

People passing by called her “Monkey”: facets of racism in children’s writings ^{1 2 3}

As pessoas que passavam xingavam ela de “macaca”: as facetas do racismo em textos infantis

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Abstract

How do public school students represent manifestations of racism in texts? Through the analysis of polyphony, we scrutinized the nuances of racial prejudice in personal accounts of sixth-year students from a public school. Considering the speaker's division allowed us to see how racism appears in the words of children aged 10 to 12 years. Racial insults were the main marks of the racism reported. However, it appears never in the voice of the narrator of the text, but always in the voice of other enunciators. We noticed that children judge racist manifestations wrong, censoring their occurrence. However, such manifestations are included in the voices of others incorporated in the texts. We conclude that the Polyphonic Theory of Enunciation is a useful tool to deepen the understanding of racist discourse.

Keywords: writing, written accounts, racism, racial insult, polyphony

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Resumo

Como alunos de escolas públicas representam as manifestações de racismo em textos? Por meio da análise da polifonia, foram escrutinadas as nuances do preconceito racial presentes em relatos pessoais de alunos do sexto ano de uma escola pública. Considerar a divisão do locutor permitiu ver como o racismo comparece nas palavras das crianças de 10 a 12 anos. O insulto racial foi a principal marca de racismo reportado. Entretanto, ele nunca aparece na voz do narrador do texto, mas sim, na de outros enunciadores. Percebe-se que as crianças julgam erradas as manifestações racistas, censurando sua ocorrência. Elas são incluídas, entretanto, nas vozes albeias incorporadas nos textos. Conclui-se que a Teoria Polifônica da Enunciação é uma ferramenta útil para aprofundar a compreensão do discurso racista.

Palavras-chave: *escrita, relatos, racismo, insulto racial, polifonia*

Introduction

How do public school students represent manifestations of racism in their texts? To answer this question, we asked students aged 10 to 12 to write a personal account, describing a situation in which someone (the children themselves or a person they know) had been a victim of prejudice.

Our main objective was, by means of the analysis of polyphony (Ducrot et al., 1998, Ducrot, 2020), scrutinize the nuances of racism present in the texts written by children. By giving subjects the opportunity to narrate stories involving racial prejudice, we aimed to investigate the different voices that appear when school students take a stance in this regard.

Considering that: (a) researchers have paid little attention to writers of intermediate ages (Chapman, 2006) which correspond to the beginning of lower secondary education;⁴ (b) There are no studies on how Brazilian children tell adults about negative words and attitudes directed towards them, especially in schools (Valente, 2005); (c) a study in this regard can contribute to discussions on anti-racist education (Silva, 2021); and (d) for us, “discourse is at the heart of racism” (Van Dijk, 2002, p. 145). In this article, we intend to emphasize the study of the

⁴ Translator’s note (T.N.): This article uses the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

linguistic aspects of children's accounts to understand the subtleties of the facets of racism in children's writings.

Although there are many investigations into racism in Brazil, only a few focus on language. Moreira-Primo and França (2020) carried out a systematic review of 34 texts (articles, master's theses and doctoral dissertations) published between 1999 and 2018. All of them were empirical studies that aimed to analyze the effects of racism on children's school careers. The authors observed that the main themes of these studies were subjects that do not specifically focus on the way of saying, namely: the constitution of the black child's identity; preferences for the characteristics of white people; the intersections of racism with gender and class; religious racism; school failure and performance; racism among teachers and at school; and the discourse of a supposed equality.

Some examples of studies that explore language, when dealing with the issue of racism, are Cleanand (2013) and Sue and Golash-Boza (2013), which, at an early stage of their research, analyze linguistic phenomena, so as to, when exploring the data, privilege content over linguistic and discursive analysis.

An education beyond the culture of silence

The reasoning that supported our investigation is in line with the construction of an emancipatory education. Such education takes students and education professionals from naive consciousness to critical consciousness (Freire, 2021b). For this reason, we believe it is important to have on the horizon teaching and learning environments that promote the liberation of everyone involved in the teaching and learning of how to read and write (Freire, 2008, 2019, 2020).

The main cause of the ills faced by black people in our country is the social and economic situation. Nonetheless, the erasure of the collective memory, culture and identity of African peoples may be related to high rates of school repetition and dropout among this portion of the population. Therefore, even though school education alone is not capable of changing all the directions of society, it undeniably occupies a prominent space in the collective construction of critical consciousness (Munanga, 2005).

We are committed to inventing a new democratic education, which aims at social emancipation and is capable of helping people overcome their colonial past (Romão & Gadotti, 2012). The main objective of this education is to overcome the “culture of silence” in relation to the dominant culture of the oppressor or invader (Freire, 2019). Thus, in a democratic education, the oppressed should gain a voice and become capable of putting into words their desires, feelings, problems, concerns, and perplexities.

