

A STUDY ON LANGUAGE IN FRANTZ FANON'S *BLACK SKIN,* *WHITE MASKS*

UM ESTUDO SOBRE A LINGUAGEM EM *PELE NEGRA, MÁSCARAS BRANCAS* DE FRANTZ
FANON

UN ESTUDIO SOBRE EL LENGUAJE EN *PIEL NEGRA, MÁSCARAS BLANCAS* DE FRANTZ
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1 INTRODUCTION

Frantz Fanon begins the first chapter of his book *Black Skin, White Masks*¹, entitled “Black and Language”, with a blunt statement regarding the reasons for his study. This statement has heuristic value for us, as it can serve as a work hypothesis that, regardless of its truth, can be adopted as a guiding idea in the investigation of the facts that we will later discuss. Fanon says (2008, p. 33, emphasis added):

We attribute fundamental importance to the phenomenon of language. That is why we consider this study necessary, **as it can provide us with one of the understanding elements of the *for-the-other* dimension of colored men**; as speaking is existing absolutely for the other.

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¹The book was translated twice in Brazil; both translations are used in the current paper. The bibliographic reference system will allow the reader to clearly identify the use made of each translation.

The author adds the following to this (2008, p. 33): “Speaking is being able to use a given syntax, possessing the morphology of one language or another but, above all, assuming a culture, bearing the weight of a civilization”. Fanon's starting point is known to all who dedicate themselves to studying his philosophy: in the initial reflection context of *Black Skin, White Masks*, it is a question of thinking about the relationship between the *Antillean Black* and the French language since, in his opinion, “every colonized people – that is, every people in whose midst an inferiority complex has arisen due to the burial of its cultural originality complex takes a stance in relation to the language of the civilizing nation, that is, the metropolitan culture” (FANON, 2008, p. 34).

In other words, the “language of the metropolis” is present in the life of the colonized, either in a process of approximation (which may imply assimilation at various levels and intensities, which Fanon will call *speaking like a white-skinned person* (FANON, 2008, p. 36), or in a distancing process (which can also take on different nuances). This presence can constitute a perspective from which the colonized speaks.

If we consider Fanon's idea that we quoted above, according to which speech/language² can *provide one of the understanding elements of the 'for-the-other' dimension*, we believe that there is a clear need to develop studies that seek to explain the nature of this “understanding element” within this debate. In other words, clarification of the organization logic of the places occupied by subjects in their speech, as well as of those intended for the other in that same speech, seems to be an essential part of the theories that, in contemporary times, are devoted to the study of racialization.

This discussion about speech, who speaks and to whom they speak emerges today – even if not always in a central way – in several papers that identify speech/language as an important reflection *locus*³. It is in this point that we intend to formulate some considerations in order to develop a linguistic-enunciative study (BENVENISTE, 1989; 1989) and, through this strand, an enunciative-anthropological approach (FLORES, 2019) that thematizes speech/language as *one of the understanding elements* of the aspects involved within the reflections about race/racism/racialization. In a way, our intention is to contribute, even if in general terms, to the construction of a linguistic basis for the theoretical field to which our study belongs.

We have at least one reason to do this: it is undeniable that speech/language appears as an important element in the scope of the discussion promoted by Fanon (2020). In addition to that and even if in different ways in each case, studies such as those by Nascimento (2021), Mignolo (2021) and Moreira (2020) refer to the Benvenistian framework, especially that of the so-called Theory of Enunciation, to support part of the reflection they make in the scope of the studies they promote.

Nascimento (2021), for example, resorts to Benveniste's Theory of Enunciation to contextualize his discussion around the notion of “enunciation locus”. He says: “the theories about Speech locus and Enunciation locus are not always convergent. Whereas the Speech locus has become increasingly explored publicly in Brazil since Ribeiro (2017), the Enunciation locus has a more complex and remote origin” (NASCIMENTO, 2021, p. 58). For Nascimento, “enunciation is a concept that has been discussed since Benveniste's work (1976) in his attempt to theorize enunciation subjects” (NASCIMENTO, 2021, p. 58). The author explains that, in Benveniste, “each enunciation is unprecedented and unrepeatable. Thus, each utterance arising from a given enunciation is new, in which an 'I' implies to whom a person speaks, which is marked, even if implicitly, in speech” (NASCIMENTO, 2021, p. 58). However, the author considers that “the term ‘enunciation locus’, [...], has been used based on the reading that Mignolo (2000) makes of the work of Chicana *mestiza* intellectual Gloria Anzaldúa, when theorizing her concept of “borderline thinking”. In other words, by not exempting itself from clarifying the epistemological origins of his reflection, Nascimento's work opens up the possibility of anchoring new perspectives of approaches within the historical theoretical framework.

In turn, Mignolo (2021, p. 29) presents a reading according to which the “basic distinction (Emile Benveniste) between enunciation and what is enunciated was necessary for Benveniste to establish the floating sign, a central part of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology, and its development in French structuralism”. According to Mignolo, by turning to the study of enunciation, he “turned

²At this point, we do not see the need to make a distinction between both terms. However, as this paper advances, these concepts will be more clearly specified.

