

## **Southern epistemologies, decolonization, English as a Lingua Franca: ingredients to an effective Applied Linguistics potion.**

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### **1. Introduction**

When considering southern epistemologies we need to start from a specific understanding of coloniality as informed by its other side, modernity (Mignolo 2000). In such southern thinking, modernity/coloniality characterize world views rather than simply historical moments in the past or geographical positions of nation-states on political world maps. As understood by the Latin American group of thinkers that includes Mignolo, Quijano, Grosfoguel and Welsh, among others, coloniality is a dark dimension of modernity that lingers on, despite the end of colonialism and the institutional independence of the former colonies. For them, as well as for many Brazilian applied linguists, coloniality therefore “does not refer to the historical process of colonization, but to unequal power, knowledge, race relations and resources, controlled and reproduced in the name of development; coloniality defines which knowledges are validated as knowledge and it establishes who is recognized as a full citizen and who is not” (Menezes de Souza 2013). Therefore, such understanding is of paramount importance to a discussion about (de)coloniality and power informed by southern perspectives.

Epistemologies of the South, as described in the work of the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, involve subaltern resistance to the violence of modernity/coloniality, counteracting hegemonic Northern epistemologies and confronting the colonial neoliberal project of domination, moving towards more horizontal differences and social justice as situated practices. Sousa Santos (2018) recently defined epistemologies of the south as concerning “the production and validation of knowledges anchored in the experiences of resistance of all those social groups that have systematically suffered injustice, oppression, and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy”. Therefore, south and north here do not refer to geographical positions, as mentioned before in relation to coloniality, but to epistemologies or world views – this is to say that there may be southern epistemologies in the geographical north, and vice-versa. Sousa Santos explains that:

To situate knowledges and cultures according to different epistemic regions of the world does not at all mean that we are facing Leibnizian monads, that is to say, completely autonomous and distinct structures that are thereby endowed with sufficient reason. [...] We speak of cultural or epistemic regions as sets of styles,

problematics, or priorities of thought and action, regions that are endowed with some identity as compared with others. (Sousa Santos 2018: 34)

It is from the perspective of the epistemologies of the south that this paper will look into the concept of proficiency (and its correlate *intelligibility*) and analyze the violence it perpetrated since it became central in mainstream applied linguistics. The discussion here will therefore focus more on southern epistemologies and decoloniality than on ELF theorization per se, since the readership of the eighth edition of the *Waseda Working Papers* is by now quite familiar with ELF perspectives but not necessarily with their interface with issues of decoloniality and epistemologies of the south. This paper relies therefore mainly on the praxis of decoloniality and less on ELF theorization, though as I hope to be able to demonstrate, these perspectives have a wide interface, especially concerning the role of language in the coloniality of being, power and knowledge. I present such discussion hoping it can contribute to a more inclusive view of applied linguistics and to a decolonial ELF-aware teaching-learning of English, as will be more detailed in the sections to follow.

## 2. The concept of language

It is obvious that the language concept we have is crucial to how we teach and learn a language. However, the language concepts that inform different practices are usually taken for granted even in applied linguistics theorization – sometimes there is even an impression of consensus as to what we mean by language and what it does with, to and for those who exist in it. My point here is that discourse on language can be constructed through constant repetition and also through pervading silence: not making it explicit what we mean by language has helped build this feeling of consensus, this illusion that we are talking about a given object out there, and that such object is and appears the same to us all.

In my attempt to make visible here the concept of language that informs my own view, I will explore two ways of looking into what languages are and what they do, illustrated by and illustrating the (de)coloniality of our language practices: (1) language as habit formation and (2) translanguaging.

