From Southern Theory to Decolonizing Sociolinguistics

STUDIES IN KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND PARTICIPATION

***Series Editors*: Mary Jane Curry,** *University of Rochester, USA* **and Theresa Lillis,** *The Open University, UK*

Questions about the relationships among language and other semiotic resources (such as image, film/video, sound) and knowledge production, participation and distribution are increasingly coming to the fore in the context of debates about globalisation, multilingualism, and new technologies. Much of the existing work published on knowledge production has focused on formal academic/scientific knowledge; this knowledge is beginning to be produced and communicated via a much wider range of genres, modes and media including, for example, blogs, wikis and Twitter feeds, which have created new ways of producing and communicating knowledge, as well as opening up new ways of participating. Fast-moving shifts in these domains prompt the need for this series which aims to explore facets of knowledge production including: what is counted as knowledge, how it is recognised and rewarded, and who has access to producing, distributing and using knowledge(s). One of the key aims of the series is to include work by scholars located outside the 'centre', and to include work written in innovative styles and formats.

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STUDIES IN KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND PARTICIPATION: 5

From Southern Theory to Decolonizing Sociolinguistics

Voices, Questions and Alternatives

Edited by
Ana Deumert and Sinfree Makoni

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7 The Relevance of Experience: Decolonial and Southern Indigenous Perspectives of Language

Cristine Severo and Sinfree Makoni

Introduction

This chapter is in line with current discussions committed to problematizing and expanding the epistemological field concerned with language policies for indigenous peoples (Hauck & Heurich, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Severo, 2016; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). In recognition of UNESCO's initiative to promote the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032), we aim to focus on southern perspectives of language(s) that take into account indigenous people's experiences. This means that we advocate for a radically contextualized perspective of language, for which the condition of production (Kubota *et al.*, 2022; Makoni & Criss, 2017) is embedded in indigenous people's lives. It follows that any concept of language diversity should be able to problematize power relations and structural asymmetry: 'True linguistic diversity and justice can be attained by both problematizing structural obstacles and recognizing that ideologies and structures are entrenched in unequal and unjust relations of power regarding race, gender, class, and sexuality, which influence diverse language users to communicate in certain way' (Kubota *et al.*, 2022: para. 1). Such a view includes the role played by language activists in shaping our contextualized understanding of language and language revitalization, such as the case of several indigenous languages. In this regard, we agree that 'interventions on behalf of a threatened minority language that leave intact all other aspects of social evolution that link the community with the world have generally resulted in failure' (Makoni & Criss, 2017: 535).

Along the same lines, the concept of experience matters since it allows us to broaden the concept of language inscribed in the meaning-making process of personal experiences connected to real-life social practices: 'Linguistic phenomena thus take place in the same space as

our shared everyday experience of the real world' (Inkpin, 2016: 7). Such a perspective is consistent with integrationist principles of language and communication insofar as 'Personal experience is the nearest thing Integrationism has to a foundation in its thinking about language. [Roy] Harris even speaks of the *terra firma* of individual experience' (Pablé & Hutton, 2013: 8). Integrational linguistics is critical of the language myth (Harris, 1990), which alludes to the 'fixed-code fallacy' and the 'fallacy of telementation': 'The former refers to the belief that languages exist as internally structured systems of invariant units and regularities and the consequent view that the description and analysis of these systems constitute the proper subject matter of a scientifically orientated linguistics' (Orman, 2013: 2). We problematize such fallacies by engaging with the notion of experience as a core dimension to define language practices.

We argue that this line of thought is consistent with Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1975: 386) concept of language as experience that deeply connects the personal with the interpersonal meaning-making process: 'Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement takes place between two people'. This means that language experience definitely matters if we want to claim for a politics concerned with plurality, dialogue and comprehension. The underpinning hermeneutical principle we assume is that '[c]onversation is a process of coming to an understanding' in which 'each person opens himself to the other' (Gadamer, 1975: 387). One of the objectives of intergrationism seeks to explore lay people's experiences of language. Phenomenology seeks to analyze individual experiences. Integrationism and phenomenology intersect because language is part of individual experience.