The central difficulty in achieving this goal lies in the fact that the oppressed are often fascinated by the oppressor's culture and do not realize that they have left their own culture aside. Inadvertently the oppressed start to speak as if they were the oppressors, from the place of the ones who oppress them, leaving what would be their singular place of enunciation empty.

Thus, for the education worker and the researcher who turn to questions linked to the speaker's relationship with language, an enigma always remains: how much will the educational process be able to help overcome second-generation colonialism, the colonization of the mind through disciplines such as education, science, economics, and law”? (Le Grange, 2016, p. 4, our translation).

From the perspective of Gomes (2021), it is about decolonizing minds, through the construction of anti-racist pedagogical practices. For the author, such practices are fundamental to deconstruct “the racist logic present in our socialization and in the formative processes built in private and public lives” (p. 437). This deconstruction interests students of all races and ethnic groups, since “by receiving an education poisoned by prejudices, their psychic structures have also been affected” (Munanga, 2005, p. 16).

For us, the condition for the success of this venture is to take into account approaches that consider the act of reading a discursive process in which author and reader are socio-historically determined and ideologically constituted subjects. In these proposals, such as that of Coracini (1995), rather than pre-established, the meaning is configured by the historical-social moment.

Despite the complexity of the fight against racism, which requires several battle fronts, we have no doubt that transforming our minds as teachers is an extremely important preliminary task. This transformation will make us true educators, capable of contributing to the building of Brazilian democracy, which cannot be fully achieved while the destruction of the historical

and cultural individualities of the populations that formed the plural matrix of the Brazilian people and society continues.

It follows from this position that, if someone wants to act as an agent of decolonization in the educational act, it is essential that, when teaching how to read, educators shed light on how meanings related to the colonization processes were constructed; and that, when teaching to write, the educator gives students a voice, inviting them to report their own experiences through written texts and not according to external proposals.

Reporting experiences in primary and lower secondary education

Reporting an experience in a text written in a school involves constructing a narrative, that is, creating a “representation of a real or fictitious event or series of events through language, and more particularly through written language” (Genette, 2013, p. 255). Furthermore, according to the same author, this implies describing characters, objects and settings involved in the construction of the facts to be narrated. The narrative's history seems to be confused with the history of humanity itself. It is present in all cultures, times and places, in multiple forms of presentation (Barthes, 2013).

From the point of view of the action to be performed, anyone who writes an experience account needs to produce a narrative thematizing events they experienced or witnessed. For this reason, writing accounts

can be an excellent exercise of elaboration of the existential experience of the individual, of a society and even of the world; it allows expanding one's understanding of the provisional nature of each state or situation in life, leading to the recognition of the transformational character of the action on oneself and on reality. (Rezende & Souza, 2018. pp. 146-147)

Adopting a psychoanalytic perspective, the potential for resignification of the human experience provided by the act of reporting does not require that the text of the account contain supposed truths from a factual point of view. Every narrative, even a fictional one, contains the dimension of its author's psychic reality (Bartholomeu & Assolini, 2020). For this reason, a researcher who focuses on analyzing narratives can, by observing that the narrated events are

discursively constructed in the text, infer “how stereotypes are accepted or rejected, or how locally instituted identities relate to specialized or common-sense discourses that circulate in society” (Bastos & Biar, 2015, p. 109).

Finally, as Lemos Vóvio and Armada Firmino (2019) point out, literacy practices, such as writing accounts, can be a means of confronting racism, which is still present in Brazilian schools. Such practices provide opportunities for the confrontation of multiple identities, with which subjects may or may not identify. Therefore, such practices provide learning about oneself and differences and can, thus, promote education for ethnic-racial relations (Lemos Vóvio & Armada Firmino, 2019).

Racism in Brazilian schools

Racism is a “systematic form of discrimination based on race” (Almeida, 2019. p. 26). Always structural, racism manifests itself through practices that result in disadvantages for some or privileges for others, depending on their racial groups. Thus, racism goes beyond racial prejudice. The latter is a judgment based on stereotypes, whereas racism progresses to a different treatment of members of the races that are targets of prejudice.

Brazilian society has been organized on the premises of exclusion and lack of racial participation (Fiorin, 2016). For Guimarães (1999), each racism can only be understood within its own history. In the Brazilian case, it is necessary to have in mind, firstly, that racism was considered a taboo until recently. It was claimed that Brazilians lived in a racial democracy. This false idea of racial harmony led Brazilian sociocultural inequalities not to be taken into account.

Guimarães (1999) further argues that the very notion of race denotes a social reality rather than a biological fact. The author explains that there is nothing visible in skin color or nose shape that justifies discrimination against some individuals. These facts only work within a pre-existing ideology. Thus, when one attributes certain characteristics to a certain group, for example, saying that northeasterners are uneducated, one naturalizes a supposedly social trait “making the sphere of race relations seem like a pure illusion provoked by a very well-conceived plan of social domination and oppression” (Guimarães, 2004, p. 11).

