of language use and its social implications” (Gomes, 2025, p. 15)<sup>8</sup>. Paying attention to language through a critical language education lens means recognizing that it “can both perpetuate and challenge social inequalities” (Gomes, 2025, p. 15)<sup>9</sup>, bringing us back to English. Performing English does not necessarily perpetuate inequality; it can also challenge it.

Beyond problematizing the native speaker model, ELF scholarship has begun to question linguistic belonging itself. Rooted in a conception of language as a strictly bounded entity, the paradigm that came before the criticism tended to separate languages as properties of specific groups, a view shaped by the construction of nation-states in the 19th century. Sets of semiotic resources not associated with English were viewed solely as the language of the other, rather than as sets of socially enacted semiotic elements that may be incorporated into any individual's linguistic repertoire. As Gomes (2025, p. 4) affirms, “language is shaped by social, historical, cultural, and ideological aspects, not just structural ones.”<sup>10</sup> The structuralist discourses that describe languages as codes reduce English to structural components. This view served both to separate languages and to elevate English as superior, linked to development and prosperity. If languages were not treated as separate entities, it would be impossible to hierarchize them in ways that allow whiteness to enforce or perpetuate its privileges.

The critiques raised by ELF scholarship in its early stages did not address race. There was a questioning of models and linguistic belonging, but no commentary on how these elements contributed to the maintenance and perpetuation of racism. This body-centered critique emerges in Brazil through decoloniality, in a theoretical effort known as *ELF feito no Brasil*, where *feito no Brasil* means *made in Brazil* (Duboc, 2019). According

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<sup>7</sup> Original in Portuguese: “o silêncio é ponto de atenção na performatividade da branquitude porque é performativo de racismo, na complacência do pacto narcísico (...), entendido como a cumplicidade branca dissimulada que garante privilégios”.

<sup>8</sup> Original in Portuguese: “uma abordagem que visa não apenas o ensino de línguas, mas também o desenvolvimento de uma consciência crítica sobre o uso da língua(gem) e suas implicações sociais.”

<sup>9</sup> Original in Portuguese: “pode tanto perpetuar quanto desafiar desigualdades sociais”.

<sup>10</sup> Original in Portuguese: “a língua se configura a partir de aspectos sociais, históricos, culturais, ideológicos e não apenas estruturais”.

to Duboc and Siqueira (2020, p. 234), the expression *ELF feito no Brasil* “attempts to stress the expanding notion of ELF by contemporary Brazilian scholars who have put greater emphasis on the critical and political nature of English and the process of learning and teaching the language in the Brazilian context” (Duboc; Siqueira, 2020, p. 234).

Thinking about ELF in Brazil means aligning with the understanding that “the body that learns languages is also a body constituted (and in constant reconstitution) by social identities of gender, whether a non-binary body, or a body constituted/performed by multiple social identities of race, gender, and sexualities” (Gomes, 2025, p. 9)<sup>11</sup>. Gomes invites us to consider language teaching through the lens of critical language education, i.e., a linguistic teacher education which is responsive to the social demands that arise in literacy practices and events. Linking ELF to this approach means reflecting on aspects that go beyond appearances and immediate accessibility. It means looking at the roots of problems involving English to expose structural issues such as misogyny and racism in society.

ELF has problematized the illegitimacy of non-standard forms since early stages, assessing them as completely possible and adequate, however, the racial factor which establishes its illegitimacy at first place is left aside. Other dimensions intersect with it, such as class and gender, producing multilayered minoritized forms that endure the pressure of normative standards from multiple directions. English teachers and learners will always have diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and those will be reflected in the linguistic forms they produce in English. These linguistic forms are characterized by non-standardized features that suffer multiple pressures related to race, class and/or gender, nevertheless, these features are usually erased or just considered wrong due to white standards which are disguised as neutral and universal. Through the purported universality of white standards for English, body is disregarded as an aspect that is not connected to mind.

In a decolonial project, the theoretical effort of *ELF feito no Brasil* seeks to contribute to the deconstruction of the dualism between body and mind proposed by Descartes. As an alternative to the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, *ELF feito no Brasil* emerges as an epistemic stance (Fiorese, 2025), or, expanding on that, an onto-epistemic

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<sup>11</sup> Original in Portuguese: “o corpo que aprende línguas é também um corpo constituído (e em constante processo de reconstituição) de identidades sociais de gênero, ou é um corpo não binário, ou é um corpo constituído/performatizado por múltiplas identidades sociais de raça, de gênero, de sexualidades.”.

stance. Within this framework, the body plays a crucial role, as “our bodies are invested by and within power relations, since the material and symbolic presence of the body in speech acts imposes itself on linguistic effects” (Bonfim, 2016, p. 17)<sup>12</sup>. The validity of an utterance, whether spoken or signed, is determined by the body that enunciates it. A black, female, LGBTQIAPN+, disabled body, or one that intersects such identities, is often sufficient for an utterance to be invalidated. In the case of English, syntactic constructions, vocabulary, or accents associated with these groups are frequently dismissed, rendering them linguistically marginalized.