The first view on language I want to briefly mention here is what I have been calling *language as habit formation*, based on the idea that languages are reified systems and language learning involves the acquisition of the rules that purportedly govern such systems. Treated as independent entities (both from one another and from their speakers – *speaking* being considered in this perspective the ability from which the others derive), languages supposedly have given, inherent meanings. Better still, words and grammar would have meanings of their own, that would need to be reproduced – or adapted, in the best-case

scenario – in diverse contexts, for communication to be effective. As autonomous objects, the idea here is that meanings in languages arise from the appropriate application of norms (grammar). Therefore, norms and meanings are placed under the responsibility of “nationally-defined” groups of people who are in charge of creating and establishing the norms and meanings of linguistic items. Thus, they are also responsible for defining what is correct and incorrect, producing what we call *standard language* and creating a whole ideology that follows suit: these groups of people, together with the norms and meanings they are responsible for, become as it were central to the existence of languages in this perspective, in English usually referred to as Standard English Ideology (See, for example, Seidlhofer 2018).

In English the norm-designers are generally referred to as participants of two of the three concentric circles in a perspective created by Kachru in the 80’s to explain the dissemination of English around the world: they are the so-called native-speakers and/or the people born and raised in the inner and outer circle countries, as described by Kachru (1985). It is worth noting that, in practice, very often those in the inner circle are considered as the sole owners of English, while the outer and expanding circles host language users who are considered as deprived from such ownership. The third circle mentioned by Kachru as “the expanding circle” comprises countries where the language norms, created and safeguarded by the other two circles are reproduced. To those English speakers living in countries like Brazil and Japan, for example, there would be only one route to follow: to apply the rules formed by speakers in the inner circle. To obey. Like good vessels.

Needless to say that such division in practice is not as clear-cut or linear as Kachru’s circles seem to be at first, especially when we observe ELF in international contexts: the ways English is constructed in practice, across Kachru’s circles, show the complexity involved in the uses of this language by “native” and “non-native” speakers from various linguacultural backgrounds. However, the view promoted by the concentric circles is a familiar view to many of us within applied linguistics<sup>1</sup>. And a cruel one too, I should add. Emptied of agency

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that Standard English usually requires capital letters to the names of disciplines such as Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, but I am intentionally referring to applied linguistics with small letters to remind the reader of how science can be approximated to Vattimo’s “weak thought”, briefly defined by him as “by no means a weakness of thinking as such. It is just that, because thinking is no longer demonstrative but rather edifying, it has become in that restricted sense weaker” (Vattimo, Zabala & Macetti, 2002: 452). In other words, this is to indicate that applied linguistics, just like any other science, needs to be seen as interpretation – of a specific kind, of course, as it is a field of knowledge constructed and regulated by a selective community of authorized scholars, but still a field subject to specific interpretive and legitimizing procedures designed by human beings, rather than an incorporeal *demonstration* of truth or reality.

over the English language and meaning-making, we inhabitants from outside the Commonwealth, considered non-native speakers, are relegated to the inferior position of reproducing what others create and what therefore belongs to them and is loaned, in an act of profound benevolence, to us. This was described as such at the end of the 1980's, last century. It has been proven wrong and prejudicial. Kachru has suffered emphatic criticism (see for example Schmitz 2014, Xiaowiong and Xianxing 2011). Nowadays, at the end of the 2010's, such epistemological racism (Grosfoguel 2013) seems to be over. Maybe so. But when you look from below, not quite.

Although applied linguistics and ELF theorization have been explicit about the artificiality of the constructs native x non-native speakers, such constructs have been operating as references to social practices, especially in the ELT field: job opportunities, mostly in the private sector in Brazil, place great value on a language teacher's profile read as that of a "native speaker" (Polidorio 2014, Fernandes 2006). This may well be a consequence of the emphasis such construct has received until recently in theories around language teaching, as well as in the development of language teaching-learning approaches based on such theories and their by-products such as textbooks, methodologies and even teacher identities.

The epistemic violence involved in this issue, however, does not lie exclusively in the domain of employability and the financial sustenance of Brazilian English language teachers, but also – and perhaps more dramatically – in the way their identities are constructed both by themselves and society as a whole. Identities always lacking, always in a craving desire to reach idealized perfection, to become something they are not and cannot ever be, that is, born and raised in the UK or the USA. These are identities prone to develop the impostor syndrome described by Eva Bernat (Bernat 2008).