In the case of Brazilian racism, in contrast to what occurs in the United States, Nogueira (2007) observed that there is mark racial prejudice, that is, racism is exercised based on appearance (physical features, physiognomy, gestures, or accent). Therefore, according to Guimarães (1999), black people with darker skin tend to be more frequent targets of racism than black people with lighter skin.

This facet of racism is visible in racial insults, a tool used to show black people the negative meaning attributed to their color by society (Guimarães, 2000, 2002). When asked about racism, children and teenagers often say that racial insults and discrimination are common in schools and associate them with bullying (Jorge, 2016). However, faculty and school staff tend to minimize these occurrences and their effects. Consequently, racism is a persistent reality in educational institutions (Bernardo & Maciel, 2015).

Fortunately, Brazilian society has been taking initiatives against racism. The promulgation of Law 7716 (Brasil, 1989), which establishes racism is a crime, was a milestone. Law 10 639 (Brasil, 2003) was another mark. It included the mandatory subject “Afro-Brazilian History and Culture” in the official curriculum of the compulsory education system.

Since the promulgation of Law 10,639, research has been carried out to monitor the conditions of its implementation and the success of its enforcement. For example, Martins and Sales (2014) found that teachers concluded that the study of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture has reduced conflicts related to ethnic-racial issues and that students pointed out that learning about this topic has had an impact on racism, especially at school.

Although important changes have been observed, students still face racism in their school communities and do not perceive relevant actions supposedly taken by faculty or staff. Likewise, they do not identify practices related to the study of Afro-Brazilian culture and history in most subjects in the curriculum. In relation to this aspect, teachers state that, even though they are aware of the importance of the topic, sometimes they do not feel prepared to incorporate this issue into the curricula of their subjects (Gonçalves, 2018).

Aware that some racism manifestations still occur in Brazilian schools (Candau & Leite, 2011; Carvalho, 2005; Gomes, 2003; Santiago, 2020), in which black students may suffer verbal aggression from their peers, even when the aggressors are also black (Fazzi, 2007), we sought to investigate how the polyphonic theory of enunciation (Ducrot, 1998, 2020) allows us to perceive discursive configurations that go beyond the denial of the existence of racism, which

is the most common form of its occurrence in Latin America (*"I'm not a racist, but..."*) (Van Dijk, 1992, 2005).

Polyphony in language

Considering that in Brazil conversations about racism tend to be heterogeneous and marked not only by conflicts between speakers, but also by internal conflicts of the speaking subject, we incorporated polyphonic studies of enunciation into our analytical efforts (Ducrot, 1998, 2020).

We continue the studies previously initiated (Riolfi & Costa, 2018), in which we analyzed the polyphony present in children's texts. As Ducrot's theory of polyphony touches the constitution of the meaning of discourses, one of the advantages of this procedure could be to foster the development of reading comprehension (Niederauer, 2015).

In the context of analyzing literary texts, the word polyphony was originally used to define "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). Later, the word polyphony was included in linguistic studies to question the oneness of the speaker and to designate an enunciative unfolding within the enunciation, similar to a play in which different characters are on stage (Ducrot, 1998, 2020).

Ducrot (1987), for whom argumentation is in language, considers the argumentative value of words to analyze the argumentative direction of discourse (Ducrot, 1981, 2008, 2020). He believes that argumentation is a type of discursive relationship that links one or more arguments to a conclusion (Anscombe & Ducrot, 1983). Thus, in his analysis of the argumentative direction of enunciations, Ducrot is attentive to the presence of different voices that can be discerned through careful reading.

To this end, Ducrot first separates the empirical person (the speaking subject) from the discursive entity represented in the text, which is noted with the letter L, the initial for the French word *locuteur* (speaker). Then, he proposes a first level of polyphony: the separation between L and the different voices conveyed by it, the enunciators (to be noted using the letter "e"). While L is represented in the text as the entity that is responsible for the discourse, being the instance to which the pronoun "I" should be attributed, the "e"s are not necessarily named:

e^1 , e^2 , e^n are voices brought by the enunciation that express points of view to which L reacts, agreeing or disagreeing with them (Ducrot, 2020).

Therefore, there may be enunciations in which L apparently points to a given conclusion, when taking responsibility for the speech, but the presence of enunciators e^1 , e^2 , e^n denounces another narrative. This is seen, for example, in “I’m not a racist, I even have black friends”. In the first part of the sentence, L carries one e^1 that tries to build an ethos – a construction shared by an enunciator and a co-enunciator, an interactive process of influencing the interlocutor (Maingueneau, 2005, 2011) – of being progressive and free from prejudice. However, the presence of “even” linguistically marks the presence of two voices. In the second part of the enunciation, there is an e^2 which, despite claiming to have black friends, has already announced its reservation about black people.