³Here we highlight the work by linguist Gabriel Nascimento, especially his text called “Between the enunciation locus and the speech locus: Marking the unmarked and bringing our bodies back in language” (NASCIMENTO, 2021).

to the subject who produces and manipulates signs, rather than the structure of signs itself (the utterance)” (MIGNOLO, 2021, p.29). He also adds: “With this distinction in mind, I would venture to say that the interrelated spheres of the colonial matrix of power (economy, authority, gender and sexuality, and knowledge/subjectivity) operate at the level of the utterance, while patriarchy and racism are grounded in the enunciation” (MIGNOLO, 2021, p. 29). Mignolo's reading is truly inspiring and, therefore, we cannot fail to note that Mignolo (2021, p. 32) formulates a fundamental prospective reasoning for our purposes here when he states that “perhaps Frantz Fanon has conceptualized better than anyone else what I have in mind to expand Benveniste's formal apparatus of enunciation”. Mignolo makes this assertion referring exactly to *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon.

Finally, it is worth recalling the study by Moreira (2020), who, when reading *Black Skin, White Masks*, explicitly considers that:

[...] although Fanon is referring to colonized men, specifically the Antillean Black, and the stance they must take towards the colonizers' speech, we see that his reflection resonates with a discussion assumed and deepened by Émile Benveniste when he proposes human interaction as a fundamental characteristic of language. (MOREIRA, 2020, p. 48)

For us, recalling these authors is enough to support our discussion since, especially in Mignolo (2021), the decolonial aspect of the gesture of shifting the focus from the utterance to the enunciation is valued, made possible from Benveniste.

In our perspective and inspired by these works, we would like to deepen a reflection that takes into account the utterance/enunciation dyad, based on Benveniste's studies. In other words, as the meaning of what is said is never entirely transparent, the content of what is said (what we call *utterance*) necessarily depends on the fact that it was said, on its *enunciation*, and it is in this instance that we see a place emerge from which a subject is constituted in speech/language. Therefore, our intention with this study is to deepen the discussion around speech/language from a linguistic-enunciative point of view, which in this paper will be done from the perspective of Émile Benveniste reinterpreted through the lens of an anthropology of enunciation (cf. FLORES, 2019).

This approach is anchored in the proposal of an “anthropology of enunciation” (FLORES, 2019) that is devoted to thinking about language phenomena as “general problems of Linguistics”, that is, as problems that are relevant across any linguistic reflection. In other words, the different phenomena of human language - such as those delimited by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* - are understood as the subjects' experience in their condition as speakers. Thus, an anthropology of enunciation is concerned with studying what a speaker says about their condition as such when they comment on their position as a speaker within certain linguistic phenomena. It is this perspective that we think about targeting at Fanon's comments when he attempts to circumscribe what he calls the *understanding elements of the for-the-other dimension*.

In this sense, with what we have presented so far, we believe that we have provided the minimum justification to initiate a study that aims at addressing speech/language within studies of race, racism and racialization. The topic deserves more detailed attention. To do this, we will conduct a first study here, circumscribed to Frantz Fanon's seminal work: *Black Skin, White Masks*. On the one hand, the focus on Fanon's work is justified by the book's importance in the theoretical universe in which it is included and, on the other hand, by the fact that Fanon himself indicates that speech/language plays a prominent role in his theorization, which we have already made clear by recalling that the first chapter of his book deals precisely with linguistic issues.

Also in relation to the procedural resources, we would like to say a few words about what it means to take a work *per se* as a reflection object. Here we rely on the notion of “comment”, as developed by French philosopher Edmond Ortigues (1987) in a beautiful entry of *Enciclopédia Einaudi* – “Interpretation” (revisited in Flores, 2019, p. 307-308). According to him, “a comment does not arise directly from the text, but from the questions we raise about it” (ORTIGUES, 1987, p. 222). A “comment” – especially the exegetical ones to which we approach here in a way – is a hypothesis that concerns certain aspects that one wants to question; like any hypothesis, it can and should be appreciated by others. In order to do so, it is necessary to take into account criteria of significance

and established connections. This means that a “comment” implies the person who makes it⁴; in addition to that, it implies someone else: it has the structure of a dialogue.

In this sense, what we do next is a *comment* on Fanon's work that has a dual purpose: a) to present a survey of *where* and *how* the reflection on speech/language appears in *Black Skin, White Masks* (we will do this in item 2 below); and b) to propose an analysis that shows *how* the reflection on speech/language *operates* in Fanon's reasoning (we will do this in item 3 below). With this, we hope to minimally contribute to placing Fanon's work as a fundamental text for studies that do not detach the human from the linguistic.

2 FROM LANGUAGE PHENOMENOLOGY TO FANON'S PHILOSOPHY

Homi Bhabha (2005, p.70, emphasis added) says the following regarding Fanon in his *The Location of Culture*: “To read Fanon is **to experience the notion of division** that prefigures – and splits – the emergence of a truly radical thought that never comes to light without projecting uncertain obscurity. Fanon is the provider of transgressive and transitional truth”.

This formulation by Bhabha synthesizes the point of view from which we plan to conduct our reading in relation to the presence of speech/language in *Black Skin, White Masks*. The use Fanon makes of the linguistic scope in his work sets in motion this “experiencing the notion of division” that Bhabha speaks about. This is exactly what is unveiled in the first chapter of the book.

In other words, we will try to show that the *division* (from Latin, *divisio,ónis* ‘splitting, sharing, distribution, division’)⁵ that we see outlined in *Black Skin, White Masks* is first and foremost experienced in speech/language. Fanon emphasizes a (divided) difference that is shown as separation in speech/language – in the experience that each speaker has when speaking; this difference that evidences separation is then experienced, according to what we think, as an enunciation locus, which is highlighted in Fanon's analysis. In other words, enunciation arises from division, from the difference experienced in speech/language.