More recent developments around ELF (Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey 2011) have also been insisting on how violent such reality is, and at the same time, how distant it has become from what is observed in practice. Examining interactions among English users from the outer and expanding circle in international contexts, scholars have realized that the English used across the three circles does not blindly follow standard English – whatever such standard is. The English observed in these scenarios is situated, negotiated as it emerges in each enunciative act (Bakhtin 1997).

In face of this, one needs to seriously consider Kumaravadivelu's suggestion (2016: 82) that:

The only meaningful option open to the subaltern community is the decolonial option. The option demands action. Without action, the discourse is reduced to

banality. There is ample evidence in our disciplinary literature: The subaltern can speak; the subaltern can write. The question is: Can the subaltern act?

The challenge he places goes beyond writing articles and book chapters on classroom research; it goes beyond interviewing teachers and learners and denouncing their oppression. It claims for action. And action can be done in various ways, in multiple contexts, by different people in different positions. However, I believe the subaltern need to speak more as well, because although I agree that the subaltern CAN speak, as Kumaravadivelu put it, they are not always heard. The present paper can be a valuable opportunity to be heard. So I plan to contribute to the discussion on the subject of language learning-teaching from my subaltern perspective as a teacher of English born in Brazil, even though Kumaravadivelu seems to insist on the separation between words and deeds, thinking and acting, mind and body. I assume Freirean *praxis*, a view that does not tell apart theory from practice, a view that sees language as practice and therefore believes in the performativity of our texts.

That being said, this paper will focus on adding a bit to the conversation from a “subaltern” perspective, moving on to discuss what I referred to above as (2) the second way of conceptualizing language, *translanguaging*, in opposition to the one that sees language as *habit formation* (as in some language teaching-learning methods such as the audiolingual, where the repetition of drills aimed at reproducing/memorizing standard English). In order to situate my locus of enunciation, what I understand as essential to the language concept I am bringing to the fore here, I will first present my take on (de)coloniality in section 2 below. With such locus in mind, I will then present the language concept that informs my readings, discussing its ramifications in applied linguistics and ELF.

### 3. Locus of Enunciation: Decoloniality

The modernity/coloniality Latin American group (M/C group), formed by interdisciplinary scholars mainly from History and Social Sciences, such as the Argentinians Walter Dignolo and Enrique Dussel, the Colombian Arturo Escobar and the Peruvian Anibal Quijano, advanced what has been called the “decolonial turn”, that is, “a crucial epistemological movement to the critical and utopian renewal of social sciences in Latin America in the XXI century: the radicalization of the postcolonial argument within the continent” (Ballestrin 2013: 89 – my translation).<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of the present paper, it can be said that the main tenets of their studies involve their understanding of the different (post)colonial processes suffered in Latin America on the one hand, and Asia and Africa on the other. For the M/C group, “the Americans were considered, from the colonial European perspective, as its extension rather than as its difference (as was the case with Africa and

Asia)” (Mignolo 2000: 128). The implications of this are many, but one that becomes especially relevant for us here is that the independence of Latin American countries was obtained when their colonial empires were already in decay (Spain and Portugal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and before the idea of nation-states was available<sup>2</sup>. The idea of a nation at independence was, therefore, the idea of a people’s union in the Americas rather than a political division within the Americas. Besides, those fighting for the independence of Latin America from Spain and Portugal were themselves a *creolized population* that existed before modernity became a colonizing project. In Mignolo’s words (2000: 133), “postcolonial nations after 1950, contrary to postindependence nations in the early nineteenth century, defined themselves within the liberal ideology of the modern world system”.

What specifically matters in this for our argument is that, because the processes and the historical-political-economical circumstances of our independence from the colonies were radically different from those of Asia and Africa on which postcolonial studies reflected, postcolonial theories do not fit our past and present realities in Latin America.