Methodology

Instruments and data collection

Due to a partnership between researchers and teachers, participants were invited to write during classes (Costa, 2019). Writing accounts of personal experiences was a familiar task for students, because, following the guidelines of the government curricula for Portuguese classes, the participants were practicing writing accounts (Currículo da Cidade, 2019). Before writing, the assignment was read aloud, and they had the opportunity to ask questions. On average, it took them an hour to complete it.

Our research instrument had four comic strips, followed by a request for a writing. Comic books are a substantial resource in education, because they favor the learning process by putting together words and images. Furthermore, the elliptical character of their language forces readers to think and imagine (Vergueiro, 2014). All strips featured the same character: Armandinho, a boy who, despite his young age, experiences and confronts inequality (Buchmann Cardoso & Mortari, 2014). The character was created by Brazilian illustrator Alexandre Beck (Soares, 2013). The strips are transcribed as follows:

Strip 1:

Armandinho's father: *Many people are carriers of this disease and don't even know it. And we all suffer from it!!*

Armandinho's father: *It can be transmitted by parents, school friends and even by TV!*

Armandinho: *Is there a cure for this disease?*

Armandinho's father: *Sure, there's a cure.*

Armandinho's father: *Prejudice can be cured with education.*

Strip 2:

Armandinho's friend: *Dinho, have you seen the shirt Beto is wearing?*

Armandinho: *Yeab!*

Armandinho's friend: *Can anything be more ridiculous than that?*

Armandinho: *Yes, a mania for making fun of others that some people have.*

Strip 3:

Armandinho's friend: *They won't let me play because I'm a girl.*

Armandinho: *But that's not the reason.*

Armandinho: *It's because you play better than them.*

Strip 4:

Armandinho: *Cars are boy toys and dolls are girl toys. What's that supposed to mean?!*

Unknown adult: *(silence)*

Armandinho: *At home, my mom drives... and my dad takes care of me!*

None of the strips addresses racism. The effect of meaning in the first one is that prejudice is wrong, it is an issue of uneducated people. There is an equivalence between “prejudice” and “disease”, created mainly by the verbs “transmit”, “cure” and “treat”. The second strip creates an effect of meaning against bullying, classifying it as “ridiculous” and naming it “mania”. Both third and fourth strips create an effect against gender discrimination.

Students were asked two questions: have you ever suffered any type of prejudice? Have you ever seen anyone in this situation? Participants were then asked to write a personal account, describing a situation in which they, or someone they knew, had been a victim of prejudice. This choice was based on the belief that this type of account can be a useful tool against prejudice (Dominicé, 2006).

Participants

Out of 113 students from the 1st year of lower secondary education of a public school in São Paulo city, Brazil, who initially agreed to participate in the research, 47 children reported situations of racism and, therefore, became the participants of this research. Twenty were boys and 27 were girls. During data collection, they were 11 or 12 years old.

The school where the texts were collected is located on the outskirts of São Paulo city: Itaim Paulista neighborhood, where 54% of the population consider themselves black. Our participants follow the same racial pattern. Average family salaries are approximately 15% of the average income of families living in the city’s most privileged areas. (Igualdade racial..., 2010).

Participants were informed about the research procedures and agreed to participate voluntarily. The school board signed a free and informed consent form, previously signed by the researchers, who committed to maintaining confidentiality of the identity of the research participants. To this end, when the subjects' first names were mentioned in the accounts, we replaced them with pseudonyms. The same occurred with personal biographical details which might lead to identifying who had written the account.

Results and discussion

The children produced handwritten non-illustrated texts. Most of them were written in cursive letters. On average, accounts were 200 to 300-word long. Except for a student who claimed to have been discriminated against because he was white, all students mentioned events of prejudice against black people.

In our analysis, we found allusions to different types of racial prejudice. This seems to point out that, despite the tendency to deny racism in Brazil (Guimarães, 1999, 2004; Telles, 2003; Van Dijk, 1992, 2005), if invited to express themselves about it, school-age children are able to report events of racial prejudice. Children reported both verbal and physical aggression against black people. Verbal aggression appeared in 44 texts (77.20%) and non-verbal aggression in 13 (22.80%).

The non-verbal racist actions accounted were related to: physical violence (53.84%); avoidance of black people (38.46%); management of the relationship of a friend with a black person in order to interrupt the latter (7.69%). Regarding verbal racist actions, racial insults (Guimarães, 2000, 2002) occurred in their various facets.

“I came home smelling like black people”: omnipresence of racial insults

Racial insults (Guimarães, 2000, 2002) were the most prominent facet of racism in the corpus. The effectiveness of racial insults as a humiliation tool lies in the possibility of delimiting the distance between L and their interlocutor. From the point of view of the person insulting, the person being insulted, when hearing the words addressed to them, should recognize their poverty, their social anomie, that is, their social and family disorganization, their dirtiness, and their animality (Guimarães, 2000, 2002).

