

NECRO-LINGUISTICS: LINGUISTICALLY CONSTRUCTING EXPENDABLE, DISPOSABLE CATEGORIES OF BEING

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Abstract

In our paper, we put forward a conceptual framework for applied linguistics, specifically focused on Indigenous languages, minority languages (and their speakers) that are subject to oppression. Our conceptual framework, stemming from work in biopolitics (Foucault, 2009), colonial biopolitical regimes (Fanon, 1963) and necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019) focuses on the manners in which specific languages and peoples are discursively constructed as not worth living, expendable, disposable (Evans & Giroux, 2015), better off dead, moribund, in need of revitalization, and so forth. These discursive constructions also enable us to allow vast populations (racialized peoples, queer people, disabled people, people with long Covid or AIDS) to be viewed as animal or machine, and subjected to living conditions that confer on them a status akin to that of the living dead. Because of our own work as applied linguists engaged in discourse analysis, and our critique of anthropological, theoretical, and applied linguists who believe that by documenting and teaching languages they are revitalizing or saving them, we refer to this conceptual framework as Necro-linguistics. There are many aspects to our conceptual framework; here, we note only a few. First, Indigenous people have died and still die in the fight for their languages. In fact, colonialism depends not only on exploitation but also on the death of Indigenous peoples. Second, in many contexts, people die because they speak the wrong language, or they speak the “right” language with the wrong accent, or they are viewed to use a language illegitimately. Third, we only need look as far as the rhetoric surrounding the recent overturning of Roe versus Wade in the United States to see how language can construct people who become pregnant as worthy of death, and others as allies, victims, or vigilantes; similar discursive constructions of people pertain in war or terror, which both necessitate distancing ourselves from the act of killing (McIntosh, 2021). Fourth, there is an established connection between language and wellness/health, and consequently also between language and death (Roche, 2021). Finally, in the Anthropocene in which there is no longer any doubt that humans are destroying our habitat, we suggest that we need new metaphors and discourses to live by, or rather, to die by.

Keywords: *Necro-linguistics, biopolitics, linguistic constructivism.*
