TEMPOS PARA (RE)EXISTIR E DECOLONIZAR NA LINGUÍSTICA APLICADA

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Pontes

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SUMÁRIO

SOUTHERN APPROACHES TOWARD LANGUAGE: GOING BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRIC ORIENTATION TO LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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Introduction

In this introduction, we seek to argue that if either decolonization or Southern Epistemologies are to be successful we need to develop alternative approaches toward language. This seems particularly appropriate to do here, as this book is comprised by texts that communicate with an on-line event with a similar aim, that is, to think of alternatives to institutionalized scholarship. We argue that, even if we concede that Linguistics or Applied Linguistics may illuminate the reality of language, they are not, however, the sole means of doing so. 'A disciplinary decadence' and decadence' (GORDON, 2015) sets in if we allow either of them to exercise a prerogative in terms of what we understand by language:

> Disciplinary decadence, as we have seen, is the process of critical decay within a field or discipline. In such instances, the proponent ontologizes his or her discipline far beyond its scope. Thus, a decadent scientist criticizes the humanities for not being scientific; a decadent literary scholar criticizes scientists and social scientists for not being literary or textual [...] (GORDON, 2015, p. 48).

In attention to an interdisciplinary framework, we seek to expand the analytical approaches that can be adopted toward the analysis of language. To do so, we explore the implications of analyzing language when framed through water and oceans as analytical categories. We also explore how the debate on the limits of anthropocentrism may contribute to expand our concept of language when, for example, we briefly characterize the nature of "animal sound", "tree talk,"

"tree communication," "trans-species communication", and "city talk" as other genres of analysis in the expansion of approaches to language which we are seeking to decolonize.

Wet Ontologies as Ways of Framing Language

How does water shape our conceptual images of language in the Global South? It is relevant to frame language using water because the planet is largely water, and every one of us is approximately 80% water; thus, water is not out there, it is "in us" (NEIMANIS, 2017). Further, it is important to consider water because what we think water is has an impact on how we shape and treat it as well as how we frame language. Waterscape epistemology, or "wet epistemology" and "liquid materiality" (STEINBERG; PETERS, 2015) mark a dramatic shift from the perception of language as single rooted monolingual speaker to that of a multilingual migrant: 'Wet epistemology' encapsulates the paradoxical relationship between liquidity and solidity. We seek to explore the implications of such epistemology to the notion of language, as the following: "Water needs riverbanks or coastlines to be perceived. These are not limitations but necessary for an orientation in the endless vastness of the ocean. The same holds true for languages and their interaction. Fluidity has to be complemented by solidity, and vice versa. Water always contains soil in some form and land is always permeated by water" (GUILDIN, 2020, p. 228).

Following Steinberg and Peters (2015), we will not only treat the sea as a background against which we frame language, but also investigate the impact of the "seaness of the sea" (HOFMEYER, 2020) on our framing of language. The ocean provides a fertile environment for reconceptualizing our understandings of space, time, movement, and the experiences of being in a transformative and mobile world. Liquid materiality allows for novel ways of thinking, not only about water, but also with and through the land.

We argue that critical perspectives can be gained by taking the ocean's liquidity seriously. Nevertheless, we also are self-critical. We question the basis of wet ontology, particularly the distinction between land and ocean, for the ocean is not simply liquid, it is also solid (ice) and air (mist). It generates winds, which transport smells, and these may travel miles inland. Although earlier attention to the ocean's liquidity was a necessary antidote to surficial ontology, we take the discussion further by exploring what emerges if, instead, we were to approach the ocean as offering more than wet ontology, wherein its fluid nature is continually produced and dissipated (STEINBERG; PETERS, 2015). Giving attention to wet ontology and going beyond it affect how we frame language because there are "diverse approaches to writing about or of the sea shape, the way we engage with the sea, and our relationship with the sea" (STEINBERG; PETERS, 2015, p. 1). In other words, the wet ontology, in writing in the Global South, has an impact on our daily engagement with seaness and oceanness. We also compare different approaches to wet ontologies, including (a) indigenous (b) urban, and (c) in relation situations of conflict.