By highlighting indigenous language experiences, we assume that such non-default perspectives can 'shed light on what is involved in language use more generally, and in this sense might reasonably be expected to be of interest to and/or illuminated by philosophy of language' (Inkpin, 2016: 4). This means that we seek to go beyond a representational or informative dimension of language use to consider several kinds of experience that people may have with language, including the spiritual, aesthetical, educational and ritualist dimensions of language practice. By doing so, we aim to contribute to the debates on southern perspectives of language (Makoni *et al*., 2022; Pennycook & Makoni, 2020; Severo & Makoni, 2021) that problematize colonial concepts of indigenous language that are alien to how local people understand and experience their practices. By focusing on the questions that really matter from the perspective of indigenous peoples, we aim to contribute to a southernized concept of language policy and planning. This means that the concept of politics adopted by us is radically based on the idea of plurality: 'plurality is specifically the condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life' (Arendt, 1998: 8).

In this chapter, we assume that both the decolonial and anti-colonial perspectives propose an epistemological, political and cultural revision of the categories that have been used to narrate and define the indigenous world (Cusicanqui, 2015; Kovach, 2009; Krenak, 2020; Lander, 2005; Leonard, 2017; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Mignolo, 2008, 2015; Morana *et al.*, 2008; Quijano, 2000; Smith, 1999; Walsh, 2013; Wilson, 2008; Yunkaporta, 2009, 2010; Zaffaroni, 2017), such as ideas of ethnicity, indigeneity, diversity, language extinction and language revitalization. The decolonial and anti-colonial perspectives work as critics of the colonial apparatus, problematizing the use of race as the main classificatory category of people and their languages. Although such a critical perspective is strongly embedded in Latin American colonial experiences, we understand that there is a cross-cultural indigenous movement that has strongly affected the politics of knowledge concerning indigenous issues. We understand that indigenous movements have worked as both local and global movements mainly after 1980. This means that they 'are not unified under any single authority but rather relate to each other in a network structure' (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 86). Indigenous activism has resignified the terms 'indigenous' and 'indigeneity' in global movements, although there is still a gap in understanding how global activism relates to local and regional uses (Merlan, 2019).

Positionality is an important concept in this chapter, since it connects our reflections to the role played by indigenous people in the process of knowledge production, dissemination, transmission and reception. Positionality has been a widely debated topic in qualitative research, in the face of the researcher's interference in the research process and its results. Positionality implies a self-reflexive attitude in research for the purpose of 'understanding of the self and identifying the discourses which have impacted on the lenses through which the researcher views the world and participants under study' (Grbich, 2004: 71). The academic politics of indigenous positionality is in line with other academic movements that have been struggling for visibility. One example is the publication, *Black Linguistics: Language, Society and Politics in Africa and the Americas* (Ball *et al.*, 2003), where the authors explicitly engage with positionality as a central element to the process of knowledge production, as we notice in the opening of their book:

> This book foregrounds contributions to research on Black languages by Black scholars in Africa and the Americas. It identifies key epistemological and political underpinnings of what we are here calling 'Black Linguistics': a postcolonial scholarship that seeks to celebrate and create room for insurgent knowledge about Black languages. Black Linguistics is committed to studies of Black languages by Black speakers and to analyses of the sociopolitical consequences of varying conceptualizations of and research on Black languages. (Ball *et al.*, 2003: 1)

Even though we – Cristine Severo and Sinfree Makoni – are not indigenous, we believe that our academic positionality as southern scholars, from Brazil and African contexts, and our critical and public engagement with a series of discussions concerning southern perspectives of language may contribute to expanding the debate by including an indigenous framework and problematizations in the academic debate concerning the decolonial perspectives of language.

This chapter is divided into two parts: first, we explore a southern perspective of language based on the decolonial critique of the concept of language; next, we present some examples that illustrate why indigenous experience matters, to define not only languages but also the basis of a politics of plurality, which means that even indigenous movements are confronted with pressures that may push them to downplay their diversity and homogenize them.