In such landscape, it is of paramount importance to look at the complicity between coloniality and modernity, and to resist the coloniality of power imbued in modernity’s ontoepistemology. In other words, to fight the *civilizing* mission of turning local histories into global designs (Mignolo 2000). The imposition of modernity’s global design is therefore what decoloniality resists. Such design involves, for example, the primacy of Reason, the drive for homogeneity all over the planet, the inability to think outside the borders set by one’s own world view, that is, the difficulty to perform what Mignolo calls “border thinking”, the second tenant of the M/C group studies I would like to foreground here. It is worth citing Mignolo at length on his idea of what constitutes “border thinking”:

The epistemological potential of border thinking, of “an other thinking”, has the possibility of overcoming the limitation of territorial thinking (e.g., the monotypic epistemology of modernity), whose victory was possible because of its power in the subalternization of knowledge located outside the parameters of modern conceptions of reason and rationality. A double critique [or “border thinking”] releases knowledges that have been subalternized, and the release of these knowledges makes possible “an other thinking”. (Mignolo 2000: 67)

For Mignolo, one strategy to promote border thinking is to go about a general *de-linking*

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<sup>2</sup> For Mignolo (2000: 137), “decolonization at the beginning of the nineteenth century could not have been undertaken with a national-state project in mind, since nation-states as known today were not available”

from modern/colonial ideas, creating a critique from within that makes it possible to think otherwise, to envisage and to enact different perspectives from that of modernity that guides our ways of life in the Global West. For him, it is paramount to “decolonize the mind”, and this process should start by questioning the desire to promote one single ideal of life. In his words, again:

De-coloniality, then, means working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ, which is what modernity/coloniality does and, hence, where decolonization of the mind should begin. [...] We (I am referring to you and me, patient reader) are entering here in the unavoidable terrain of terminological de-naturalization. That is, one strategy of de-linking is to de-naturalize concepts and conceptual fields that totalize A reality (Mignolo 2010: 459).

When bringing these demands to our field of applied linguistics and language teaching, delinking our thoughts from monological epistemologies, as a strategy for border thinking, becomes particularly useful. I relate this to our field’s need to distance from the monolingual bias in language acquisition theories, which has been more widely recognized fairly recently in our area especially in the domain of bilingual studies (May 2013). This comes in consonance with perspectives about the performativity of language (Salih 2016, Butler 2010, Pennycook 2004a) and views on translingualism (Garcia and Li 2014).

Some Brazilian studies in ELF (as in the work by Siqueira, Jordão, Diniz de Figueiredo, to name a few) also bring forward the importance of reconceptualizing language away from the monolingual bias that has informed much of the research on applied linguistics and language acquisition. Departing from a Bakhtinian concept of language as social practice, this strand stresses both elements of the binomial – *social* and *practice*: language is conceived as always socially constituted in a never-ending process of realization. From the study of how language users interact in international contexts, this strand looks at language as being socio-interactionally created in each enunciative act, to use Bakhtin’s terminology (Bakhtin 1992, 1997). The implications of this view to language teaching and learning make it possible for us to look at acquisition from a new perspective when compared to the traditional methodologies starting from simple language forms to reach more complex ones, of moving up hierarchically from purportedly more concrete and easy-to-grasp language items to more difficult and abstract ones. Acquisition has thus been reconceptualized as learning to communicate and contextual meaning-making has become more important than knowing standard language norms. The focus of teaching shifts to engaging with language as a local

practice rather than with learning grammar or discrete vocabulary items, to language as an activity rather than language as a system (Pennycook 2016).

This is made possible, I believe, by recognizing the coloniality of our traditional teaching methods and strategies, constructed under the grasp of modern ontoepistemologies. It is made possible by acknowledging that most of the textbooks and materials we have available nowadays build on categories of thought, of “language and proficiency” that have promoted violent epistemicides (Sousa Santos 2015) and therefore need to be defied. Such confrontation has been undertaken by some studies of ELF (Rajadurai 2007, Sifakis and Bayyurt 2015, Jordão and Marques 2017, Siqueira 2015, to name a few) and will be made more explicit later, in section 4 below. First, we need to establish the (second) language concept that informs the arguments developed in this text, that is, translinguaging.

