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The politics of southern research in language studies: an epilogue

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ABSTRACT

In this epilogue we connect contemporary discussion concerning Southern epistemologies and methodologies in language studies with decolonizing Higher Education. This means that we cannot divorce Southern epistemologies from the regimes of truth that guide the modes of production, dissemination and appropriation of knowledge in the global world, which also includes the discussion concerning ethics and positionality in research. We argue that this discussion should be radically embedded in a broader political and economic context, by considering the role of neoliberalism in shaping contemporary universities.

In this epilogue, we connect contemporary discussion of Southern epistemologies and methodologies in language studies (Deumert, Storch, and Shepherd 2020; Deumert & S. Makoni, forthcoming; S. Makoni and Severo 2022; S. Makoni, Verity, and Kaiper-Marquez 2021; S. Makoni et al. 2022) with the decolonization of higher education (Bock et al. 2021; S. Makoni et al. 2022; Santos 2011, 2014). We cannot divorce Southern epistemologies from the regimes of truth (Abdelhay, Severo, and Markoni 2023; Foucault 2003) that guide the modes of production, dissemination, and appropriation of knowledge in the global world and need to include ethics and positionality in research (Ball et al. 2003; B. Makoni 2021; Smith 1999). This discussion also contributes to cultural discourse studies regarding issues of Eastern/Western epistemologies, in line with Shi-xu's critique of the Eurocentric nature of the field (2009, 239):

> In the case of the current mainstream scholarship on language, communication, and discourse, objects of research often come from Anglo-American or some European cultures and realities, or otherwise, the types of research question and so principles of research interest usually emanate from the Western cosmopolitan institutions.

The debate about Southern epistemologies and methodologies should problematize the institutional crises faced by universities, including scientific and pedagogical autonomy as being dependent on financial support provided by the state; the reduction of the state's political commitment to universities, which means universities' not fulfilling their role as public good; the reduction of certain social agendas in favor of more neoliberal ones; the submission of the university to authoritarian or market interests; the tension between

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national universities and transnational ones; and the neoliberal globalization of the university (Santos 2011). Such political crises have deeply affected the way research has been conducted, including the choice of researchers, objects, fields, and themes that should be supported by governmental or private funding. The ranking standards and logic of productivism and quantification that characterize universities also have had an impact on the way researchers relate with their research.

By keeping such arguments in mind, this epilogue concerns four interconnected challenges that Southern researchers must face. By Southern researchers, we do not mean only those located in geographical Southern contexts but also the ones located in Northern geographical contexts that are faced with institutional racism and economic or political constraint in regard to their critical positions. The following topics are discussed: (1) the logic of extraction and the ethical dimension of the concept of research; (2) the politics of publication that follows a bibliometric coloniality; (3) the ethical role of the researcher and his/her positionality; and (4) the role of solidarity, sharing, and a sense of collectivity in challenging neoliberal logics.

1. 'De-humanizing' research

A decade ago, we were asked by Denzin (2013) to 'imagine a world without data, a world without method, a world without a hegemonic politics of evidence, a world where no one counts, a world without end' (353). It has become commonplace that positivist epistemologies are 'extractionist', and the critical (post)qualitative trend is heading toward the ideal of a 'non-extractionist' form of research. Kuntz (2015) defined a 'logic of extraction' as 'a historically laden normalizing rationale that promotes values of distance, fixity, and procedural ways of knowing and coming to know' (12). A non-extractionist epistemology values complexity, relationality, and embeddedness. This logic of extraction is deeply embedded in all positivist metalanguages. Therefore, the abandonment of the extractionist strategy would result in the collapse of the entire positivist architecture of 'science'. Lather and Pierre (2013) noted:

> If we give up the scientism of positivist social science, we can no longer think many descriptors we believe we need to guarantee the value and rigor of humanist qualitative inquiry—for example, systematicity, process, audit trails, the clarity of language, value-free knowledge (objectivity, bias), the accumulation of knowledge, triangulation, coding data, and data itself. Without these, how do we know that what we are doing is science? Does it matter in the new mattering? And who gets to define science anyway? (630)

When closely probed with respect to extractionism, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative designs is not absolute but, rather, a matter of degree (Tate 2023). Qualitative research continues to operate within the originating logic of positivist epistemology of extractionism but under the guise of 'humanism' (Lather and Pierre 2013). Dimitriadis (2016) noted that 'the humanist impulse to see humanity separate from the material has girded qualitative inquiry for generations, locking generation after generation into assumptions around representational categories such as "data"' (142). To achieve a non-extractionist scholarship, research needs to be 'de-humanized', i.e. delinked from liberal humanism, which is embedded in the conceptual vocabularies and metalanguages used to control the 'quality' of qualitative research. To state it more starkly, qualitative research itself is viewed as reflecting an epistemology of extractionism.