> The notion of oww [One-World World] signals the predominant idea in the West that we all live within a single world, made up of one underlying reality (one nature) and many cultures. This imperialistic notion supposes the West's ability to arrogate for itself the right to be "the world" and to subject all other worlds to its rules, to diminish them to secondary status to nonexistence, often figuratively and materially. It is a very seductive notion." (ESCOBAR, 2018, p. 86).

The objective of our introduction is to argue that another world of language scholarship is possible — that it is feasible to move beyond the oww. Movement beyond the oww is possible if we create a path and walk it together with human and other "human Earth-beings," including trees and other species. Movement beyond the oww demands that we consider social and linguistic phenomena from "other" epistemological and ontological perspectives and build knowledges from below, from the grassroots, and, in some cases, from below trees in forests.

This development of epistemologies, ontologies, and knowledges from below requires re--linking, which is different from de-linking. Re-linking is a radically different move, as it involves the cultivation of worlds rooted in an engagement with other than "human Earth- beings." "Relinking also implies acting in and with all the other Earth-beings. This means that trees, stones, our ancestors, the elements can be categorized as social" (SUÁREZ-KRABBE, 2020, n.p.). If trees are all part of the social, sociolinguistics will involve investigating how trees interact with each other (what may be referred to as *tree talk*) or how humans interact and communicate with other species that are not human but are our other fellow Earth-beings. Investigations into tree talk and interactions between humans and other species, including, for example, dogs, or interacting among different species who find themselves sharing the same space will, therefore, constitute an indispensable part of a project of studying language in the Global South — a project that seeks to go beyond an anthropocentric orientation to language and communication research.

Going beyond anthropocentrism in language studies

One example of how the debate on the limits of anthropocentrism may contribute to expand our concept of language has to do with a critical subarea of music studies named ethnomusicology, which problematizes universal aspects of music, such as the idea of absolute and pure music: "What is this essence that so powerfully discriminates between what is and is not Music?" (CHUA, 1990, p. 4). The concept of music is political since it favors and legitimizes certain sounds in detriment to others. The underlying discussions on the concept of music include questioning the limits between nature and culture in the definition of what counts as music. The idea of *zoömusicology*, for example, recognizes that animals carry an aesthetic function. This means that animal songs cannot be reduced to a repetitive, intrinsic and mechanical practice. Rather, the acoustic environment may influence the way certain animals produce

signals, such as grasshoppers; also, there are several "disordered sounds" produced by insects, fish, mammals and birds that do not fit the traditional taxonomy (MÂCHE, 1993).

Anthropocentrism has contributed to create an ideology of human *sound* as being different from animal *noise*, in which the former's rational and ordering dimension worked as a criteria to define the meanings and limits of music. Actually, the balance between order and disorder that characterizes most animal's acoustic signals is one core aspect of musical traits (MÂCHE, 1993). Another example is the notion of *entomusic*, concerning how music can be made by, with or for insects, such as the project carried out by the Brazilian musician Pedro Filho Amorim (2021) who produced a concert for the insects following two steps: first, recording and codifying the insect sounds in specific soundscape, by detecting a wide range of ultrasound, and second, converting human music phonograms into sounds appreciable by insects. Such concert for the insects also problematizes human notions of listening, by expanding its limits to integrate several sounds that generally cannot be processed by human ears.

Technology allied to animal sounds and human's sensibility may contribute to expand our capacity to comprehend and interact with the world beyond the limits of our senses, even though we may continuously interrogate "To what extent can one ever apprehend the sensory world of the 'other'?" (CLASSEN; HOWES, 2006, p. 201). Concerning the role played by technology in contemporary and future times, it is worth mentioning Lovelock's thesis (2019) on the emergence of an age of hyperintelligence, the *novacene*, which would surpass the age of anthropocene. For Lovelock, the novacene has already started and can be defined by how technology moves beyond our control, generating intelligences far greater and much faster than our own (APPLEYARD, 2019). It differs from *technoceno* because at the present time of novaceno human beings and technology are impelled to work together in favour of life (SCARANO, 2019).