#### 4. Conceptualizing Language: Translinguaging

The second way of looking into languages I wish to present here can be seen broadly as translingualism, or language as translingual practice<sup>3</sup>. In such view, languages are perceived as interdependent, mutually influencing one another constantly, in permanent processes of change; the borders between any two languages, therefore, are always blurred and never rigid. In some dimensions of this perspective, the view of languages as entities existing on their own is conceived as a fallacy created by the infamous Herderian triad (one nation, one language, one culture) and the need to reinforce control over people’s identities, nation-states and their borders (Pennycook and Makoni 2007). In translingualism, meaning is made by making use of one’s *repertoire*. A repertoire, in this context, does not refer only, not even “mostly”, to discrete language items, but it relates to every means available for meaning-making, be they visual, gestural, voiced, written and so on. Languages are seen as informed by multimodality and “texts are meshed and mediated by diverse codes” (Canagarajah 2013: 6). Languages cannot be *owned* by anyone, since they are not objects to be passed on, bought or sold: as practices, languages cannot be reified, commercialized in the neoliberal market as merchandise. What we teach and learn are procedures of meaning-making, ways to relate to perceived sameness and difference, perspectives on intercultural relations, possibilities for interpreting oneself and others.

Although I have referred mostly to scholars writing from the Global North up to this point, this perspective on language can be characterized within southern epistemologies, for we do not consider North and South from a territorial/geographical perspective, but from an epistemological one as also stated earlier. Southern epistemologies, then, claim for less

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<sup>3</sup> There has been some discussion whether “translingualism” and “translingual practice” refer to the same or different views.



violent and more equalitarian views on meaning-making in a series of dimensions, of which I will mention only three for now:

- it widens the scope of communication and what it takes for communication to happen, making it possible for language users to resort to whatever they see fit and thus construct meaning effectively in local manners with local, contingent resources – this allows for the legitimacy of local ways of communication and democratizes the ability to make meaning;
- it dislocates the native speaker construct from the center of our concerns, placing the so-called “non-native-speakers” in the position of norm creators and placing norm as another construct, one among many resources for communication – this allows for underprivileged language users to see their own ways with language as important resources for communication;
- it looks at language as a social practice, stressing the significance of human beings for the existence of language and the centrality of such practices for our lives – this allows for every individual who lives in a language, or in many languages, to conceptualize oneself as capable of communicating with others.

Such view is also closely related to the view of language as translingual practice (Canagarajah 2013), a view that advances all of the above plus the concept of *repertoire* to refer to the resources used and created by *language users* (speakers, listeners, writers and readers – cf Maturana 2001) in their interactions as meaning-makers. In order for the idea of repertoire to be understood alongside these developments in decolonial thinking, we need to remember that historically, in linguistics and applied linguistics, the concept of language proficiency has focused mainly on speaking and fluency. It has disregarded other dimensions of language use and centered around the ideal construct *native speaker* (Rajadurai 2007), thus perpetrating epistemic violence especially toward those read as “non-native speakers”, as mentioned in the introduction of this text.

In order to overcome such violence, we need to promote what Mignolo referred to as “decolonization of the mind” (as cited in section 1 above), delinking the concept of proficiency from the monolingual bias that has informed much of the language acquisition theories up to recent times and has been questioned by ELF scholars such as Jenkins (2006) and Cogo (2016). Adopting a translingual perspective on proficiency leads us to give

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I will consider them synonyms here. For more on this, refer to Garcia and Li (2014) and Canagarajah (2013).

precedence to issues of meaning-making and negotiation, instead of grammatical accuracy (McNamara 2011, Valejo and Dooly 2019). Within the idea of repertoire, translanguaging disconnects proficiency from place of birth, it displaces identity away from the eternal limbo where those read as *non-native speakers* have been placed in modern language acquisition theories. Rather than orienting itself to *native-speaker* emulation, translanguaging “proficiency” is oriented to intelligibility – another construct that needs to be resignified in order to move away from epistemic violence: Intelligibility, when decolonized, refers to the negotiation that happens whenever language is engaged with, always immersed in dialogic (Volochinóv 2017) in every situated context in which language comes into existence. It means, after all, that proficiency and intelligibility cannot be generalized or understood in abstract terms, being as they are radically dependent on the conditions of production of each literacy event and practice (Street 2003). Proficiency and intelligibility are thus aligned with situationality and can only be described within each embodied act of enunciation (Volochinóv 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to explore who says someone is or is not proficient, where, when and from which locus this is said, of whom and under which enunciation circumstances such value is attributed.