On Decolonial Perspectives of Language

The decolonial vision assumed in this text proposes a critique of the coloniality of power – a political matrix that operated, in the context of colonization, by controlling a series of interrelated elements involved in indigenous life and practices, such as control of the economy, authority, nature, natural resources, gender, body, sexuality, subjectivity and knowledge (Mignolo, 2010). Such a decolonial critical approach implies a review of theoretical and methodological frameworks that, to a large extent, have dominated the process of knowledge production about colonized peoples, such as the concept of land, as signalled by Eugenio Raúl Zaffaroni (2017), an Argentine judge of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights:

> The Earth ceased to be the Magna Mater of the ancients, the Pachamama of the Andes and the Gaia of the contemporaries, therefore something alive and life-giving, to be transformed into an inert thing (Descartes' *res extensa*), in a market of resources made available to the unlimited voracity of human beings. (Zaffaroni, 2017: 10; translated from Portuguese)[1]

Similarly, we assume that language has been transformed into this 'inert thing', a product of objectifying and crystallizing processes of knowledge construction, which contributed to invisibilizing a broader view of language practices closely connected to the way indigenous people name, narrate and experience their languages. The way indigenous languages have historically been 'researched' – following a careful and bureaucratic protocol for collection, description, documentation and exemplification – has been questioned by indigenous researchers, such as the Maori linguist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) who queries, among so many

categories, the pejorative use of the term 'research' to define studies of indigenous communities:

> From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. (Smith, 1999: 1)

Such methodological concern is epistemologically oriented and has been problematized by researchers who have been working with indigenous issues, such as the concept of indigenous educational policies, or of the revitalization and maintenance of 'endangered' or 'minority' languages. We problematize the methodology that has largely been used to define the idea of endangered languages, based on the ideology of languages as units capable of being counted and named by predefined standardizing frameworks (Appadurai, 1993; Heller & McElhinny, 2017).

The rhetoric of 'endangered languages' does not always dialogue with how indigenous peoples comprehend and experience their practices. Very often, the linguists' perspectives operate against the local perspective, as signalled by Nevins (2004) writing about his research involving an indigenous community in the White Mountain Apache Reservation in Arizona; in such a context, the educational model used by the 'specialists' for language revitalization raised ethical concerns, such as undermining the relationship between the older and younger people which was a core issue for the local community. Such disconnection between the perspectives of the specialists and the local community has motivated conflicts and tensions in relation to, for example, the ideas of legitimization and education. Nevins (2004) writes:

> I argue that the expression of ambivalence or opposition toward these programs by some Apache people was not the result of apathy or confusion…, but more often involved perceptive, incisive critique of real challenges to Apache ways of speaking and authority within Apache pedagogical practices. (Nevins, 2004: 270)

This example of a 'misunderstanding' between researchers and local subjects whose languages are seen as an object of revitalization is illustrative of the importance of an epistemological and methodological review of the way in which 'data' has been generated or, in other words, 'invented' (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006). We are adamant that modern linguistics is predicated upon a process that silences other voices, particularly those from the south which, if included in analytical models, are treated as anonymous informants. The construction of educational

programmes and pedagogical materials has devoted little attention to the local meanings attributed to these languages, which has helped to build stereotypes and crystallized monolithic views about these languages. The protectionist and salvationist discourses underlying work in language endangerment are often based on romantic and acritical views. Regarding the ideological bias inscribed in this salvationist vision, we quote Smith (1999: 2) for whom: 'the belief in the ideal that benefiting mankind is indeed a primary outcome of scientific research is as much a reflection of ideology as it is of academic training'. We understand that to deal with the linguistic tradition produced by indigenous peoples, linguistics has to change how it analyzes people's language experience. Rather than investigating language as abstract things passed down from generation to generation, we follow Gadamer's (1975: 391) proposal that 'What has come down to us by way of verbal tradition is not left over but given to us, told us – whether through direct retelling, in which myth, legend, and custom have their life, or through written tradition, whose signs are, as it were, immediately clear to every reader who can read them'. This means that the very idea of language and knowledge transmission has to be radically contextualized into the way people collectively experience language.