The abstract and relatively theoretical exposition with which we began this item becomes more understandable through a careful study of the first chapter of the book. Let us see. In principle, the chapter called “Black and Language” can be read from two perspectives that are present in the work in an articulated and non-linear way: (I) one in which Fanon circumscribes linguistic phenomena, sorts of analysis “data”, which illustrate his argumentation; and (II) another one in which the author reflects from these data and establishes his own point of view.

In (I), we see that the speaker's experience about their nature as such – a *loquens* nature – is elevated to the status of an object and, through this lens, is placed at the center of linguistic phenomenology (cf. FLORES, 2019). In (II), we see Fanon's philosophy itself develop, grounded on this same speech/language phenomenology. In our opinion, both (I) and (II) are dependent on the idea – herein taken as a work hypothesis (see above) – that speech/language is *one of the understanding elements of the for-the-other dimension*.

Fanon begins by circumscribing a situation that he explains as follows as his starting point:

At this moment, we want to show why the Antillean Black, whoever they may be, should always take a stance in relation to language. Furthermore, we will broaden the scope of our description and, in addition to Antilleans, we will take into account **any colonized man**. Every colonized people – that is, every people in whose midst an inferiority complex was born due to the burial of their cultural originality – **takes a stance in relation to the language of the civilizing nation**, that is, of the metropolitan culture. (FANON, 2008, p. 34, emphasis added)

⁴Here, perhaps it is worth clarifying the position from which we speak: we are two cisgender white-skinned individuals: a man and a woman, both non-heterosexual, teachers, civil servants and from a middle-class background.

⁵FARIA, E. *Dicionário Latino*. Available in <https://www.dicionariolatino.com//>.

Fanon's thesis in relation to speech/language is presented: the first chapter of his book focuses precisely on the division that is shown in speech/language because it is the "place" where a stance in relation to the self and the other is seen emerge – we would like to say "that is seen enunciated".

For Fanon, what a colonized person feels when visiting the metropolis is similar to what a peasant feels when visiting a capital city. The same process is repeated in these cases: the need to take a stance in relation to the other's. Fanon illustrates this process with the speech/language phenomenology in a didactic and plentiful way:

Upon arriving in France, black-skinned people will react against the myth of Martinicans who miss out the Rs. They will reconsider themselves and enter into an open conflict with such myth. Or they will dedicate themselves not only to rolling the Rs, but to cheering them on. Spying on the others' slightest reactions, listening to themselves speak, distrusting speech, that unfortunately lazy organ, they will seclude themselves in their room and read for hours, persevering in improving their *diction*.

A friend of us has recently told us the following story: a Martinican arrived at the metropolitan port of Havre and entered a café. With absolute self-confidence, he proclaimed: "Garrçon, a bottle of bee please". We have a real intoxication in this case. Worried about not matching the image of a black-skinned person that misses out the Rs, he made a good supply of them, although he did not know how to calculate the dosage. (FANON, 2008, p. 36)

What accounts for this appreciation of the Rs? In fact, there is some sort of appreciation for the world "of the other", as it is the one inhabited by humans, to which a person hopes to have access through speech/language. "I just wanted to be a man among other men" (FANON, 2020, p. 128). In this case, speech/language appears as a safe-conduct that authorizes circulation in another world. Fanon is critical when he reminds us that "there is some sort of distant enchantment, and any person who leaves for a week to the metropolis creates around them a magic circle where the words Paris, Marseille, La Sorbonne and Pigalle are cornerstones" (FANON, 2008, p. 38). It means that, along with the words, a world and a view of that world come along.

Fanon's procedure emerges almost from a paradox, which even includes: "referring to other works and to our own personal observations, we would like to attempt to demonstrate why black-skinned people place themselves in such a characteristic way in relation to the European language" (FANON, 2008, p. 40). The intention thus expressed does not seek a unitary answer, a master narrative or a single perspective; on the contrary, it allows space for history to be made in action, through taking the word, through the ways in which each person can say "I" in a speech. "What interests us here is black-skinned men in front of the French language. We want to understand why Antilleans like to speak French" (FANON, 2008, p. 41), the philosopher writes⁶. The answer, we know, will come in the form of a big endpoint suspension:

[...] there is no reason for A. Breton to say the following about Césaire: 'He is a black-skinned man who handles the French language as no white-skinned man handles it these days'. And even if Breton expressed the truth, I do not see where the paradox would lie, or anything to point out since, after all, Aimé Césaire is a Martinican and a university professor. [...]. But black-skinned people will reply 'it is an honor for us that a white-skinned person like Breton writes things like these. Let us continue...' (FANON, 2008, p. 50-51)

This outcome is multicausal: "in the Antilles [...], the officially spoken language is French" (FANON, 2008, p. 42) "Teachers closely monitor children so that Creole is not used" (FANON, 2008, p. 42). The dimension of *one* for the *other* and of the other *for one* is made dialectical (as we will see, in a Hegelian fashion, of master and slave): "when addressing a black-skinned person, a white-skinned person behaves exactly like an adult with a child, uses mime, speaks in a whisper, full of artificial kindness and amiability"

⁶We quote Nascimento (2023): "Although Fanon has a background in the Psychiatric Medicine area, he is conventionally regarded as a philosopher, especially because Philosophy is the most prevalent area in his works".

