

Decolonial Pedagogies, Multilingualism and Literacies

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My reading is from the perspective of decolonial pedagogies, multilingualism and literacy. One of the objectives of the project, *Re-imagining Multilingualisms*, was to *reimagine*. The term ‘re-imagining’ is something extremely important because imagining and being creative are not things we are used to doing in the academy, not in Linguistics at least! We believe that we are empiricists, that we only look at facts and we make conclusions. We are pseudo-scientists. We make conclusions about what we observe, and we think that what we observe has got nothing to do with what we imagine.

On the contrary, it has everything to do with what we imagine. So, when we analyse things ideologically, what is ideology? It’s exactly an imagination which has been naturalised and institutionalised. And so, whenever we look at the world, we’re looking at it from the eyes of a particular learned knowledge, an ideology. When we are asked to be able to imagine things, it’s

a point of being able to break out of our established learning and looking for something new. *Imagining* is extremely important in the learning process. If it doesn’t happen there is no learning. This is one of the important things of Freirean pedagogy. For example, he made the distinction between what he called ‘banking pedagogies’ or ‘transmission pedagogies’ where there’s just reproduction and repetition, and ‘transformative pedagogies’, what he called ‘liberatory pedagogies’, which is where *creativity* is involved, where you break the simple linearity of repetition and transmission.

So how does this work? How do you promote creativity? It is by breaking what previously seemed natural and normal. All of the activities you mentioned, different modes, going into different spaces, all of these are part of the idea of re-imagining and being creative and breaking out of the mould of normality or naturalness that we acquire in academic discourse. The important

thing is that when we talk about discourse in the academy, and here I am using decolonial theory, it's important to bring back *our bodies*. One of the critiques that decoloniality makes is that in the creation of universality and modernity which, according to decolonial theory, began with the colonial contact between Europe and the Americans – when the Iberians first came into contact with the Amerindians – they only brought with them what they knew. When they saw the Amerindians, all they saw was deficiency, absence, ignorance, what they concluded was primitivity. This contact, which created the primitivity of 'the other', was what established the modernity of the Europeans and the Iberians.

That is where this idea of superiority comes in. One of the essential aspects of this contact is that the bodies *were seen*, and the seeing of the bodies *was denied*. The racialisation occurred because there were different races, different bodies. That difference was interpreted as negativity, absence. That is where the racialisation occurred, but it was denied at the same time because there was no perception of the racialisation on the colonial side of the line of subject. We (the colonists) do not see ourselves as racialised subjects observing other racialised subjects. We do not see ourselves as subjects at all. We think we just see what there *is*. In our minds, we are just coming to conclusions based on what objectively exists. And so this racialisation of the other, which leads to a whole series of inequalities, is based on the denial of the bodies. All the knowledge produced through modernity and modern science, which is what we use until today in Linguistics, and how we define language and therefore how we define multilingualism as different discrete languages, all of this comes from the denial of the subject.

All scientific discourse is based on a dichotomy of subject and object, the observing subject. But the observing subject denies this subjectivity. That's why we have this myth of scientific and academic discourse as objective, neutral, and universal. We have basically eliminated *the body* behind the creation of our knowledge. This is why in decolonial pedagogy we have to bring back the body. In your module, *Re-imagining Multilingualisms*, one of the themes that came through was the importance of food and shared lunch breaks. Why did you notice the food so much? The food is all about bringing back the body. When we sit in lectures, our bodies are hidden behind tables. In academia, bodies are not to be seen, bodies are what bothers our thinking, because we inherited the idea of modernity: the separation between the mind and the body where it's only the mind that is important, not bodies. Bodies don't matter. The racialisation which institutionalises all of this thinking is simply made invisible. So, if you point to race it's because you're racist. When you don't, when race is not brought into account, it's because it is a neutral discourse, but the so-called neutral discourse is racist in its origin. This is one of the basic ideas of decolonial theory.