Nevertheless, as many educational programmes targeted towards indigenous peoples consider in their proposals the idea of reciprocity, it is necessary to consider that 'the relationship between such programs and members of the local language community is often quite a bit more complicated and problematic than reciprocity implies' (Nevins, 2004: 272). The idea of reciprocity should consider how power relations have historically helped to legitimize scholars' discursive positions to the detriment of local knowledges. This fictional discourse of reciprocity is often reinforced by the idea that 'having been there and having been with them' is sufficient to produce and legitimize knowledge about local practices. The use of a naïve empiricism – having been there – has underpinned the rhetoric of many researchers, attributing to themselves the authority to speak 'for them' (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). It should be noted that similar rhetoric was used by missionaries in the African and Latin American contexts (Severo, 2019). By submitting the concept of research to such problematization, we seek to comprehend how scholarship has reproduced silencing (Makoni & Severo, 2022) and invisibilizing practices: 'community members are for the most part excluded from the research process, they have become resentful of research in general' (Wilson, 2008: 15). We argue that it is our responsibility to deal with such resentful feelings as part of the problem invented by scholarship.

In addition to the methodological and epistemological revisions concerning indigenous language studies, the concept of language also demands a reconsideration of generic and hierarchical identity categories, such as the terms 'indigenous', 'native peoples', 'forest peoples',

'Aborigines' and 'peoples of the fourth world'. The very idea of what counts as indigenous is politically constructed and must be kept under constant revision, mainly because such a concept inherited European, Christian and Western outlooks that have helped to shape how modern identities have been systematically and carefully narrated (Mignolo, 2007). Such an epistemic matrix operates through the following orientations: by classifying societies into categories; by grouping complex images of other societies into a given simplified representational system; by creating standardized models for comparative analysis; by establishing evaluation criteria by which others are ranked (Hall & Gieben, 1992); and by reproducing both a politics of invisibility and a politics of hypervisibility (Santos, 2002).

Such a focus on classification also underpins concepts of language. An example is the influence of a hierarchical typological model inspired by biblical genealogies in language classification (Irvine, 2011). Such classificatory frameworks were used in the colonial context. Other colonial frameworks of language include the enumerability of linguistic diversity, naming practices, the construction of indigeneity and the use of dictionaries and grammars as reflecting a theory about languages (Makoni, 2018). Such concepts and categories have been widely used in language planning and policy studies, with little attention given to epistemological and methodological issues concerning local interests and demands. We argue that indigenous peoples should be able to choose to create and conduct their own language policies. Such a position is in line with a Global South perspective that claims for 'a major shift from treating Southern others as research objects and informants to a more inclusive and disruptive role as knowledge creators and co-constructors' (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020: 13). This means that indigenous peoples are challenged to also produce a critical response to how their histories, languages and subjectivities have been colonized and appropriated by neocolonial powers. Indigenous positionality is also about a discursive position that helps to change the rules that have historically defined what counts as indigeneity and indigenous language experiences. Such positionality can contribute to expanding the discussion on the meanings and roles of research, as the following principles underlying what counts as an indigenous research framework:

> Recognition of our worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival; Honouring our social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people; Emphasis of social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures; Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands. (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003: 205)

Decolonial and Southern Experiences and Initiatives

In this section, we present some examples of how indigenous experiences and initiatives can articulate decolonial and southern visions of language policy and planning. We focus on the importance of indigenous voices in shaping not only concepts of language, but also projects concerning language policies. By recognizing that 'indigenous scholars are in the process of shaping, redefining, and explaining their positions' (Wilson, 2008: 54), we prioritize the role played by experience in southern and decolonial language policies and planning. Such a perspective has to do with the concept of positionality; that is, the position of the researcher in relation to the political, economic, cultural and social context of the research. Positionality has been a widely debated topic in qualitative research, in the face of the researcher's interference in the research process and its results. Positionality implies a self-reflexive attitude in research for the purpose of 'understanding of the self and identifying the discourses which have impacted on the lenses through which the researcher views the world and participants under study' (Grbich, 2004: 71). In this regard, for example, Bourke (2014) addresses the importance of positionality in his research on racial issues in higher education, in which symbolic aspects of identities were in question. He writes:

> Throughout my preparations to conduct this research, from the formulation of the initial research questions to the drafting of the focus group protocol, my positionality as a White man studying issues of race remained at the forefront of my mind. (Bourke, 2014: 1)

Positionality definitely matters when we talk about language policy and planning in the Global South, since it helps to redefine power relations towards the legitimation of emancipatory scripts (Santos, 2002).