(FANON, 2008, p. 44). That is how one exists for the other: “when speaking *petit-nègre*⁷, a white-skinned person expresses this idea: ‘You there, stay in your place!’” (FANON, 2008, p. 46). “As the primary subjectification point in colonial discourse” (BHABHA, 2005, p. 117) – stereotyping both the colonized and the colonizers – this stereotype rejects difference as an enunciation possibility.

Thus, based on the analytical sequence on which we have elaborated our comments so far, we allow ourselves to make our own interpretation of Fanon's book title, with emphasis on the aspect of speech/language: *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which it can be seen that a reality – *black skin* – is refracted in a false representation of that reality – *white masks* – a representation that is, above all, a stance of subjects in their discourse⁸, through their enunciation.

We therefore agree with Fanon when he says:

As can be seen, **we were not mistaken in thinking that a study of the Antilleans' language could reveal some traits of their world**. As we have already said at the beginning, there is a relationship of support between speech and the community. Speaking a language is assuming a world, a culture. Antilleans who want to be White will be so much more to the extent that they have assumed the cultural instrument that language is. (FANON, 2008, p. 49-50, emphasis added)

There is no mistake in looking at the speech/language of colonial subjects – both the colonized and the colonizers – because both in it and through it, social and cultural enunciative stances are revealed. The first chapter of Fanon's work frames what follows in the book. That said, it is also worth making a brief incursion into a subject matter that was not necessary to discuss until now, but which acquires major importance from now on, considering continuity of our reflection: the *stricto sensu* linguistic aspect of Fanon's approach.

We have been using “/” to indicate an indistinction between speech and language in Fanon's philosophy. However, it is time to make a decision regarding this issue. Regarding this matter, let us get straight to the point⁹: the indiscriminate use of “language”, “speech” and “lingo” in *Black Skin, White Masks* should not deceive us. Fanon is always talking about “speech” – in the sense of what colonizers say – a term that has some specificity in his theorization, and it is this specificity that we will try to circumscribe. Let us see a few illustrative instances¹⁰:

a) As for language:

- “Any man who possesses language possesses, in turn, the world that this language expresses and that is implicit to him [...] there is extraordinary power in possessing language” (FANON, 2008, p. 34).

Please note that, in this usage, “language” has a meaning that oscillates between “object of possession” and “expression of a world, of a culture”.

- “[...] we want to show why Antillean black-skinned people, whoever they may be, should always take a stance in relation to language” (FANON, 2008, p. 34).

Here, “language” seems to have the meaning of “speech”: a stance is taken in front of speech, in the case of the French language.

⁷According to a footnote in the 2008 edition (FANON, 2008, p. 35), *Petit-nègre*, literally translated as “little black” or “blacky”, is the expression used to designate a hybrid speech, a summary patois created in the French colonial world, a mixture of French with several African languages. The term “patois” refers to the various regional dialects of metropolitan France. Creole is the more elaborated French spoken in overseas territories.

⁸Unnecessarily to say, although we do it anyway for the sake of clarity, that we use the term “discourse” when referring to the linguistic manifestation of a subject, in the terms in which Benveniste's theory understands it. To better understand this idea, we suggest reading Dessons' book (2006), whose title, *Émile Benveniste: l'invention du discours*, already indicates to whom 20th century linguistics owes the idea of “discourse”.

⁹It is important to remember that the book was originally written in French and that its translation into Portuguese does not seem to pose major difficulties regarding these terms.

¹⁰From a methodological point of view, we consider the following illustrative instances where the uses of *speech*, *language* and *lingo* are specified, as indices that allow circumscribing the multiplicity of meanings that the terms acquire in the context in question. Such indices acquire meaning as a result of the syntagmatization (BENVENISTE, 1989) operated by the use a subject makes in their discourse.

- “He identifies himself through language. In Savane, where the youth from Fort-de-France gather, the scene is significant: the word is immediately given to the newcomer” (FANON, 2008, p. 39).

When Fanon says that a speaker “identifies themselves through language”, he undoubtedly delimits a sense that includes “speech”, but also the idea of “discourse”, explicit in “the word”.

- “The problem of language is too important to be fully addressed in this work” (FANON, 2008, p. 41).
It seems that “the problem of language” is taken here in the broad sense of a controversial issue, not yet satisfactorily answered, which can be the object of scientific research studies or discussions.
- “Antilleans who want to be White will be so much more to the extent that they have assumed the cultural instrument that language is” (FANON, 2008, p. 50).

Once again, “language” is taken as an “instrument”. This time, however, with a special epithet: cultural.

b) As for “speech”:

- “Antillean black-skinned people will be all the more White, that is, will come closer to being true human beings, to the extent that they adopt the French speech” (FANON, 2008, p. 34).
- “In the Antilles, there is nothing like it. The officially spoken language is French. Teachers closely monitor children so that Creole is not used” (FANON, 2008, p. 42).
- “I meet a German or a Russian man speaking poor French. I try to give him the information he asks for through gestures, but I do not forget that he has his own speech, his own country, and that he may be a lawyer or engineer in his own culture” (FANON, 2008, p. 46).
- “French is then the language used” (FANON, 2008, p. 49).

In all these passages highlighted above, it can be seen that Fanon uses the word “speech” similarly to some uses of “language” already highlighted, with the meaning of a representation system constituted by words and combined rules that individuals from a linguistic community use as the main communication and expression means - in a word: lingo.

However, in the chapter from *Black Skin, White Masks* there are two uses that we are examining and which deserve our attention:

- “there is a relationship of support between speech and community” (FANON, 2008, p. 49).
- “Speaking a language is assuming a world, a culture” (FANON, 2008, p. 50).