The analysis showed a pattern of racial offenses. The speakers present in the children's accounts carry voices that allege the inferiority of black people and justify it. In many texts, the polyphony generated by these voices is broad, creating complex realities. The justification found for the alleged inferiority of black people is given through traits such as origin, social class, religion, appearance, and cultural differences.

Furthermore, racial insults are used to justify accusations of poor hygiene standards, moral anomie, social anomie, the objectification of black people, the suggestion of physical and moral defects, and lower social status.

In what follows, we will exemplify each form of racial insult present in the material analyzed.

- a) *Accusation of poor hygiene standards.* It involves associating black skin with a lack of hygiene, or even mentioning its body odor. In the corpus, L often introduces an e¹ voice that narrates a situation in which a third party insults a black person, using words that denote dirt, as in: “And then some girls started to curse him for smelling and call him stinky, rotten smell, garbage, etc.” Another possibility is the use of direct speech. In this case, there is an e² voice that insults the black person as in: “I came home smelling like black people”.
- b) *Moral anomie.* Alludes to the accusation of deviation from the social pact (delinquent conduct, immorality, etc.). There is often an association of this with African-based religions, seen in a pejorative way. The word “macumba”, used to designate them indiscriminately, is mentioned as something to fear or be ashamed of. The associations of “macumba” with dirt are common, as in “Macumbeira with lice”. In the excerpt “Get away from that girl or you’ll get macumba”, L introduces an e¹ voice that supports L’s imperative for the caller to move away from a black person comparing “macumba” to a contagious disease. Therefore, there is an implicit statement: the religions of black people have the same properties as disease-causing agents.
- c) *Social anomie.* It refers to the use of being black as an excuse to assert social inferiority or justify a ban. Situations are very often mentioned in the accounts in which at least one enunciator e¹ proposed a situation of social anomie of black people (“Go back to Africa!”), justifying this proposal by their origin (African; African black little girl) or skin color (Asphalt; Chocolate candy; Crazy black woman; Nigger; You little nigger; Black; You nigger!⁵).

⁵ T.N.: In Portuguese, Asfalto; Bom-bom; Nega maluca; Nego; Neguinho; Preto; Seu negro!

- d) *Objectification*. It is related to the comparison of black people with an animal, object or part of the body, aiming at their humiliation. An example is: “They started laughing in my face. Afterwards, they started calling me Monkey because of my color.” The most frequent racial insult in the accounts is the comparison of black people with a monkey. Metaphors linked to skin color are also frequent, as in “Charcoal”; “Black people coal”; “chocolate”; “Black beans”.
- e) *Imputation of inferior social status*. It involves addressing black people as if they were servants, whether of the interlocutor or of third parties. This can be observed in the following excerpt, in which L narrates a racial insult inflicted on his aunt: “The day they called her Maid, she was at the movie theater, when a lady was late and holding a huge snack. Then this woman fell down [and dropped her snack]. Then this woman said she [the black woman] would have to clean up the mess”.
- f) *Insinuation of physical or mental defects*. The most common allusion present in the corpus is ugliness, associated with the color of the skin or the shape of the hair of black people. Below is an example, in which L introduces e¹, which includes lexical items culturally associated with racial insults: “You Hard-haired, you look like a devil with that hair.”

“Because I felt humiliated”: racism according to its victims

In 13 texts (27.7% of the corpus), the narrators constituted themselves as Ls that represent themselves as a black person who was a victim of racist behavior. L describes himself or herself as someone who, interested in living his or her own life, was attacked unfairly and inexplicably.

Having interpreted racism as something that hurts, these voices pointed to the presence of a moral conscience in the accounts. Thus, this was in line with previous research, whose results suggest that children can moralize actions that involve harm, defined as an intuitively perceived continuum (Schein & Grey, 2018).

All the texts are marked by the presence of voices of equitable people, who can attribute value to all human beings, and whose principles allow evaluating what is right and what is wrong.

This effect is reinforced by the fact that, in all texts, the speakers neither judge the aggressor nor react to the aggression.

Table 1 reproduces an account written by a victim of racism, an 11-year-old girl.

Table 1

Reproduction of an account written by one of the research participants

Untitled Text

1. One day at school, I was doing the drawing that
2. the teacher had told me to do.
3. Suddenly, the boys started saying my
4. name then I asked, “Why are you talking about me?”
5. They started laughing in my face.
6. Then they started calling me Monkey
7. because of my color, and called me Hard-haired.
8. I started crying because they kept humiliating me.
9. I always got home sad and my mother
10. asked,
11. “Ivy, why are you sad?” Then I answered with
12. the sadness in my heart,
13. “Mom, is there anything wrong with my
14. color?” My mother answered
15. “Sweetheart, you never had any problems with your
16. color, you are beautiful as you are.”
17. So I started to stop caring about this nonsense,
18. and I stopped caring about what people say about
19. me.