The Brazilian scholar Kanavilil Rajagopalan has pointed out, however, that despite all this reflection on the importance of reconceptualizing proficiency and intelligibility, making them relative to each specific situated language practice, the figure of the native speaker still haunts us. For him it is no surprise that “with a concept such as intelligibility nurtured in a context where the so-called native varieties no longer rule the roost, the figure of the native speaker creeps back in, only this time through the back door and that too most stealthily.” (Rajagopalan 2010: 468). He claims, and I cannot help but agree with him, that what is at stake here is power and control, ownership and authority, more than a disembodied language system: this reinforces the argument presented here before, that is, that although our theories have challenged the concept of (non)native-speaker and the ideology behind it (native-speakerism – see Holliday 2006), this construct still informs most practice around language teaching-learning.

Further on in the same text, Rajagopalan points out that intelligibility is made possible through “a willingness or need to understand one another” and that such willingness is what makes us “postulate the existence of a common language in the first place” (id, *ibid*, 469). The emphasis here is on communication as interaction and meaning-making, in a clear link with translanguaging, for which how people make meanings and communicate is more relevant than which languages are being used in the process. From such perspective, proficiency is to be defined in terms of how communication is established, sustained, motivated in specific interactional situations, rather than in terms of adequacy to an artificially constructed norm or

standard.

ELF studies have also responded to latest developments on bilingualism and multiliteracies, for example, in the work of Jenkins (2015), who has described ELF studies as having three phases. The first would be ELF's initial focus on language description and codification of varieties; the second phase was marked by a focus on variability, doing away with the notion of varieties; the third phase, aligned with studies on multilingualism, and I dare say, also with translanguaging, considers the idea of repertoire to think about English language learning in an ELF-aware perspective. In Jenkins' words (2015: 77),

In 'ELF 3', the focus moves again, this time away from ELF as the framework to ELF within a framework of multilingualism. English, while always in the (potential) mix, is now conceived as one among many other languages, one resource among many, available but not necessarily used, with ELF defined not merely by its variability but by its complexity and emergent nature.

This view of ELF as having an emergent nature, in so far as it is specific to each situation of use, or to each enunciative act, conceives intelligibility and proficiency as situated practices resulting from an appreciation of the materiality and singularity of each event of engagement with language. Such view makes it possible to understand language practices as unique activities among humans (and non-humans alike – see Pennycook 2018 – but that is another story for another text). The significance of this to language teaching and learning lies mainly in the fact that our engagement with language is always situated and, as such, teachers and students can only *measure* their proficiency regarding concrete instances of communication.

## 5. Praxis: local uses of southern epistemologies

It is now time to go back to Kumaravadivelu's invitation to action mentioned in the introduction to this paper. His claim that "Without action, the discourse is reduced to banality" (2012: 82) comes as an alert along similar lines to what the Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros de Castro, in a conference at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil, in 2017, insisted on: for him, "science knows, but politics does" (2017). If that is the case, then we must move towards a local understanding of action based on the indigenous perspective de Castro learned in his work.

De Castro explains the indigenous view by comparing two world views: the first is one we imported from the Europe of modernity, a view he refers to as "acting by the model", which conceptualizes the scientific apprehension of the world (objective) as distinct from its political apprehension (subjective), defending the need to homogenize vertical procedures to

access reality, leaning on the importance of copying and reproducing the same process to reach the same truth all over. Any similarity with the monolingual bias in applied linguistics is not mere coincidence.