Both expand the idea of speech to include notions such as “culture”, “society” and their interrelations¹¹.

c) As for “Lingo”, we only found one use of the term:

- “Every lingo is a way of thinking” (FANON, 2008, p. 39).

This is undoubtedly a usage that resonates with the notion of speech in its relation to culture.

This survey allows us to assume that the “language” on which Fanon reflects in “Black and Language” could be considered the “speech” – sometimes of the colonized, other of the colonizers – in the historical sense defined by Benveniste (1989, p. 96): “there is speech as an empirical lingo, historical, such as the Chinese language, the French language, or the Assyrian language, and there is speech as a system of significant forms, the primary condition of communication. By operating with this first distinction, we separate [...] two levels: historical and fundamental.

¹¹For a deeper understanding of this issue, we suggest reading Benveniste’s text called “Structure of Speech, Structure of Society”.(BENVENISTE, 1989). Complementarily, we refer to our previous work called “Language and Culture: An Approach with Benveniste”, in which we addressed the relationship between culture and language based on Benveniste’s ideas (FLORES, SEVERO, 2016).

Now, speech, language and lingo – herein considered as a whole – are initially taken by Fanon at their historical level; however, there is also something fundamental there: the fact that they encompass (Benveniste would say “contain”) society. In this sense, Fanon looks at linguistic phenomenology [perspective (I)] with the intention of providing support for a discussion that takes it as a starting point, but goes beyond it [perspective (II)]. Therefore, from now on, we use the term “speech” instead of the slash (“/”) to refer to the reality that Fanon speaks about.

3 SPEAKING IS EXISTING ABSOLUTELY FOR THE OTHER

As we have seen, the first chapter of *White Skin, Black Masks*, “Black and Language”, not only deals with language but also with the colonizers’ speech and lingo. This lingo, along with its way of relating to the world, is imposed upon colonized people and, from this imposition; it provokes different relationships of closeness and distance with these subjects. Let us resume an already cited excerpt: “every colonized people [...] takes a stance in relation to the language of the civilizing nation, that is, of the metropolitan culture” (FANON, 2008, p. 34). Taking a stance in relation to language: in the eyes of Benvenistian linguists, it is an invitation to think about the process by which the speaker becomes a subject in and through speech. If it is the act of appropriating speech to propose an “I” that grounds subjectivity in language, but also outside of it (BENVENISTE, 1988), here we see a clipping that adds layers of meaning to what has already been thought about the processes around subjectivity in speech. The determinant “of the civilizing nation” adds a historical and social aspect that most works produced in the field of enunciation do not address, or even mention. Perhaps this is the layer of meaning that Fanon’s text adds to the discussion about language in this field – and perhaps a gateway for studies on language and enunciation to enter into the study of Fanonian thought.

In addition to the first chapter, language appears at different moments in Fanon’s work, although not always directly. Thus, when in the now famous ending of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon asks “Oh my body, make of me a man who always questions”, he is addressing the capacity for signification, manifested through the body. If in the first chapter of the book Fanon refers to the use of the speech-system and the specificities of employing lingos according to their role in colonial and neocolonial enterprises¹², at other moments, as already mentioned, other aspects of language are mobilized by Fanon. With Benveniste (1988), we learn that it is in and through language that the speaker becomes a subject. By enunciating (themselves), speakers appropriate speech, creating in language their place as subjects.

In several moments of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon refers to what we consider the enunciative act, employing various *dicendi* verbs: speak, proclaim, express and cry out, among others. We will now see what Fanon tells us about these acts and what this can reveal about the role of speech in the reflection developed in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

3.1 SPEAKING IS USING SPEECH

Simply by operating a small census of the use of the verb “to speak” in the studied work, it is already possible to compile some traces of what Fanon says about speech. In addition to the already cited passage, let us see which other statements Fanon makes about “speaking”:

- “As speaking is existing absolutely for the other” (FANON, 2008, p. 33).

When speaking – we would say “when enunciating” – the speaker becomes a subject. In this gesture, the speaker establishes a *You*, an Other, in front of themselves. Here, we merge Fanon and Benveniste in order to evidence the proximity of their reflections. In the paragraph after this quote, Fanon addresses a topic that we already know from the thoughts of W.E.B. DuBois (2021): both dimensions of black-skinned people – “[o]ne with their own kind and another with the White” (FANON, 2020, p. 31). In DuBois, *dual consciousness* becomes a term developed in his own texts and in the works of several other authors; it is from this notion that

¹²From now on, we will use only the adjective “colonial” and its derivatives to refer not only to the colonization period but also to what follows it, as we understand that the colonial scene (KILOMBA, 2019) continues to be enacted and that its effects, mainly those addressed here, continue to reverberate.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) develops the concept of *self-definition*, for example. In Fanon, it is the starting point for thinking about the relationship between colonized black-skinned subjects and the colonizers' speech. If "speaking is existing absolutely for the other", when we think about the relationship between one – colonized – and the other – colonizer –, the preposition "for" takes on the meaning of "based on". In this intersubjective relationship, "existing for the other" is not "existing with the other" or "existing in front of the other", but "existing based on the other". Later on, Fanon says: "[s]peaking is being able to use a given syntax [...]", that is, understanding a set of rules, certain functioning. If we talk about the syntax of colonial speech, then we are dealing with colonial rules. Also in the same period of the quoted passage, Fanon adds: "[...] but above all, it is bearing the weight of a civilization" (FANON, 2020, p. 31). Three words indicate the hardness of this relationship: "bearing", "weight" and "civilization". It is not "civilization" here; Fanon does not mobilize the idea that a specific culture represents the only possible notion of civilization, but of "a" civilization, that is, a culture, a way of thinking represented by speech. However, the verb "to bear" and its complement, the noun "weight", indicate that it is not an easy relationship: it is necessary to endure – to bear – something with annihilating potential: "the weight of a civilization".