In the text reproduced in Table 1, L uses enunciators who, little by little, lead the reader to follow a black girl's personal coming-of-age drama. From an initial state of sadness and humiliation, the protagonist of the narrative stops giving weight to the aggressiveness of others, as she reduces the aggressors' discourse to the quality of "nonsense" (line 18).

Initially, L creates a setting in which the protagonist, immersed in her daily life, is attacked without prior motivation. In lines 1 and 2, she introduces e¹, the voice of a student performing her tasks, which describes a school scene in which the actors act in accordance with social norms (*I was doing the drawing that the teacher had told me to do*). This creates the image of a disciplined and obedient subject, which makes the reader tend to adhere to her narrative perspective.

Then, through indirect speech, e² occurs, which corresponds to the voice of the aggressors, who were initially talking about the protagonist. She states: *they started saying my name*, in lines 3 and 4. Subsequently, there is an e³, which reproduces the question directed at the girl's aggressor (*"Why are you talking about me?"*, in line 5). The aggressiveness reported scales with the presence of an e⁴, manifested through the account of the hostile action (*"laughing in my face"*, in line 6).

Finally, in lines 7 and 8, this segment of the text ends with the presence of an e⁵, whose function is to clarify the relationship between the insults "Monkey" and "Hard-haired" and the color of the protagonist's skin (*because of my color*), establishing a causal relationship between having black skin and having been insulted.

In line 9, L adds a new voice to report a non-violent reaction to a violent or degrading situation. e⁶ reports the act of crying to express sadness (*I started crying*). Next comes e⁷, which explains the reason, the feeling of humiliation (*because they kept humiliating me*).

In line 10, e⁸ explains the durational aspect of the situation, which had been dragging on over time (*always got home sad*). Then, in line 11, e⁹ carries the voice of the protagonist's mother (*"Ivy, why are you sad?"*).

In lines 14 to 17, e¹⁰ and e¹¹ are voices that continue to engage in a dialogue. First, the protagonist asks for her mother's opinion regarding the color of her skin. Then, this voice praises her, urging her to accept herself (*you are beautiful as you are*).

In the concluding paragraph, lines 18 to 20, e^{12} is a voice that gave new meaning to her situation, as she learned to attach less importance to racial prejudice.

Having said that, it is worth stating that, in addition to the mechanisms already explored throughout the analysis of the text reproduced in Table 1, – such mechanisms are present in general throughout the corpus –, there are also speakers that:

- Recognize that the suffering of black people is a social reality and disagree with the existence of racism.

Example 1: That hurt me a lot, but it's reality, we live in a world where the white person who steals is innocent, and the black person who didn't do anything is guilty.

In the first part of the text, L presents an e^1 that describes the psychological effects of racism on him (*That hurt me a lot*). Then, introduced by the argumentative operator “but” (Ducrot, 2020), an e^2 occurs. It claims to know the reality of the facts in this regard (*but it is the reality*). e^3 , present in “*we live in a world*”, is responsible for presenting a statement to be attributed to the narrator of the text, potentially confused with the speaking subject.

Finally, this ethics is expressed in the last part of the text, where the contrast between the statements of e^4 (*the white person who steals is innocent*) and e^5 (*the black person who does nothing is guilty*) shows that L perceives social injustice and is at odds with it.

- Believe in justice and human equality.

Example 2: There are white and black people, but that doesn't change anything, we are all the same.

L presents an e^1 that shares a fact: people's skin color is different (*There are white and black people*). Then L uses the argumentative operator “but” (Ducrot, 2020) to lead the text to its conclusion, namely: this fact does not invalidate e^2 – color doesn't change people's essence (*this doesn't change anything*); or e^3 – all human beings have the same value (*we are all the same*).

- Is proud of a part of the body that is often the target of racism.

Example 3: I started to take more care of and add more volume to my hair.

L features an e^1 that shares her decision to invest in personal care (*to take care; my hair*). As the conjunction “and” is present in the sequence, one would expect to find the specifications of the actions performed, which in fact occurs due to the presence of e^2 (*add more volume to*),

whose voice associates the natural characteristic of black people's hair (volume) with beauty and aesthetics.

“People passing by called her ‘Monkey’”: racism reported by eyewitnesses

The text presented below, in Table 2, exemplifies the production of witnesses of racism. In 34 texts (72.3% of the corpus) the narrators constituted themselves as Ls that witnessed racial discrimination.

In them, L described scenes in which speakers saw a third party display racist behavior towards a black person. In all of them, L identified with the victim and expressed a negative judgment against racism.

