

# Racism and Language in Latin America

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Racism is a prejudiced social practice that classifies human beings as inferiors or superiors. The Latin-American context – since the colonization of the indigenous lands until today – reflects, via different manifestations of violence, a state of insecurity and of reproduction of infinite violations due to instituted and naturalized racism.

In his book *The Expulsion of the Other*, Byung-Chul Han talks about the fear of the other and proposes that the only form to connect our existence with the others is via listening. If I do not listen nor am listened to, my suffering becomes private and I make myself enough, single. One way of avoiding this psychic suffering is by socializing it. But how can I listen to the other if I deny their language?

It is important to keep in mind that identity, identical, and idiom have the same root: *idem*, which means the same (Corominas, 1980). From this observation, it is possible to understand a linguistic characteristic of identity. It could be said that the individual is that which is spoken of them; their names, surnames, and nicknames form a linguistic identity that tells us about them. The discursive mesh in itself is what would give the individual a particular identity.

Daniel Mato, a researcher at Conicet (Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council), said, in an interview, that the Argentinian society is not even aware of its racism, and that people believe there is no racism because there are no segregationist laws such there were in South Africa and in the US. Nevertheless, the official language is Spanish, and few provinces recognize indigenous languages. In Argentina, as the country was being colonized, indigenous people were forbidden to speak their languages and, thus, to narrate their stories. These indigenous people – who often do not have access to public health and are displaced from their territories – speak a language that is not understood by their co-citizens, while society silently watches. Only in 2020 the government created the National Direction for Ethnic-Racial Equality. There is also a proposal for the creation of compulsory capacitation in racism prevention and eradication for every person occupying a public role.

It is very common to hear stigmatization in people's language when they speak with disdain of the *gallego* (Spaniard), *ruso* (Russian), *judío* (Jew), *tano* (Italian), and *cabecita negra* (little black head) – this last one, used for the natives. Identity is also expressed on the skin surface, in the face, and in the objects around us. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1923) defines the Ego as “a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself a projection of a surface.” The skin demarcates a limit with the external world and gives a certain cohesion to the I that is supported by the corporeal.

Since the skin represents the surface of the psychic apparatus, any alteration in it produces effects that directly reverberate on the identity and, thus, on the being's figuration. As a sheath, the skin is that which is first presented to the eyes of the others. In many Latin American countries, where the white class is in power, it is frequent to see dark skinned people being discriminated and only hired to do less qualified jobs.

Judging by people's behavior and discourse, we can determine that their linguistic failures – in addition to the need to overcome the hegemonic domination (which is, in turn, patriarchal) – demand, among other things, a radical change in the language structures. The most common proposal today

comes from feminism, which promotes inclusive language. Society's prevalent racism is observed in the youth and their family, especially in the relationship mother-child.

In this relationship are rooted ambivalent and destructive desires towards the figure of the father. Such desires are imaginarily strengthened by the patriarchal model of parenting often carried out by women. We observe, thus, that racism is not only supported by those who oppress, but also by those oppressed. This can be seen in a person's efforts to change their identity via operation, or via their ways of dressing, or by dying their hair with different colors. All attempts bound to deny identity.

The subjective and collective violence that is produced as a consequence of the erasure of the *name-of-the-father* and of the concrete lack of a real approach to language empowering is also carried forward by women with some phallic bad habits. It should be possible, thus, to find a new discursive form that is not limited to the primary designation of incipient phenomena (neutral as opposed to masculine and feminine articles), but which can also complete the process of signification by avoiding merely linguistic and imaginary aspects in order to put itself at the service of that which is entirely symbolic.

We can observe that the feminisms in vogue in Latin America risk repeating the hegemonic patriarchal model in the opposite direction, which could end up generating more violence in men, given the displacement of language, discourse, and power.

Conclusion: in the face of the inclusion of autochthone languages and diverse idiomatic expressions, a code is produced, included, and established. A new language? The important thing is that it is an inclusive language that represents all people. In order to accept a language, first we need to respect the mother tongue, as well as to accept the paternal function. When the paternal function is exercised, the child can be separated from the mother. And with this separation, the individual can be integrated in the symbolic order of the language.

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