In the initial chapter, Fanon spends some time analyzing the *petit-nègre* and what it means to employ this linguistic variation: from a white-skinned person's perspective, it is a racist delusion of approximation and, at the same time, the imprisonment of black-skinned people in a subaltern and infantilized position. For the colonized, speaking [French] is bearing the weight of a civilization, but for the colonizers, speaking [*petit-nègre*] is imposing the weight of their own culture on the other, the colonized relegated to a position of not knowing. To avoid being thrown into this place – or to manage to escape from it – the colonized must speak French, but not only that, they need to speak in a certain way:

Yes, I must watch over my speech, for it is also through it that I will be judged... They will speak of me with contempt: he doesn't even know how to speak French!...

Among a group of young Antilleans, they will really fear and must be careful around anyone who expresses themselves well, who has mastery over speech, for they are almost White. In France, they say: "to speak like a book". In Martinique, they say: "to speak like a White". (FANON, 2008, p. 36)

The exaggerated pronunciation of Rs, which we mentioned in the previous section, is an effort to monitor that speech, to show belonging, to be able to "speak like a White". In the next subsection, we will address the discursive effects caused by this exaggeration.

Taking a stance in relation to speech is not just about striving to master it. Throughout the work, Fanon follows a path, he searches for himself. He chooses directions to delve into and then abandons them. His goal is to "liberate colored men from themselves" (FANON, 2020, p. 22). In this path, he shows that taking a stance towards the colonizers' speech is to situate oneself in relation to the word "*nigger*", the imprisoning denomination that this language created to objectify colonized people. Fanon clearly sees how the determinant "*nigger*" limits subjects and, already in the introduction, he warns: "[...] *niggers* are not men. [...] *Niggers* are black men" (FANON, 2020, p. 22).

This topic is revisited in different ways in each chapter. In the fifth chapter, "The Life Experience of Black Men", for example, Fanon didactically shows how black-skinned people's relationship with their bodies, with the center from which the reference should be elaborated, is profoundly shaken by the "racial epidermal scheme" (FANON, 2020, p. 127) that causes a collapse of the body scheme. "I could no longer find any of the feverish coordinates of the world. I existed threefold: I occupied a place, I was going in the direction of another... and the other – evanescent, hostile, but not opaque, rather transparent, absent – I disappeared. It was nauseating..." (FANON, 2020, p. 127). Adrift, without any own reference, this body is named by white-skinned people, who frequently reiterate the place to which black bodies must be restricted through the word that invariably adjectivizes it. One of the various examples presented by Fanon shows that even compliments are modalized:

[T]here is no reason for A. Breton to say the following of Césaire: 'He is a black-skinned man who handles the French language as no white-skinned man handles it these days'.

And even if Breton expressed the truth, I do not see where the paradox would lie, or anything to point out since, after all, Aimé Césaire is a Martinican and a university professor. (FANON, 2008, p. 50-51)

Whatever the place occupied, there is a common determinant and an expected performance – “From a man, a man's behavior was demanded. From me, a black man's behavior” (FANON, 2020, p. 129). According to Fanon, this performance of blackness imprisons colored men: for him, “the myth of the *nigger*, the idea of the *nigger*, is capable of determining authentic alienation” (FANON, 2020, p. 213).

3.2 BEYOND SPEAKING: THE SUBJECTS' STANCES IN AND THROUGH LANGUAGE

Throughout two pages, almost at the end of the book, Fanon refers to the enunciative gesture using words other than “speaking”. Let us see:

But when someone sets out to express existence, they may risk only finding the nonexistent. What is certain is that, the moment I try to reorganize my own being, Sartre, who remains the Other, eliminates any illusion by naming me. Then I tell him:

My blackness is neither a tower nor a cathedral
It plunges into the red flesh of the soil
It plunges into the burning flesh of the sky
It tears through the opaque prostration of sensible patience...

While in the paroxysm of the life experience and the fury, I proclaim this, Sartre reminds me that my blackness is only a weak moment. Actually, I truly tell you that my shoulders have shrunk away from the structure of the world, my feet no longer feel the caress of the ground. (FANON, 2020, p. 151, emphasis added)

- “But they forgot the constancy of my love. I **define** myself as absolute tension of openness.” (FANON, 2020, p. 151-152).
- “But my **cry** still resounds with violence: I am black, I am black, I am black...” (FANON, 2008, p. 125) / “Even more violent does my **cry** resound: I am a *nigger*, I am a *nigger*, I am a *nigger*...” (FANON, 2020, p. 152, emphasis added).

From these excerpts, we collected the verbs “define”, “express” [existence] and “proclaim”, as well as the noun “cry”. On the one hand, “define” and “express” [existence] refer to the production of subjectivity in and through speech; on the other hand, “proclaim” and “cry” indicate certain attitude of the speaker, certain mode of enunciation that modulates “speaking”. Both the first and second sets show linguistic gestures whose *intention*¹³ goes beyond the content of the utterance and focuses on enunciating. It cannot be ignored that these excerpts are within the chapter called “The Life Experience of Black People” since, as Benveniste (1989, p. 222) tells us, speech “serves to live”. Faced with the “scission [...] [which is] a direct consequence of the colonialist adventure” (FANON, 2020, p. 31), the colonized constantly need to [self-]define themselves, express their existence. This gesture, however, is permeated by the colonial gaze, which names them, circumscribes them to a certain place, objectifying them and denying them the position of subjects.