The second world view discussed by de Castro is what he calls “acting by example”: here, every apprehension of the world is always political, that is, based on the sensible (that what can be perceived by the senses, along the same line as conceptualized by Deleuze), on experience, and instead of presenting itself as a model to be copied, it offers us hints, clues to possible realities and truths to be constructed and shared horizontally, inspiring invention. In the Brazilian scene of language education, more specifically among teachers and scholars of English, we have been operationalizing southern epistemologies in situated agentic practices much to the perspective de Castro conceptualized as “acting by example”. Both in the production of academic knowledge and in our own teaching, we have been exercising and reflecting upon our praxis mainly in *actioning* concepts (Andreotti 2011) such as *subaltern agency* (Jordão 2016), exploring *critical moments* (Pennycook 2004) that arise in the *cracks* of the educational system (Duboc 2015) where we can devise *wiggle room* (Morgan 2010) to promote *small revolutions* (Siqueira 2015) dealing with our *minor Englishes* (Zaidan 2015) and the positions modernity has conferred to us scholars and English teachers in the Global South. In strongly hierarchical and more and more closely controlled spaces such as our academic and educational spaces, scholars as the ones mentioned above have been relying on the possibility of promoting criticality<sup>4</sup> through small-scale practices that hopefully will reverberate into social change.

Another perspective that has helped us understand how we have been acting situatedly has been advanced by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos. He postulates that modern colonial epistemologies tend to promote what he calls “abyssal thinking” – a perspective that suppresses difference and therefore blocks the possibility of changing local practices, of acting otherwise. Souza Santos (2007: 1) describes *abyssal thinking* as

consist[ing] of a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones. The invisible distinctions are established through radical lines that divide social reality into two realms, the realm of “this side of the line” and the realm of “the other side of the line”. The division is such that “the other side of the line” vanishes as reality becomes nonexistent and is indeed produced as nonexistent. Nonexistent means not existing in any relevant or

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<sup>4</sup> I have elsewhere conceptualized the perspective on criticality in my work (cf. Jordão 2008). In short, I see criticality as a process of situating one’s perspectives and being aware of their locus of enunciation.

comprehensible way of being. Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other. What most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line. To the extent that it prevails, this side of the line only prevails by exhausting the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only nonexistence, invisibility, non-dialectical absence.

For Sousa Santos, it is important to consider that modern, Western thinking has treated other forms of knowledge in an “abyssal way” (id, *ibid*: 34). His alert is for us to move away from such thinking into an “ecology of knowledges” that establishes itself “through constant questioning and incomplete answers” (id, *ibid*: 19). This attitude can lead us to a wider awareness of what we know and what we don’t know, he explains, and to a view that what we do not know is “our own ignorance, not a general ignorance” (id, *ibid*: 19). The continual state of alert to our own biases and frames of reference produces what Sousa Santos has called “epistemic vigilance”, that “transforms postabyssal thinking into a deeply self-reflective undertaking” (id, *ibid*: 19).

Thus, we locals have been epistemically vigilant of our own constructs such as that of the empowered non-native speaker (as in Rajagopalan’s alert to the native speaker figure that lurks at our back door) or the clear distinction between L1 and L2 uses in the classroom, or to generic concepts of intelligibility and proficiency. We have also been consciously thinking about our attitudes to language normalization, to the dehumanization of the peripheries (Joseph 2006), and to the relation between language and culture, just to name a few of our concerns that claim for border thinking.

In terms of our local ways to engage with the English language, we have been considering them legitimate processes of meaning-making, although being aware of the political/contextual circumstances that define and orient how our interpretive communities characterize such uses. In other words, we constantly remind ourselves that “people of the Periphery do not simply receive the Centre language in a passive way. Rather, they alter it - they speak it with an accent [...] this active interyention in the form of the language is what Canagarajah calls resistance” (Joseph 2006: 53), that we go about English as a *translingual practice* (Canagarajah 2013) without forgetting, in the intrinsic relation between language and power, that such view on how we engage with English is always contingent. We remind ourselves constantly that we must

consider how people engage with each other, tailor their language uses reciprocally,

display uptake, resist dominant conventions, and co-construct meanings in relation to existing norms and ideologies in actual interactions [... and that] what helps achieve meaning and success in communication is our ability to align semiotic resources with social and environmental affordances” (Canagarajah 2013: 28 and 32),

never oblivious that our practices happen in dialogical relations of conflict and permanent negotiation.