Table 2

Reproduction of an account written by one of the research participants

Untitled text

1 The girl I mentioned was my classmate,
2 the other children in my class
3 were prejudiced against her, the boys
4 kept calling her various ugly
5 names, just because she was black, not
6 white, she couldn't take it anymore, and
7 one day she decided to call her parents
8 and tell them everything she was going through
9 at school. Then her parents changed schools.
10 Prejudice is a very ugly thing,
11 because it hurts people, I know that
12 because I lived for three years
13 with a classmate who suffered prejudice.

The text reproduced in Table 2 was written by a 12-year-old girl. In it, the narrator constitutes herself as an L who presents herself as an eyewitness to racism. This characteristic is introduced in lines 1 and 2, through the presence of the voice e^1 , a classmate of the victim. This voice is present in the expression “*she was my classmate*”. It gives credibility to e^1 , presented as someone who has in-depth knowledge of the facts, since she had the opportunity to examine them on a daily basis. This effect is reinforced at the conclusion of the text (lines 13 and 14), where e^2 adds information about the length of time she had been observing the attacks (because *I lived for three years*).

L also constitutes herself as someone who is apart from racist conducts. This effect can be observed in lines 2 and 3, where care is taken to specify who the prejudiced children were (“*the other children*”, “*the boys*”). This impression is reinforced in lines 4 and 5 by the use of the expression “*ugly things*” to negatively qualify the aggressors’ lexical choice.

L’s position against the aggressors and in favor of the black girl can also be inferred from “*just because she was black*” (line 5). In this segment, there is an e^3 that states “she is black” and an e^4 that, by using “just because”, implies that being black does not constitute a reason to be insulted.

There is also an attempt to summon empathy from the reader. In line 6, e^5 describes the black girl’s feelings with strong emotional appeal (“*she couldn’t take it anymore*”). In line 8, there is mention of “*everything she went through*”. The choice of this way of saying allows us to assume the presence of an enunciator e^6 , which sympathizes with a victim who, in her opinion, had been suffering excessively.

L finally explains the conclusion to which her text is heading through the inclusion of an enunciator e^7 , which evaluates prejudice negatively, “*Prejudice is a very ugly thing*” (line 11) and, through the explanatory conjunction “because”, explains her reasons: “*it hurts people*” (line 12).

In lines 12 to 14, where an e^8 shows itself as a friendly ally of the black girl who is a victim of racial prejudice, the effect of separation between L and the prejudiced subjects is strongly achieved. It occurs especially in line 13, where it reads “*I lived... with*”, which adds proximity.

Having said that, it must be stated that a general characteristic in the texts is the separation between enunciators and the racist conduct. This effect is obtained when L employs enunciators who:

- Exclude themselves from the group of people who have displayed racist behaviors.

Example 4: I have already witnessed prejudice when I was at my cousin's house and a black boy was passing by, then the kids on the street started shouting "*look at the little black boy, look at the little black boy.*"

The narrator is constituted as an L that includes a voice e^1 which is configured as an eyewitness (*I have already witnessed prejudice*). Then, e^2 declares that he knows who the authors of the racial insult are (*the boys on the street started shouting*). From the emphasis on the boys' origins, it is possible to infer that L is separating himself from the racists. Finally, e^3 , the voice of the street children, reproduces the insult ("*look at the little black boy, look at the little black boy*").

- Evaluates racism as sad, wrong or inappropriate.

Example 5: This (racism) is horrible, and people don't realize the harm they cause.

Example 5 was taken from the conclusion of a text in which L narrates an act of prejudice against a black classmate, while e^1 considers prejudice something negative (*This is horrible*), e^2 adds a negative judgment about insensitive people who fail to realize when they hurt victims (*people don't realize the harm they cause*).

- Qualifies the victims of racism with attributes judged positively by society.

Example 6: Her mother managed to advise her beautiful daughter to continue (studying) [...] she knew she had great potential to be happy.

In example 6, we see a fragment of a narrative in which a black girl is described with positive qualities: she is beautiful, studious and deserves to be happy.

L introduces an e^1 voice that contextualizes the girl's relationship with her mother (the mother encouraging the child to study). Next to this voice is e^2 , which, in parallel to the narrative, praises the beauty of the black woman (*beautiful*).

Then, L presents an e^3 that gives an opinion about the victim of racism (*she had great potential to be happy*) and an e^4 that attributes this judgment to the character's mother (*she knew that*).

- Creates a setting in which the victim is a model citizen, explaining the relationship between e and the victim, in order to give credibility to the account.

Example 7: My aunt was a victim of racist prejudice when she worked at a gas station, and people passing by called her “Monkey”.

In example 7, L introduces an e¹ that narrates being aware of an episode of racial insult (*My aunt was a victim of racist prejudice*). Then, e² explains that the aggression occurred frequently, by passers-by (*people passing by called her*). Finally, e³ brings the aggressor’s voice and reproduces, in quotation marks, the aggressor’s voice (“*monkey*”).