The ethical dimension concerning the use of technology will be under continuous debate, mainly because "The world of the future will be determined by the need to ensure Gaia's survival, not by the selfish needs of humans or other intelligent species" (LOVELOCK, 2019, p. 88). Gaia is understood by Lovelock as a "single living organism" (LOVELOCK, 2019, p. 21), which means that nature and human beings are not independent, separate and autonomous entities, but are internally connected, communicating at several levels with each other. Such interconnectedness also characterizes the African philosophy of Ubuntu which "speaks to the idea of non-isolationism of man from everything and everyone around him, including nature. What this portends is that a man is never complete or whole in himself" (OJAKOROTU; OLAJIDE, 2019, p. 29). We argue that the ethical dimension becomes a core criteria to define what counts as communication in decolonization and Southern spistemologies.

The concept of communication cannot be limited to the linear production of speech nor be dependent on an abstract concept of language as verbal sign. Decolonial and Southern concepts of language are concerned with notions of communication that transcend an anthropocentric

perspective that reduces language to abstract, rational, individualistic and cognitive realities. This means we should be able to problematize the concept of language underpinning modern notions of rationality:

> The form of speech lay behind the mistake we made in continuing to reason classically and put the exceptions that science revealed – like quantum theory – into different worlds that appeared to coexist with us. We made this mistake because of the nature of speech, either spoken or written, combined with the tendency of human thought to break things down into their component parts (LOVELOCK, 2019, p. 83).

This concept of communication requires an expanded understanding of the role played by the senses in communication and production of meaning. This discussion may include other problematizations, such as the predominance of the sight in the modern knowledge production system – including the objetifying colonial gaze (RAM, 2018) – in detriment to touch or scent. Following the Anthropology of senses, the senses play different roles in different cultural settings and may also be used as a strategy of control and domination; in colonial era, the senses were racialized through "the Western association of the 'lower' races with the 'lower' senses" (CLASSEN; HOWES, 2006, p. 199). The lower senses would include taste, smell, and touch and were associated to the body, instead of to the mind/reason: "African peoples are described as being ruled by their stomachs, Native Americans are stated to have extraordinary powers of smell" (CLASSEN; HOWES, 2006, p. 206). We believe that the discussions on the limits of anthropocentrism is in line with a a materialist posthumanist perspective of language insofar as language be considered from a non-idealistic, isolated and abstract perspective. We agree that:

> sociolinguistic repertoires need to be understood in terms of spatial distribution, social practices, and material embodiment rather than the individual competence of the sociolinguistic actor who has held centre stage over the past few decades (PENNYCOOK, 2018, p. 450)

Can Trees Communicate: Wood Wide Web?

In addition to this concept of communication underlying the notion of Gaia as a single living organism, we mention the discussion concerning how forests integrate a social network and communicate through scent, sound, visual and electrical signs; also, most trees communicate through the fungi that inhabit their roots: "they also warn each other using chemical signals sent through the fungal networks around their root tips" (WOHLLEBEN, 2016, p. 20).

Trees talk to each other through underground networks of helper fungi, called *mycorrhizal fungi*, that mingle with each other. Further, trees can connect to different species. Mycorrhizas create spaces for communication between trees, what Simard (2021) refers felicitously to as

the equivalent of nature's internet: "wood wide web." When the mother (the oldest) tree is dying, it dumps resources so that they can be provided to younger trees. Trees, according to Simard, should be construed as a superorganism that can chat and exchange information within the same species and, at times, even across different species through fungi. Mycorrhizas allow not only for tree fungi symbiosis but also for communication between trees. Simard draws parallels between tree communication and neural networks in the human brain. Trees can use chemicals to communicate to warn their neighbors that an attack is imminent, so they should protect themselves. From such a perspective, trees should not be seen as solitary actors but as "chatty," big superorganisms.

Trans-species Pidgins

Kohn (2013) investigates the nature of communication between humans and dogs, which he refers to as "trans-species" communication. Trans-species communication is a type of pidgin, analogous to "motherese," which is a distinctive type of language that caregivers use when interacting with children. A trans-species pidgin, although it facilitates communication across species, for Kohn, between dogs and humans, puts the brakes on processes which render it difficult to establish firm boundaries between different kinds of being. By using a trans-species pidgin that is characterized by reduced grammatical structure, boundaries between humans and, in Kohn's case, with dogs are retained even though reduced and are not collapsed. By using trans-species pidgins to put the brakes on blurring boundaries between humans and dogs, Kohn implicitly concurs with Descola's (2013).