Confronted with colonial violence, black-skinned people need to demarcate a space. At the beginning of the fifth chapter, Fanon (2020, p. 129) presents the following conversation:

— Look how beautiful this *nigger* is...
— This beautiful *nigger* wants you to go to hell, madam!”

¹³The Brazilian translation of *Problems of General Linguistics* translates “intention” as “intended”. For Benveniste, the “intended” is “what the speaker wants to say, [the] linguistic actualization of their thought” (BENVENISTE, 1987, p. 229).

Fanon comments the following about this: “I was achieving two things at once: identifying my enemies and causing a scandal” (FANON, 2020, p. 129). The black-skinned subject responds to the racist comment by causing a scandal. Expressing himself, proclaiming and letting out his cry is vital. At the end of the chapter, this is explained as follows: “Even more violent does my **cry** resound”. It is “in the paroxysm of the experience and the fury” that the subject proclaims his place, his position as a subject. To live is to exclaim, living happens in the paroxysm of the body and in proclamation of the reality of this body in and through speech. In Fanon, speech is a battlefield between the colonial culture - which has its weight and demands to be supported - and the body/language of the subject - who does not want to be colonized, who rebels, who exclaims, who maintains criticality.

Faced with the imposition of colonial speech, the colonized are forced to take a stance. In order to maintain their humanity and to have it recognized by the other, the White, who dehumanize them through the act of naming/adjectivizing - through the frequent imposition of the word “*nigger*” - colonized subjects seek not only fluency in the colonial lingo, but also mastery of the characteristics that they believe would grant them belonging. As an illustration, let us take a closer look at the episode regarding pronunciation of the R's (see above).

Three enunciative stances arise from the phonological resource highlighted by Fanon:

1st stance - We might textualize it through the formulation “I am equal”. In France, imagining that it reproduces the metropolitan French pronunciation, the colonial *I* expresses itself in a position of belonging in relation to that place and to the White. The enunciative injunction here is total: even here, even now and coincidence between *I* and *You*.

2nd stance - It is observed from the *You* position. What the colonized believe to be a break with the myth that French people from overseas cannot pronounce Rs like metropolitan French individuals becomes a reinforcement of this belief. By attempting to force pronunciation in some words and forgetting it in others, the *I* produces a caricature of itself that actually highlights its difference - an unacceptable difference in the colonial context, which only recognizes those who are equal as French citizens.

3rd stance - It would translate into the expression “I am different from myself” or “I am better than you all”. The third stance occurs upon returning to the colony and is subsequent to the first one. In this here-and-now, the *I* is not faced with the white-skinned colonizer *You*, but with other colonized individuals. At this moment, the movement is the reverse of the first stance, as what is being emphasized is the difference of the subject who has returned from the metropolis in relation to those who did not leave and in relation to their former self prior to the journey.

Upon analyzing these enunciative stances, we perceive that the discursive effects differ in the perception of those involved according to their own positions - whether we think of these stances enunciatively - *I* and *You* - or if we consider the sociohistorical realities of the speakers - both colonized and colonizers. As we have seen, it is actually impossible to separate the enunciative reality from the sociohistorical one.

4 FANON, HEGEL, BENVENISTE

At the end of the second chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, entitled “Colored Women and the White” and when addressing psychoanalytic aspects of the relationships between colonized and colonizers, Fanon introduces a discussion that is fundamental for us and represents some sort of endpoint of our reflection. He says: “As black-skinned people are former slaves, we will also turn to Hegel” (FANON, 2008, p. 66). The announcement of resorting to Hegelian philosophy – specifically the Master and Slave dialectic found in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*¹⁴ from 1807 – becomes more evident in the eighth chapter of the book: “The Black and Recognition”. Now, it is not by chance that Fanon resorts – and this is already in the chapter title – to the notion of “recognition” (a word used by Hegel in his work), which, in our view, is here elevated to some sort of relational category, that is, a category that allows “subsuming an object of thought under a general idea”. In this sense, it is said “recognize as such” (LALANDE, 1996, p. 930). Therefore, it is not only a way of making known what was already known (the prefix *re*) but, above all, of saying that something or someone *is*. Hegel is the one who allows Fanon to reason in this way.

In fact, it is Hegel who also makes it possible for us to connect Fanon to Benveniste – which is what we want to emphasize with the interval position that the philosopher’s name occupies in the title of this item – that is, our idea is to argue that it is Hegel who puts Fanon and Benveniste into implication. We explain ourselves below.