We have to bring the body back into this. How do we do this? By something very simple, a term we use in decolonial theory: *the locus of enunciation*, the space from which we speak. When we bring into account the space from which we speak, then we bring into account something which has been eliminated in academic discourse, which is the body. To speak from a space means you are speaking from a body located in space and time. When a body is located in space and time, a body has memory, a body has

experience, a body has been exposed to history and the various conflicts of history. History has multiplicity, contradictions, etc. Bringing back the body into our pedagogies has come through in this project, not only in re-imagining but also in the use of creativity.

Food is extremely important because it's a ritual: food occurs at particular moments in events. Rituals are extremely important when we are talking about pedagogical spaces. In all cultures, we still find rituals which are part of pedagogical spaces, but we have tended to eliminate rituals apart from the rituals which originated at primary schools. I don't know if you've had this experience, but when I was a child, and I still see this in Latin America a lot: the teacher walks in and all the students say, g-o-o-d-m-o-r-n-i-n-g t-e-a-c-h-e-r in chorus. These are the rituals of pedagogy and the rituals are important because rituals are liminal spaces. Rituals are moments of transformation, of passing and they have to be marked. They cannot occur all the time, otherwise we would go mad, but they are still extremely important. They're moments of change from one thing to another. The food ritual, for example, is when your body is permitted, it's recognised. Food rituals in the academy, which you've noticed, are rare but these are spaces when we recognise that bodies exist, they need to be fed.

One of you mentioned that hungry children don't learn. This, in Brazil specifically, was the policy of the government we had for fifteen years which managed to bring a large percentage of the population out of poverty. They connected food to learning. Previously, only snacks were given at school, but then school lunches became free and poor families were encouraged that way to send their kids to school. They got allowances for that.

The allowances that the families got for putting their kids in school were not used on clothing or food, because kids got their uniforms and got food at school. So, each allowance per child added to the income of the families. By looking after bodies, we can do all kinds of things, but we tend to ignore this, to think that hunger has got nothing to do with education. We are told: we're only here (at school or university) to think. But we can't think on an empty stomach.

A ritual is a moment of transition and the food is important in that. When, in the Linguistic Landscapes seminar, you moved to the Botanical Gardens, or to Little Europe, or those syntax classes which you mentioned, that's very important. These are moments of estrangement where you felt out of your spaces of belonging. You felt, these are spaces which I'm not used to, syntax is not the kind of thing I'm used to learning, it's too abstract, it's too theoretical. In the story about going to the café, you mentioned the strangeness, but also the familiarity, you mentioned that it had the smells of home but suddenly you were made to remember it wasn't home, far from it. What are these experiences? These are experiences of movement again, these are the experiences of learning, and I think this is a very important aspect of this project. It has permitted these spaces for these movements to occur. Going from a syntax class, for example, to a class on creative writing. Both of these, the abstract knowledge and the knowledge through emotion, affect and sensation are equally important. This involves a process which decolonial theory, and so-called Southern theory, emphasises as the importance of *translation*.

Perhaps you understand translation in a very traditional, modernistic way, that is, recoding meanings from one language

to another: for example, Afrikaans to isiXhosa to English. We were taught that translation is reducing the strangeness of the other to the sameness of the self, so as to eliminate difference. Translation was to eliminate difference. So, once I've translated, I know. Then we begin to talk about 'lost in translation.' We begin to talk about an 'excess', something which translation can't wrap its head around. There's always something there which cannot be translated. We know that, but we've been taught that translation simply tells us everything that there is in the other language. Decolonial theory gives us a different idea of translation where translation is *recognition of difference*. Translation is recognition of *incompleteness*. Language, culture and knowledge are always and necessarily incomplete, otherwise they would not be living phenomena. Any living phenomenon is incomplete. The impetus to live is an impetus towards completion which is always interrupted. When we understand and recognise incompleteness, we can begin to understand translation, not as the exhaustion and reduction of, and therefore the elimination of, difference.