If language exists as social practice, it cannot be separated from the identities of its speakers. “The term identity must be linked to the body; that is, identities are corporeal (...) if, on the one hand, there are no identities without bodies, on the other, there are no texts without bodies” (Bonfim, 2016, p. 19)<sup>13</sup>. Identities are constituted through language and, as Bonfim affirms, are corporeal, since identity cannot exist outside the body. When Bonfim states that there are no texts without bodies, he critiques the supposed neutrality of science. Knowledge is always situated in the bodies of those who produce it, yet colonial efforts persist in separating subjects from knowledge, as if no trace of subjectivity was involved in its production.

A similar phenomenon occurs with English, where constant attempts are made to detach the language from its speakers, transforming it into a structure that stands above them. Phrases like “the rule doesn’t allow this” or “that’s incorrect according to grammar” are common, yet we know that rules and grammar only emerged after oral practices. The very compilation of oral rules into books was based on patterns spoken by hegemonic groups, subordinating all other linguistic forms. This produces a type of non-existence, where discourse neutralizes the language of the oppressor while simultaneously deauthorizing the language of the oppressed. What the oppressed speak ends up as “non-existent”, simply because it is absent from grammar books.

#### **4 PROFILING THE ELF-INFORMED TEACHER: TOWARD RACIAL LITERACY IN SLTE**

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<sup>12</sup> Original in Portuguese: “nossos corpos são investidos pelas e nas relações de poder, pois a presença material e simbólica do corpo no dizer (ato de fala) é uma marca que se impõe no efeito linguístico.”

<sup>13</sup> Original in Portuguese: “O termo identidade deve estar vinculado ao corpo, ou seja, identidades são corpóreas (...) se por um lado não existem identidades sem corpos, por outro, não existem textos sem corpos.”

The ELF-informed teacher must be equipped not only with linguistic flexibility but also with racial literacy and decolonial awareness. This profile challenges traditional notions of neutrality and embraces the political nature of language teaching. Teachers should be educated to recognize how race, power, and identity shape classroom interactions and to foster inclusive practices that validate diverse repertoires. Pre-service teachers and in-service teachers might react differently to these discussions, since the former are still in the process of establishing their practices, whereas the latter already have their ways of working. Constructing concepts and perceptions from scratch is usually easier than deconstructing and reconstructing them in different ways, but even in this way:

the introduction of an ELF-aware perspective in English language teaching and teacher education may represent a challenge. English language teaching is linked to an epistemological construct whereby learners, teachers, teacher-educators and publishers rely on deeply held traditions and beliefs. ELF is not a fixed, predetermined entity, it is a way of seeing language, and as such it cannot just be added as a course component in traditional ELT lessons or in a teacher education course. (Sifakis *et al.* 2018, p. 162).

Teacher-educators should be aware of these challenges in SLTE, slowly building concepts that point to a critical view on language. When teachers are learning about teaching practice, they should know that “languages are intrinsically unstable, so usage is always variable” (Seidlhofer, 2008, p. 33.2), and also that norms “are continually in flux – which is why they are so difficult to define.” (Seidlhofer, 2008, p. 33.2). At the same time, they should be able to understand the intricate connections that language has with race, opening up a decolonial view on it. Even though languages contain a myriad of norms, those deemed valid are typically aligned with white standards. As Veronelli (2015, p. 119) points out, “the classification of people into superior and inferior races was accompanied by thinking of the expressive tools that they have also in terms of superiority and inferiority. (...) *only* the colonizers have language in the full sense”.