Firm distinctions between humans and non-humans, nature and culture, may be ethnocentric because there is no universally agreed criteria of what constitutes human (DESCOLA, 2013), where being human ends and being non-human starts, and what constitutes personhood. If we are to frame either Linguistics or Applied Linguistics that goes beyond being human, it is necessary to understand what it means to be human, theoretically and ideologically. Ingold (2015) frames what it means to be human and what it means to be alive through his notion of lines. He argues that a universe of life is woven from knots and not, as is frequently thought, from blocks. Knotting is important because it metaphorically captures how things join one another. To study life and to study what it means to be human, we must study the weather.

The critical question that needs to be investigated is whether the nature and form that trans-species pidgins assume are comparable across different contexts. Kohn's (2013) study was carried out in South America; it is, therefore, relevant to ask whether the form and grammatical structures of trans-species pidgins will assume comparable or identical characteristics in form and function in Africa or South America. In other words, do trans-species pidgins share common universal characteristics? Is universalism something that we should aim for or seek to undercut?

Can a City Talk?

Sassen (2013) argues that speech is not uniquely human. Cities, Sassen argues, have speech, albeit of a different nature from that of humans and corporations and perhaps dissimilar from the tree talk of the wood wide web. This means that we have not yet exhausted all of the different speech types and language typologies. To comprehend how the city can have speech, Sassen expands the analytical terrain of the notion of the city and what constitutes speech. He defines cities as follows:

> Cities are complex systems. But they are incomplete systems. In this incompleteness lies the possibility of making the urban, the political, the civic. The city is not alone in having these characteristics, but these characteristics are part of the DNA of the urban (SASSEN, 2013, p. 209).

When we are studying how cities talk, this line of research is different from research that investigates and characterizes the different language varieties used by youth in urban centers (HURST-HAROSCH, 2019). Such studies focus on how urban youth use different urban language varieties to mark their identity, social status, gender, and so forth. In such studies, it is the youth, human beings, and not the cities themselves that talk, which is the argument that we are trying to make in this concluding chapter of our monograph.

The traffic jam is an example of a city talking:

> A car, built for speed, exits the highway and enters the city. It hits a traffic jam, composed not just of cars but of people bustling around. Suddenly, this car is crippled. Built for speed, its mobility is arrested. The city has spoken. (SASSEN, 2013, p. 210).

The city, particularly the street, is a space where the powerless have the capacity to create and make history, which is difficult to do in rural areas (SASSEN, 2013). In cities, crowds can be visible and political, enabling them to make history. "The city's speech is a capability to alter the shape, to invite, all following a logic that aims at enhancing or protecting the city's complexity and its incompleteness" (SASSEN, 2013, p. 214). Sassen (2013, p. 214) cites another example of city talk:

> One example is the early high-end gentrification in Manhattan—a whole new visual order that could not, for a while, render invisible the homelessness it had produced. A second example is the immigrant street vendor on Wall Street catering to the high level financier in a rush, altering the visual corporate landscape with the robust smell of roasted sausages.

We are, however, aware of the danger that, by emphasizing that cities talk, if taken too far, we may be criticized for anthropomorphizing the city. This anthropomorphizing is what we are trying to move away from as we seek to develop a Linguistics and Applied Linguistics that

is not exclusively human-centered, even as it means to be human is complicated, theoretically and socially.

A Note of Caution

Drawing on integrational semiology, what constitutes language in tree talk, city speech, or the use of proverbs cannot be determined in advance of the communication and is not independent of tree talk or trans-species pidgins. Communication, in both tree talk and trans-species pidgins, is a creative process that involves a large number of unknown factors that form the basis of the communicational context of the interaction between humans, animals, and other species or between trees. Within this approach, signs are not given in advance but are created in the here and now. For example, the communicability of the sign by a tree is for the purpose of forewarning other trees of imminent danger or for the sharing of resources by a dying "mother tree," which depends upon a constellation of existing factors: biomechanical, macrosocial, and circumstantial. An expanded approach to communication among animals, involves analyzing how different animals communicate with the diverse species with whom they must share their universe.