But translation is a *movement*, a recognition of difference, a recognition of the ethical need for understanding difference and at the same time the ethical recognition that 'I can't understand difference.' And it's exactly because I can't understand that I need to understand. For example, many of you struggled with the syntax lesson. But we need syntax, it's important knowledge. So just because we don't like it, because it's abstract, it's not easy, what do we do? Do we ignore it? It's the same thing as what would happen if we were ignoring a different gender or

sexuality, or a different race. What we need to do is to translate, recognise our difficulty, recognise the fact that we can't understand, and that that's exactly why we need to make an effort to understand. So, all these moments of difficulty are important. Just thinking about the comment, you heard in the coffee shop*, what does that tell you? That tells you that things haven't changed completely, that change is a continuous process, that history is a process. We are not all at the same moment in history. We move at different paces. We have to translate.

We have to understand that not understanding is part of understanding. That is extremely important, otherwise we would like to control everything. The Portuguese thinker, Souza Santos, talks about ignorance a lot in his theories and he says that in modernity, or in this traditional colonial idea of knowledge, the movement or 'the Enlightenment' was to go from ignorance to knowledge. He says that learning involves going from point A to point B. But for the Enlightenment and modernity, point A was always ignorance and point B was always knowledge, enlightenment. He says when learning was seen as going from A to B, ignorance to enlightenment, this was how colonial control established itself, how the inequality of knowledge established itself. Because who decides what ignorance is? Who decides what knowledge is? So here again, the *body* of who decides, the *location* of who decides is eliminated. What he says is that *ignorance* is always somebody's knowledge. What we define as ignorance, when something we see is ignorant, it's always the knowledge seen by someone else as 'not knowledge'. In the same way knowledge, what is considered to be knowledge, will not be known by someone else, so it will be 'ignorance' to someone else.

*See *Le Caf *, by Gen  van Wyk, this journal.

So, what is ignorance and what is knowledge? We have to understand this from a contextual, historical perspective. He says when the process of learning is seen as moving from A to B, from ignorance to knowledge, this is a typical colonial move. He uses the term 'colonial' to mean the unequal process of looking at knowledge where the point of knowledge is total, complete dominance. For example, if we look at language from this perspective, we can see ignorance: we do not recognise or see varieties, or we see some varieties as substandard or dialectal or deviant – i.e. not 'the norm'. Then what are we doing? We are saying whatever isn't our knowledge doesn't exist, or is not valuable. This is what we've got to do, we've got to change this. What he suggests is that looking at this from a decolonial perspective then what we see as ignorance is not simply a lack, but ignorance is a space populated or peopled by various things, various knowledges, various languages, if we are looking at it from a multilingual perspective. Ignorance is never a vacuum, an empty space. Ignorance is always full of things. In any process of learning, there has to be a movement from whatever populates the space of ignorance to whatever populates the space of knowledge. But, he asks, in a non-colonial, non-modernistic,

non-rationalistic movement from A to B, where do we go? We go from a recognition of *multiplicity*, where some knowledge is 'better' than others, to a position of *solidarity* where we see this multiplicity is equal. We try to understand it in a collaborative manner and not in a manner of excluding one or giving preference to another, which we would normally do.

The important aspect of solidarity, the instrument of utmost importance that we have when we want to arrive at solidarity, is *translation*, where once we recognise multiplicity, we recognise the complexity of looking at different phenomena. The ethical demand is to translate – not translation as in eliminating the difference, but translation as recognising that these forms are different to 'what I consider to be my normal'. But that's my problem. I have to make an effort to recognise them and if I don't understand, that means I have to try to understand. And I will never reach a point of total understanding – but that doesn't belittle the other phenomenon. This movement, as with everything else I have spoken about, translation, body-ness and creativity, all comes down to recognising the importance of the locus of enunciation, and how all knowledge is situated, reflecting the time and space in which it emerges.

