What does slang use have to do with race? In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, race is not fixed, given, “possessed,” or easily reducible to phenotype or skin color. Instead, people who live in Rio “read” the body for racial signs. The amount of whiteness a body displays is determined not only through observations of skin color, hair texture, and facial features, but also through careful attention to cultural and linguistic practices, like the use (or avoidance) of nonstandard speech that is commonly described as gíria (slang).

Understanding slang use (or avoidance) as a form of racialized bodily training sheds light on the relationship between race and language and how power, privilege, and racial hierarchy can be upheld through language use.