Examples of how indigenous positionality has played a role in creating and disseminating indigenous concepts of language and politics in Brazil are what have been called ethno-media or ethno-communication ('*etnomídia* or *etnocomunicação*'; Baniwa, 2017; Tupinambá, 2016). The idea of ethno-communication is deeply concerned about who communicates what to whom and how. Ethno-media has been used by indigenous peoples as a form of media activism, linked to the reorganization and visibility of social movements. Such media produced by indigenous peoples has contributed to organizing horizontal, cross-national and cross-cultural networks among different groups. We argue that ethno-media carries a decolonial orientation by providing 'the possibility of producing new ways for these groups to narrate themselves and the circumstances that affect them' (Gargioni, 2019: 59). Indigenous claims for autonomy and control of communication and knowledge production also include the precious knowledge 'of the indigenous populations of the Amazon,

who know how to live with the forest and whose activity is necessary for keeping the forest alive' (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 132). In several African contexts, traditional media has been used as a mechanism in social and political resistance (Salawu, 2015). This is an example of a decolonial and southern approach to communication, since it is based on strategies engaged with deconstructing stereotypes and crystallized perspectives about indigenous culture. It carries a broader concept of language that includes 'different ways of thinking and reporting things, which can seem poetic or even playful for those who do not know native philosophies. The word is not the only way of communication'[2] (Tupinambá, 2016: para. 8; translated from Portuguese).

Other examples of ethno-media are indigenous radio stations, blogs and vlogs, as well as a series of homepages and social networks created and maintained by the indigenous peoples themselves. *Rádio Yandê*, for example, was the first indigenous radio station created in Brazil in 2013. All the presenters at this radio station are indigenous, belonging to different ethnicities and communities, such as Terena, Tupinambá, Pataxó Ha-hã-hãe, Baniwa and Tukano. Ethno-media aims to deconstruct 'old stereotypes and prejudices caused by the lack of specialized information in non-indigenous communication vehicles' (Yandê, n.d.). It is interesting to point out that all these presenters are studying undergraduate or graduate courses, which means that the very idea of activism and ethno-media is also affected by academic discourses of resistance in line with a process of decolonizing higher education.

The station uses Portuguese, English, Spanish and several indigenous languages. The songs played are indigenous, and the themes addressed are directly linked to the interests of indigenous peoples. Regarding the linguistic scope of programming, we mention the interchangeable use of indigenous languages, Portuguese, Spanish and English:

> Yandê Connection – A talk program with indigenous people around the world.
>
> *Un programa de conversación con pueblos indígenas alrededor del mundo* ['A conversation programme with Indigenous people around the world'].
>
> *Papo na Rede é um programa de variedades com protagonistas indígenas sobre como são suas vidas e curiosidades que surgem no dia a dia* ['Papo na Rede is a variety programme with Indigenous protagonists about their lives and curiosities that appear in their daily lives']. (Yandê, n.d.)

The written use of Portuguese is predominant in Brazil, serving as a kind of 'general language' for the transmission of indigenous voices and debates. In this context, the appropriation and nativization of Portuguese means that it operates as an indigenous discourse, turning it into

an indigenous language, since it carries indigenous meanings. However, we must differentiate such strategic use of Portuguese from the language colonization process, which means that the idea of a common language as a condition for mutual understanding should be continuously problematized:

> Having a common language, however, has not served to increase cultural understandings. Rather, it has put indigenous culture at risk. This suggests that a common language is not the panacea for a common understanding. Instead, understanding is a layered endeavour. (Kovach, 2009: 24)

We argue that such a decolonizing process 'would imply the incorporation of indigenous knowledges and indigenous knowledgeable men and women as lecturers, is likewise far from indisputable' (Grosfoguel *et al.*, 2016: 83).

Another example of ethno-media activism is the publication by the Humanitas Unisinos Institute of a special online issue called *Ore Ywy – On the Need to Build Up a New Relationship with Our Land*.[3] This publication presents the perspectives of 11 indigenous peoples of different ethnicities on the issue of land (*Ore Ywy* means 'our land' in Guarani). The journal is academically oriented, which contributes to legitimizing indigenous perspectives. Examples of indigenous frameworks include the concepts of land, time and moral education, as the following examples of indigenous leaders from different ethnicities show:

> We are not the owners of the land, we are the land. Congenital, natural, and original law predates private property law. We are not fighting for land reform. Because we are the earth, we have the right to be on earth and the right to protect what we call sacred, nature; it nourishes us and we nourish it as we protect it. (Tupinambá apud IHU Online, 2018: 527; translated from Portuguese)[4]