B. Makoni (2023) argues that, even when we extend studies of language to include a linguistics of tree talk, trans-species pidgins, and interaction between humans and other species as well as between different non-human species, drawing on three important sociolinguistic handbooks: *Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (MESTHRIE, 2011), *Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (BAYLEY *et al.*, 2013), and *Sage Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (WODAK *et al.*, 2011), such an expansive sociolinguistics is still normatively White and masculine with few white females and Black men. The under-representation of women, particularly Black African female scholars, makes sociolinguistic enquiry normatively White and masculine and, thus, a perpetuation of colonial hierarchization, regardless of the positionality of the authors and ontological orientations that they adopt.

Sociolinguistics for B. Makoni and for us in this chapter, despite its ostensible progressive orientation, becomes complicit in the perpetuation of racial inequalities and "epistemic violence" against Black female bodies. B. Makoni (2021) argues convincingly that Black women's invisibility in scholarship is a product of the intersection of race and gender, racial and gender stereotyping that occurs in society, resulting in black women's publishing less and their published work being cited less frequently than that of men and white women (MAKONI, 2021). B. Makoni argues that Black women are, however, not a homogeneous group. The experience of African women is slightly different from that of African American women, who may find themselves occupying prominent positions in academic associations, unlike African women, such as the American Anthropological Association and the Modern Language Association. Despite

the prominent positions that some African American women occupy, they may find themselves still marginalized because they are symbolically included, but excluded epistemologically.

Similarly, those who ply their trade in the Global North are visible because they might be physically, culturally, or phenotypically different. They typically find themselves having to serve as research assistants to senior scholars.

The Way Forward

In this introduction to this book, we seek to challenge ethnocentric approaches that treat distinctions between humans in one culture as true in all other cultures, either explicitly or implicitly. The introduction follows the Amazonian tendency to treat certain elements in the environment as persons endowed with cognitive, moral, and social qualities, analogous to those of the human and, thus, to be incorporated within the category of persons, spirits, plants, and animals as part of a cosmology (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 1988).

If we seek to fight against the disciplinary decadence faced by the fields of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, the construction of "pluriversal" futures requires that we epistemologically decolonize language studies to enable us to analyze the nature of communication, not only between humans but between other species, for example, communication in the wood wide web among trees. Such a pluriversal linguistic system, which we are seeking to bring about, is in sharp contrast to the "mono-cultural, universal, extractivist" world of Global Language Northern scholarship. This epistemological marginalization is a consequence of imperialism or colonialism or the "death project" (SUÁREZ-KRABBE, 2020). We, therefore, are not able to dictate how Linguistics or Applied Linguistics can or should be decolonized. Decolonization cannot adopt an intellectual "recipe" approach because decolonization is an option (MIGNOLO, 2008).

The decolonization of Linguistics and Sociolinguistics that we propose in this chapter is grounded in a strong belief that decolonial movements are neither fashions nor buzz words which are likely to dissipate in the near future. The critique of Linguistics that we make is not limited to dominant liberal narratives about language and social life but, rather, can be extended to Marxist and critical approaches to language because the models that colonialists use involve a set of analytical frameworks drawn from Gramsci, Foucault, Derrida, and Strauss. In most cases, the frameworks are Western, but the raw material for analysis is India, Latin America or Africa. The reverse rarely occurs; for example, African or Indian and Latin American intellectual thought by Nkrumah, Gandhi, Paulo Freire and Césaire are rarely used to frame Western social languages and political issues.

Finally, decolonial theory, even though indispensable in challenging Eurocentrism in Applied Linguistics, has not yet produced a coherent framework, but there are recurring features that are central to the theory: (a) it constitutes a critique of western knowledge; (b) it is

in search of distribution and transformation of knowledge; and (c) it criticizes the racism that is part of the legacy of colonialism. Further, the momentum of decoloniality and Southern epistemologies is driven by three factors, according to (a) the fall of the West and the rise of the rest, (b) the collapse of the socialist bloc and the demise of Marxism, and (c) the crisis of Western civilization.

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