## 6. ELF as translingual practice

As announced in the introduction to this paper, there is a lot in common between some studies in ELF and our praxis as described in section 3 above. Brazilian researchers such as Savio Siqueira, Ana Paula Duboc, Michelle El Kadri, Anderson Marques, Ana Raquel Fialho Ferreira, and many others have been working from a perspective of English as translingual practice in Brazilian English teaching-learning, displacing the occasional focus on L1 X L2 and concentrating more on how communicative practices happen in students’ engagement with English.

Fialho Ferreira (2019), for example, has developed a collaborative study with a teacher educator preparing students as English teachers in higher education; she examined her own and the teacher’s ways to conceptualize ELF in their context, as well as their praxis designing and implementing what they called “an ELF perspective” to teach English to future teachers of English. She concludes that even within an apparent monolingual situation there is a lot of translanguage practice happening, as future teachers of English resignify their own roles teaching *beyond* language structures, emphasizing communication and negotiation strategies rather than grammatical forms.

Marques (2018), another example, situated his field research in a university extension program for students of English of all ages. Dealing with a varied group of students (from ages 16 to 58, from high-school students to experienced professionals in different fields), he developed a course of his own design, promoting language awareness from an ELF perspective, and analyzing students’ attitudes and the development of their awareness of ELF. During the course, he helped his students realize that they resorted to varied repertoires to communicate during classes, interacting among themselves and with the teaching resources available – videos, written texts, audios, etc. Insisting on exposing students to a wide variety of uses of English, Marques concluded that it is possible to make students ELF-aware by explicitly calling students attention to translingual practices in the classroom.

Such studies have departed from a concept of language that can be approximated to

translanguaging or translanguing practice. I will not dwell here on the controversy around the differences between the two terms (for this, see Canagarajah 2013 and Garcia and Wei 2014), *taking the liberty of considering them both synonymous with a perspective that sees the borders among languages as always blurred and largely affiliate to the language concept named as translanguaging in section 2 in this paper.* The interface of translanguaging and ELF seems evident, in so far as both highlight language as socially constructed, unique to each enunciation, dialogical in the Bakhtinian sense (that is, briefly, as pulsating with various possibilities of struggling meanings, always in the making); both see language as a social practice, which means that language comes anew every time it is used; both posit, together with Bakhtin's Circle, that language exists in a process of constant negotiation and attribution of value, among power relations relative to the social, political, economic (and so on) relations established among those who engage in each specific literacy event (Leander and Boldt 2012).

## 7. Concluding remarks

Before closing this paper, it seems relevant to point out how the discussions presented here fit within the field of Applied Linguistics.

First of all, it is important to stress that this discussion does belong to the large field we know as applied linguistics. The view presented here assumes we are not talking about the application of Linguistics when working under applied linguistics (Widdowson 2000, see also this volume): applied linguistics is conceived here as different from linguistics mainly in so far as the former's main concern is with how language relates to *people*, while traditional linguistics tends to be more concerned with the description and systematization of *languages*.

Furthermore, in this paper, applied linguistics is thought of from a decolonial, southern perspective, in permanent dialogue with concepts such as Sousa Santos' *post-abysal thinking* and *epistemic vigilance*, envisaging the productivity of co-existence in difference and of tensions as opportunities to engage in critical thinking; as a form of "weak thought" (cf. footnote 1) this applied linguistics assumes the impermanence of truths and the contingency of its findings, stressing the heterogeneity of our praxes and claiming for the need to decolonize them through collaboration and border thinking.

These were the main tenets of the arguments presented in this paper as ingredients to a potion that, if not magic at all, has been effective to keep us alive and kicking (perhaps more kicking than alive) amidst the coloniality of our knowledge field and of our contemporary social scene.

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