> We must listen to older people's advices, because they know what it means to lose hope and to try to keep life at its best in us. I am thankful for this sensitivity to have the patience to listen! (Esbell apud IHU Online, 2018: 28; translated from Portuguese)[5]

> Indigenous education has its peculiarities. One of them is that in the Kambeba village, for example, we do not follow the clock to set the time to enter and to leave […] We are also careful about teaching the children about the value of caring for the river […]. (Kambeba apud IHU Online, 2018: 42)

> Every year the government sends books to the villages, but I don't see any importance in that, because there is no purpose in sending beautiful books of famous authors to our children. This affects their formation

> because it has nothing to do with indigenous culture. That is why I speak of the importance of native literature in which the indigenous can write about their people, thoughts, ideas, and criticisms. (Jekupé apud IHU Online, 2018: 50)[6]

In terms of indigenous positionality, we briefly mention the perspective of Linda Smith, a Maori researcher who has been working with educational, linguistic and indigenous language research policies in Australian and New Zealand contexts. We point out the problematization she makes of classical research questions. For example, in addition to the traditional critical questions – Whose research is it? Whose interests does it serve? Who planned the methodology and form of intervention? How will the results be disseminated? – there are other questions embedded in indigenous interests – Is your spirit clear? Does he or she have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Can they fix up our generator? Can they actually do anything? (Smith, 1999: 10). These questions are relevant in the knowledge-making process as they reveal epistemological, methodological and ethical concerns. We argue that a decolonial and southern approach to language policy and planning must take seriously the role of experience in shaping 'research' questions. The idea of experience underlines indigenous claims for a politics of visibility and audibility conducted by indigenous peoples. A local sense of experience matters, as we see in the arguments of indigenous researchers:

> In positioning myself as an indigenous woman, I am claiming a genealogical, cultural, and political set of experiences. My *whakapapa* or descent lines come through both my parents. Through them I belong to two different major 'tribal' groups and have close links to others. (Smith, 1999: 12)

> By getting away from abstractions and rules, stories allow us to see others' life experiences through our own eyes. This information may then be internalized in a way that is difficult for abstract discussions to achieve. (Wilson, 2008: 17)

> This writing comes from the heart, it comes from who I am and all that I am – nothing more, or less for that matter. It comes from my own need and longing to engage with my Nêhiýaw and Saulteaux ancestry, and to say to my academic world that my culture counts. (Kovach, 2009: 7)

> I research from the strength and position of being Aboriginal and viewing anything western as 'other', alongside and among western worldviews and realities. (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003: 205)

> [In] 2020, in Mexico, the Declaration of Los Pinos was elaborated, which established the foundations for the construction of a Global Action Plan for the IDIL (International Decade of Indigenous Languages) and

> established as a guiding principle the effective participation of Indigenous peoples in decision-making, consultation, planning and implementation, with the motto of 'Nothing for us without us'. (Rubim *et al.*, 2022: 155–156; translated from Portuguese)[7]

Indigenous researchers in academic contexts also face new challenges due to their ambivalent positionality that demands a continuous process of translation and meaning negotiation. Translation is a political process that shapes power relations between different indigenous peoples, and between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples as well. In this decolonial perspective of research, some premises become relativized or problematized – for example, the theoretical framework that legitimizes what is considered valid research; the use of textual academic genres to the detriment of oral genres, such as testimonies, narratives and songs; the perspective of what counts as fact and evidence; the rules and moral values that guide the work, such as veracity, authenticity and honesty; representations about objectivity and subjectivity; the conception of human nature and responsibility; the process of selecting who would be the 'informants' and the 'experts'; the form of local distribution of knowledge; and who would be more or less authorized to speak (Leonard, 2017; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Severo & Makoni, 2021; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). In terms of a southern concept of language that problematizes the politics of knowledge production, dissemination and appropriation, positionality helps to question the rules that define what counts as research and truth.