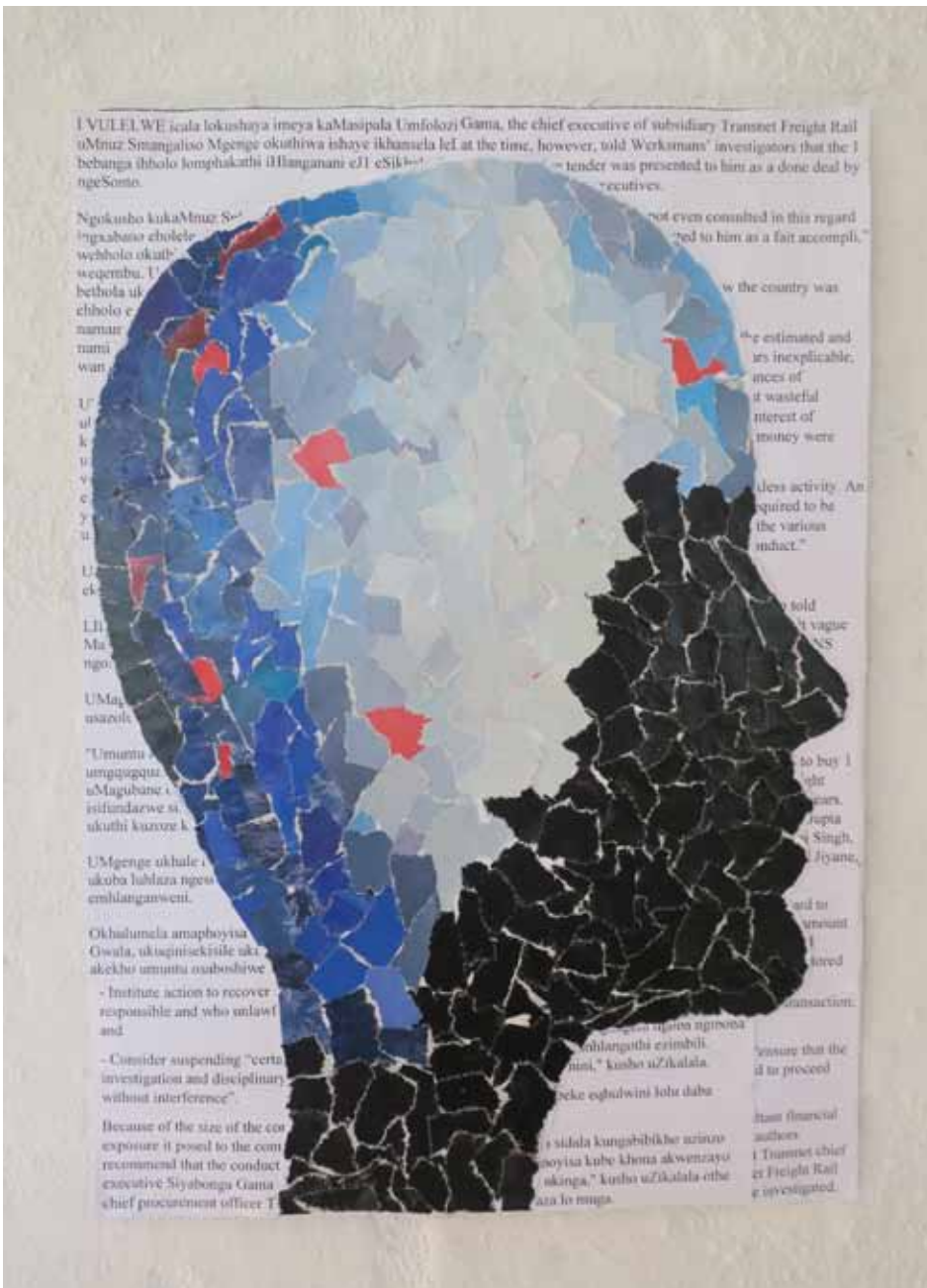


Fig. 4 Exhibition piece #3, by Caitlin O'Donovan