In 1986, renowned French linguist Claudine Normand published a beautiful text entitled “*Les termes de l’énonciation chez Benveniste*”, in which she announces the following: “I allow myself to see in Benveniste an unhappy Hegelian, a misfortune which we should rejoice in since it has constantly driven him towards this speech that eludes a complete description” (NORMAND, 1996, p. 137). Years later, no less remarkable Jean-Claude Milner, in his work called *Le périple structural* (2002) and in a brilliant retake of Benveniste’s life “journey” entitled “*Ibat Obscurus*”, states that Benveniste reads Hegel “in the original and quotes him in German, without translating” (MILNER, 2002, p. 125). Milner provides careful details when indicating the moments when the philosopher’s presence is perceived in the linguist: the “Preface” to *Origines de la formation des noms en indo-européen* from 1935 ends with a phrase from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*; at the beginning of the article called “*Liber et liberi*” from 1936, the following can be read: “As by a **dialectical** fatality, the discussion to which we have submitted the Latin name for **slave**, *servus*, puts into play the origin and proper meaning of the adjective *liber*” (BENVENISTE, 1936, p. 51, emphasis added) – we highlight the words “dialectical” and “slave”; and in the article called “Nature of Linguistic Signs” from 1939, a critique about the notion of the arbitrary in Saussure, where we see Benveniste evoking the word “dialectical”, which “appears in a way that leaves little doubt about the Hegelian reference” (MILNER, 2002, p. 128).

These pieces of information are now enough to support our interpretation, according to which Hegelian dialectics – especially in the Master and Slave formulation – provides “one of the understanding elements of the *for-the-other* dimension of colored men” (FANON, 2008, p. 33), and this can be seen from the analysis of the *I-You* enunciative stances, which we have done above, based on Benveniste.

As an epigraph to “Black and Hegel”, Fanon includes the following passage from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: “Self-consciousness is in itself and for itself when and because it is in itself and for itself another self-consciousness; this means that it only exists insofar as it is recognized” (HEGEL *apud* FANON, 2008, p. 180)¹⁵. It becomes quite evident that what matters to Fanon is to establish in the dialectic of recognition the idea of self-consciousness, which, already at the beginning of this part of his book, he translates by asserting that “Man is only human to the extent that he wants to impose himself on another man, in order to be recognized” (FANON, 2008, p. 180). In other words, based on Hegel, Fanon considers that self-consciousness is in itself and for itself, as it is recognized by another self-consciousness; that is to say, recognition occurs in a dialectic (of desire), linked to reciprocal recognition and, mainly, in the fact that, for consciousness to become desiring, it is necessary for it to recognize itself in the other and vice versa, that is, this other must recognize itself in another.

¹⁴Here, we are using the Brazilian translation of the text (see *References*).

¹⁵In the translation of *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* that we consulted, we found the same passage translated in a slightly different way: “Self-consciousness is in and for itself when and by the fact that it is in and for itself for Another one; that is, it is only as something recognized” (HEGEL, 2003, p. 142). We have chosen to refer to the passage in Fanon’s book as it appears and, in a footnote, the Brazilian version of Hegel’s work.

Thus, the Master is recognized by the Slave who, in turn, recognizes himself as consciousness. This recognition of the Slave comes through the servitude that alienates the Master in the relationship that demands mutual recognition. Fanon knows this: “To obtain self-certainty, integration of the concept of recognition is necessary. Likewise, the other expects our recognition in order to expand into the universal self-consciousness” (FANON, 2008, p. 181). However, he warns: “The other, however, can recognize me without struggle” (FANON, 2008, p. 182), meaning that recognition can be granted and not conquered: “Black-skinned people are slaves who have been allowed to adopt the attitude of masters. White-skinned people are masters who allowed their slaves to eat at their table” (FANON, 2008, p. 182). Thus, “the turnaround did not differentiate black-skinned people. They transitioned from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another” (FANON, 2008, p. 183).

In the analysis we made above about the *I-You* enunciative stances, Fanon's exact words are verified: “Black-skinned people were acted on” (FANON, 2008, p. 182). There is no recognition arising from the action. Therefore, Fanon is right when he concludes by saying: “Leading man to be *actionable*, keeping in his sphere of influence respect for the fundamental values that make a human world, such is the first urgency of those who, after having reflected, get ready to act” (FANON, 2008, p. 184).

5 CONCLUSION

It is time to conclude our reflection, and we do so by situating two directions from which we believe that our paper can be considered.

In the first place, we sought to argue in favor of an approach to racial studies that includes linguistic studies. In other words, our intention was to show that understanding the subjects' speech – the enunciative position from which they speak – is a *sine qua non* condition so that what they say can be understood. In this sense, the utterance – what is said – is not independent of the fact of it having been said – the enunciation. It is in the relationship between utterance and enunciation, that is, when subjects situate what they say in relation to themselves, the other and time-space that we see speech in action. We believe that this is evident in the analysis we made of the phonological phenomenon present in the episode concerning pronunciation of the Rs (see above). The use of Rs – what is said – takes on very singular meanings in the enunciation – in the act of saying. Some of these meanings were presented in our analysis.

Based on this episode, we hope to have illustrated what we mean when we say – based on Fanon – that speech is *one of the understanding elements of the for-the-other dimension*. Secondly, we seek to indicate a reading bias of Fanon's work that we think is not yet fully established. In other words, the fact that there is a reflection in Fanon based on a given perspective of speech seems to us to be a proof; however, as Benveniste (1988, p. 284) reminds us, “sometimes it is useful to ask the proof to justify itself”. It was this reading direction that we tried to establish. It is in line with the idea that the speaker is *Homo loquens* (FLORES, 2019), a being constituted in language, a subject for being a speaker, who always shows knowledge about their nature as such.

From this second direction, a perspective arises for linguistic studies: the speech that *serves to live*, as Benveniste (1989, p. 222) says, is a link between the speaker and the culture they are a part of; this link reveals diversity (of speech, cultures, speakers, societies). There would be a Linguistics of diversity to be made that included the speaker not as an abstraction, but as an experience.

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