Such epistemological and methodological revisions include problematizing the very concept of language in terms of, for example, the relationships between language and thought, and between language and corporality; the idea of language as a countable and abstract unit; and the perspective of language as a nameable entity, a decodable element and a set of fragments (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006; Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). Other concepts related to language that deserve to be revised include the notions of time and space, especially because for some indigenous views there is no distinction between them. One example is how indigenous education is closely connected to both nature and land – as well as time – which is related to a sense of natural rhythm (Severo, 2019). The Western linguistic and discursive mode of spatialization/territorialization does not echo indigenous views, such as the complex concept of 'land' and the way the colonizers renamed indigenous spaces. Indigenous concepts of land have to do with a collective mode of living and sharing: 'The importance of land is tied with the value of collective responsibility and stewardship' (Kovach, 2009: 63), which differs from the Western principle of private property. Western concepts of land are related to modes of control and domination of it: 'Land, for example,

was viewed as something to be tamed and brought under control' (Smith, 1999: 51). It follows that collective modes of living also imply specific modes of communication and knowledge transmission.

Indigenous territorialization must be seen at different levels, which includes the conceived space, the perceived space and the lived space. This means that, in our understanding of signification, we take into account:

> [T]erritories and territorialities that were experienced by these peoples in certain phases of the processes of colonial territorialization that, today, are fragmented not only by the usurped lands, but also by the dispersion of the memory of contemporary indigenous peoples. (Cardoso, 2018: 12; translated from Portuguese)[8]

Also, in the process of land appropriation, resignification and naming, 'land became increasingly disconnected from the songs and chants used by indigenous peoples to trace their histories' (Smith, 1999: 51). Other examples of the colonial use of spatial representations include maps and binary definitions such as centre–periphery and inside–outside (as well as native–foreign). With regard to the category of time, the linear and progressive Western vision and the connection of time to a given idea of work and production, implicitly projects indigenous peoples as lazy and indolent (Smith, 1999). This means that by considering indigenous epistemologies, a complex set of elements are interrelated: 'our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualities, and our places in the cosmos' (Wilson, 2008: 74).

The idea of nature is embedded in an indigenous mode of living and framing the world, as well as in indigenous concepts of language. For example, in the worldview of the Guarani Mbya – an indigenous Brazilian group – there is a deep connection between the idea of a tree and a word, meaning that the word flows from the tree. Thus, the Guarani Mbya use the wood of sacred trees to construct drums that serve as instruments for communication with non-humans (Cadogan, 1971; Severo & Makoni, 2021). This example illustrates how the binary relation between nature and culture – which is reproduced by the idea of language as a human attribute – is subverted from an indigenous and decolonial perspective. In this vein, a decolonial approach 'could cancel the dichotomy of nature and culture as such, and shift to a complex relationality and process-based view of our entanglements with the planet, with other lives, with inanimate matter' (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2020: para. 17). The multitude of possibilities to narrate its own history integrates a robust decolonial movement, in which memory is continually updated, helping to deconstruct binarisms and stereotypes. Thus, Cusicanqui (2015) writes:

> The decolonization of the worldview would consist in freeing the visualization from the ties of language, and in updating the memory of the experience as an indissoluble whole, in which the bodily and mental senses merge. (Cusicanqui, 2015: 19; translated from Portuguese)[9]

These examples are representative of what we call indigenous perspectives. The ideas of ethno-media, land, language and education are deeply linked to a sense of temporality, spatiality/territorialization and relationship. Indigenous voices and indigenous positionalities have helped to reorient what counts as indigenous perspective in the academic field. Such an integrated concept of life is also embedded in the idea of sacredness of indigenous research, which 'is bound in ceremony, spirit, land, place, nature, relationships, language, dreams, humour, purpose, and stories in an inexplicable, holistic, non-fragmented way' (Kovach, 2009: 140).

Our line of thought is that, in recent years, 'indigenous scholars began to assert their power. No longer would they allow others to speak in their place. They began to articulate their own indigenist perspective and demanded to be heard in doing so' (Wilson, 2008: 51). We see this as an ongoing movement that, by taking place in different parts of the globe, helps to shape cross-cultural practices of resistance where languages play a central role in materializing indigenous narratives.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the importance of indigenous voices, positionalities and discourses for the construction of policies involving indigenous languages and education. We argue that contemporary critical debates on language studies and language policies must take seriously the perspective and experience of people who have been historically affected by the colonial process. This decolonial attitude responds to a political demand for revision of epistemological and ontological categories that have historically guided the process of production and the legitimization of knowledge. A decolonial approach to language policy aims at problematizing the historical process of construction and the crystallization of theological and European concepts of languages centred on ideas of grammar, dictionaries, literacy and research. This does not mean, of course, to cancel this theoretical-methodological framework, but to provoke a dialogue with other subjects and processes of knowledge construction and dissemination.