- Shows empathy for the victim and/or confronts the aggressor.

Example 8: I was very angry. I confronted him right away because I don't have patience with this (racism). If it were me, it would be worse for him. [...] So I said shut up because the person is not here to defend himself.

L introduces an e¹ which is the voice of a girl who shares the emotional effects of having witnessed an incident of racism (*I was very angry*). e² goes on to narrate the subsequent actions and her motivation (*I confronted him right away because I have no patience with this*). Then, e³ explains her identification with the victim, reasoning from her place (*If it were me*). Finally, e⁴ reproduces the enunciation that was previously said, at the moment of confrontation with the aggressor: (*So I said shut up*).

- Values aspects that are usually the target of racist mockery.

Example 9: After a while, my cousin decided to let his hair grow. His hair looked beautiful. But when his friends saw it, they said his hair was hard, ugly.

L introduces an e¹ that narrates the decision made by a black boy about his own hair (*he decided to let his hair grow*). Then e² judges the results of this decision positively (*it looked beautiful*). Finally, introduced by the argumentative operator “but” (Ducrot, 2020), an e², through indirect speech, reproduces the condemnation made by racist people (*his hair was hard, ugly*).

- Differentiates the description from the insult when the word “black” is used.

Example 10: Then he stumbled upon a boy named Gustavo. [...] “You black boy, you are blind.” Then he said, “I’m black because God made me that way.”

The excerpt was taken from an account in which an unnamed black child inadvertently crashed into Gustavo. The latter, overcome with anger, insults the narrator, using ableist vocabulary and racial insults.

Then, L introduces e¹ voice, which reports the incident (*he stumbled upon a boy named Gustavo*). e², in turn, represents Gustavo's voice (*"You black man, you are blind."*). Next, e³ resignifies the word "black", assuming it as a description (*"I am black because God made me that way"*). This speech, in turn, is introduced by e⁴, responsible for giving a voice to the black child (*Then he said*).

Conclusions and recommendations

The research whose results have been shared in this article used the lens of polyphony to analyze personal accounts in which manifestations of racism are represented in different voices. We noticed that there is a clear enunciative division in the texts. On the one hand, racial insults appear in all accounts. On the other hand, racism is manifest when students narrate situations in which they include enunciators other than the one constituted as the speaker of the text.

Therefore, considering the speaker's division allowed, first of all, to imagine that most likely all the children participating in the research know that racism should be evaluated as something wrong. This hypothesis is based on the observation that the person legally responsible for the texts (L – the speaker)⁶ does not express opinions in the field of racial prejudice. The division of the speaker (L) also made it possible to detail different modalities of the presence of discrimination and prejudice reflected in the writing of research participants. The victims of racism do not condemn their aggressors and present themselves as fair and sensible. Witnesses identify with those attacked and disapprove of the aggressors.

Finally, finding that racial prejudice circulates in the form of the voices of third parties included in the accounts (the different enunciators) led us to understand the importance of reading activities through which teachers and students learn to recognize conflicting enunciators present in texts. This recognition can promote the development of reading comprehension

⁶ T. N.: In this text, represented by letter L.

(Niederauer, 2015), in an effort in line with a conception of teaching reading and writing that transcends technical aspects, and consists of a “dialogical experience” (Freire, 2021a, p. 81). In the specific context of the racial agenda, such recognition can also help to combat racist discourse and promote more egalitarian relationships at school and in society.

That said, it is worth highlighting some developments of these studies for the field of education. Inviting students in intermediate grades to report their experiences, especially those involving conflicting themes that tend to remain masked by the culture of silence (Freire, 2019), fosters the construction of an egalitarian society, in which the transformative potential of the word is a virtuality for all people, regardless of who they are. By being a space for reworking subjective experience and putting identity issues into play, this type of education can establish other ways of reading words and reading the world (Lemos Vóvio & Armada Firmino, 2019).

Thus, we conclude that the Polyphonic Theory of Enunciation is a useful tool to describe and deepen the understanding of the characteristics of racist discourse in Brazil, which was marked by invisibility until recently (Guimarães, 1999). If, at the level of the speakers (L), this discourse declares to be that of an alleged racial democracy, the unraveling of the enunciators can reveal structural racism (Almeida, 2019).

Finally, it should be said that research into expressions of racism has advanced considerably in recent years, but there is still a need for studies articulating language, education, and prejudice. The texts analyzed in this study were inspired by strips that denounced prejudice in general. This may have influenced the results in two ways. One is the fact that racism appeared in 40% of the accounts written by children who live in an area where 54% of the population is black and, therefore, it is possible that a greater number of students have experienced or witnessed racial prejudice. Another is the fact that all the speakers in the accounts presented themselves as politically correct. Thus, we wonder whether research on spontaneous productions would have different results. Oral debates or comments and their replies on social media would be a fertile ground for further research.

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