In order to break this cycle, SLTE should teach the decolonial pedagogy composed by the triad identify-interrogate-interrupt coloniality (Souza; Duboc, 2021). Teachers must learn how to question established situations and norms and convey this to their students. Even if we have the pressure of teaching standards, we should always mention the onto-epistemic stance in which they are inscribed, showing that just knowing linguistic standards themselves does not necessarily lead to effective communication. The

standards impact people's lives, especially racialized ones, so it is important that teachers know about the coloniality of language and that an act of delinking (Mignolo, 2007) is necessary. According to Mignolo (2007, p. 453):

de-linking presupposes to move toward a geopolitics of knowledge that on the one hand denounces the pretended universality of a particular ethnicity (body politics), located in a specific part of the planet (geo-politics), that is, Europe where capitalism accumulated as a consequence of colonialism. De-linking then shall be understood as a de-colonial epistemic shift leading to other-universality, that is, to pluri-versality as a universal project.

Understanding the grammars of coloniality helps us to go beyond the teaching of normative grammar or 'native-like' pronunciation without reflection on the injustices that standard linguistic models reproduce. ELT practices will only benefit from ELF and critical racial literacy, since teachers are able to work in ways that promote social justice, going closer to what Mignolo called "pluri-versality". To be ELF-aware through racial literacy is to be transculturally aware; it is to have multilingual sensitivity to students' linguistic repertoires without forgetting that coloniality is always around us, so that we should be cautious not to reproduce or reinforce given practices that help minoritize and oppress certain groups of people.

## 5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Rethinking English as a Lingua Franca through antiracist language education demands a profound shift in how we conceptualize language, identity, and pedagogy. This paper has argued that ELF must move beyond its descriptive origins to embrace a decolonial stance, one that recognizes the body as central to linguistic legitimacy and challenges the racialized norms embedded in ELT. Language is not a neutral tool; it is a site of struggle, shaped by histories of colonialism and systems of power that continue to marginalize certain voices while privileging others.

The persistence of coloniality in language education is evident in three interconnected dimensions. First, *racialization*: linguistic 'deviations' are often judged through racialized lenses that delegitimize repertoires associated with marginalized communities. Second, *epistemic justice*: these judgments deny the validity of knowledge produced by racialized speakers, reinforcing hierarchies of who is allowed to "own" English. Third, *market dynamics*: diversity is commodified in textbooks and curricula,

where symbolic inclusion generates profit but rarely disrupts exclusionary logics. Taken together, these dimensions reveal how coloniality operates simultaneously at the discursive, epistemic, and economic levels of ELT.

The idealization of native speakerism, the commodification of diversity, and the deficit framing of non-standard linguistic forms are structural dynamics that reflect a broader epistemological order that privileges whiteness, and Eurocentric norms as the default. In this context, SLTE must respond not with superficial reforms but with a deep commitment to cultivating racial literacy. This involves educating teachers to identify, interrogate, and interrupt the colonial logics of exclusion that permeate language education, i.e. racialization in linguistic hierarchies, epistemic injustices that delegitimize certain repertoires, and market-driven forms of inclusion that reproduce colonial logics.

Profiling the ELF-informed teacher thus requires envisioning educators who are linguistically flexible, politically engaged, and critically aware of how race, power, and economics intersect in classrooms. These teachers understand that language is always situated, always embodied, and always implicated in broader social hierarchies. They are prepared to challenge the myth of linguistic neutrality and to foster pedagogies that validate diverse repertoires and resist the reproduction of inequality. Such educators recognize that teaching English is never just about grammar or vocabulary, but also about whose knowledge counts, whose voices are heard, and whose identities are affirmed.

Through the lens of ELF *feito no Brasil* and the concept of pluri-versality, this paper has proposed a framework for teacher education that validates diverse linguistic practices and foregrounds epistemic resistance. This framework insists that English, when reclaimed through critical racial literacy, can become a language of solidarity, denunciation, and transformation. It can serve as a bridge between communities, at the same time that it allows for naming injustice, and imagining *otherwise*. The paper also demands that SLTE move beyond symbolic gestures toward structural change, preparing teachers to navigate the complexities of race, power, and language conscientiously.

Moreover, this work is ongoing. Coloniality is not a relic of the past; it is a living structure that adapts and persists. As such, antiracist language education must be dynamic, reflexive, and responsive to the evolving realities of learners and teachers alike. It must be rooted in local contexts while remaining attuned to global struggles for justice. The project of rethinking ELF is, ultimately, a project of reimagining the very foundations

of language education, toward a future where all bodies, all voices, and all ways of knowing are recognized as legitimate and valuable.

In this spirit, the call to integrate racial literacy into ELF and SLTE is not merely academic, but ethical. It is a call to educators, researchers, and institutions to take responsibility for the role language plays in shaping our world. It points to a future where English language teaching is not a site of exclusion but a space of epistemic plurality, transcultural awareness, and social justice. It is a call to action, to solidarity, and to hope.

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