Finally, we are in line with those who propose that 'identities in politics'(Mignolo, 2008: 289) is an urgent issue to address in order to increase social and epistemic justice. We focus on Walter Mignolo's proposal because it creates space for a critical and dynamic response to how identities have been historically shaped by power relations. Mignolo (2008) writes:

> [W]ithout the construction of political theories and the organization of political actions based on identities that were allocated (for example, there were no indigenous people on the American continents until the arrival of the Spanish; and there were no blacks until the beginning of the massive slave trade in the Atlantic) by imperial discourses (in the six languages of European modernity – English, French, and German after the Enlightenment; and Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese during the Renaissance), it may not be possible to denaturalize the racial and imperial construction of identity in the modern world in a capitalist economy. (Mignolo, 2008: 289; translated from Portuguese)[10]

Notes

(1) '*A Terra deixou de ser a Magna Mater dos antigos, a Pachamama dos andinos e a Gaia dos contemporâneos, portanto algo vivo e gerador de vida, para ser transformada numa coisa inerte (res extensa de Descartes), num balcão de recursos colocados à disposição da voracidade ilimitada dos seres humanos*'.

(2) '*[D]iferentes formas de pensar e de relatar as coisas, o que pode parecer poético ou até lúdico para quem não conhece as filosofias nativas. A palavra não é a única maneira de comunicação*'.

(3) See http://www.ihuonline.unisinos.br/media/pdf/IHUOnlineEdicao527.pdf (accessed 18 November 2020).

(4) '*Nós não somos donos da terra, nós somos a terra. O direito congênito, natural e originário é anterior ao direito da propriedade privada. Não estamos lutando por reforma agrária. Pelo fato de nós sermos a terra, temos o direito de estarmos na terra e o direito de proteger o que chamamos de sagrado, a natureza; é ela que nos nutre e nós a nutrimos à medida que a protegemos*'.

(5) '*Devemos ouvir o conselho dos velhos, pois eles já souberam o que é perder a esperança e tentam manter a vida em seu melhor, em nós. Agradeço essa sensibilidade em ter a paciência de ouvir!*'

(6) '*A educação indígena tem suas peculiaridades. Uma delas é que na aldeia Kambeba, por exemplo, não temos tempo de relógio para marcar a hora que entra e a hora que sai […] Também temos o cuidado de na aldeia ensinar as crianças o valor de cuidar do rio em uma aula de educação ambiental […]*'.

(7) '*[…] foi elaborada em 2020, no México, a Declaração de Los Pinos, que instituiu os fundamentos para a construção de um Plano de Ação Global para a DILI e estabeleceu como princípio norteador a par-ticipação efetiva dos povos indígenas na tomada de decisão, consulta, planejamento e implementação, tendo como lema "Nada para nós sem nós"*'.

(8) '*[T]erritórios e territorialidades que foram vivenciados por esses povos em determinadas fases dos processos de territorialização colonial pelos quais passaram e que, atualmente, se fragmentaram não somente pelas terras usurpadas, mas também pela dispersão da memória dos povos indígenas contemporâneos […]*'.

(9) '*La descolonización de la mirada consistiría en liberar la visualización de las ataduras del lenguaje, y en reactualizar la memoria de la experiencia como un todo indisoluble, en el que se funden los sentidos corporales y mentales*'.

(10) '*[S]em a construção de teorias políticas e a organização de ações políticas fundamentadas em identidades que foram alocadas (por exemplo, não havia índios nos continentes americanos até a chegada dos espanhóis; e não havia negros até o começo do comércio massivo de escravos no Atlântico) por discursos imperiais (nas seis línguas da modernidade européia—inglês, francês e alemão após o Iluminismo; e italiano, espanhol e português durante o Renascimento), pode não ser possível desnaturalizar a construção racial e imperial da identidade no mundo moderno em uma economia capitalista*'.

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