The question is not just whether we can do without the construct 'qualitative research', as Lather and Pierre (2013) contemplated, but whether we can do without the term 'research' itself, as its colonially loaded Northern-ness seems beyond dismantling. Writing from the perspective of the colonized (the indigenous communities in New Zealand), Smith (1999) contended that the term 'research' is 'probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary' (1), as it is iconically linked with Western colonialism, which shaped the memory and history of the colonized. In a similar vein, Reinharz (1979) argued:

> Research is frequently conducted on a rape model: The researchers take, hit, and run. They intrude into their subjects' privacy, disrupt their perceptions, utilize false pretenses, manipulate the relationship, and give little or nothing in return. When the needs of the researchers are satisfied, they break off contact with the subject. (95)

Let us give a concrete example of Reinharz's 'hit-and-run model of research' from a Sudanese context. A team of researchers went to the area of the Tima tribe in the Nuba Mountains to study the language situation. The team included some of the educated persons from the tribe who were interested in having Tima institutionalized as a medium of instruction in their local primary schools. For this to happen, the linguistic variety had to be codified, and this educational need motivated their partnership with the professional linguists. The lead professional linguist (AbdelRahim Mugaddam) convened a meeting with the male members of the tribe to enlighten them about the project.

> On one occasion during the meeting, a member of the community (let's anonymously call him Nasr) intervened with a contribution using (a form of) 'Tima'. To be sure, Arabic is part of Nasr's repertoire because his contribution was a dialogical reaction to the convenor's briefing and also because we came to know that he could communicatively conduct himself in Arabic quite well. The substance of Nasr's comment turned out to be a reminder of a past event in which a [Western] linguist came to the area to document Tima. The locals helped the linguist with the required data, and the linguist left with a promise to return with 'materials' which can be used for educational purposes. The professional linguist unfortunately was never seen again. The convenors and one of the linguists assured Nasr that in this project the locals are not only 'data providers' but partners with expertise in the project of literacy development. (Mugaddam and Abdelhay 2014, 19)

The point here is that the mere presence of a 'researcher' in the area of the Tima tribe reminded members of the tribe of the terrible experience they had with the Western linguist who 'datafied' them for their own interests, with utter disregard for the local voices of the tribe.

2. 'Northernize or you perish': bibliometric coloniality

A recent encounter with a journal editor who refused to review our submission provided an opportunity to show the way in which the algorithmic metric of the impact factor can be abused by some journals as a proxy for performing epistemological racism against Southern scholarship and scholars from the South (Abdelhay, Severo, and Markoni 2023). Mills et al. (2023) called this neoliberal regime of knowledge metricization, which perpetuates a Northern-centric view, or 'bibliometric coloniality'. Metricization concerns the ways in which metrics and algorithms are (ab)used to enforce colonial power dynamics in the field of academic publishing. The gated world of academic publishing

is highly regulated and restructured by a few global companies, which manipulate a complex of digital resources to redefine academic credibility. The politics of citation has effectively superseded the ethic of trust, which the academic community has used to provide as a basis of credibility. Using the perspective of the publishing economies in Ghanian universities, Mills et al. (2023) noted:

> A global science system that relies on Scopus and Web of Science renders much African research and publishing invisible. The resulting 'metricisation' of publishing integrity through citations is slowly but surely devaluing the credibility and visibility of long-established African scholarly journals, reinforcing academic coloniality and epistemic exclusion. (200)

What sustains this condition of coloniality is not only the unequal global political economy of publishing but also a dehumanizing regime of credibility that demonizes, and thus invisibilizes, African citations and platforms of knowledge production (Mills et al. 2023). For the question, 'Can Africa escape bibliometric coloniality'? Mills et al.'s response is, 'The future of Africa's research ecosystems depends on strong and well-funded national research systems, bibliodiversity, multilingual publishing, and alternative circuits of academic credibility' (201). The implications of this bibliometric coloniality for the issue of socioeconomic inequality in the Global South are profound, as bibliometric coloniality contributes to the erasure of epistemological diversity and to the silencing of the Southern revolutionary voice. It is the perishing of the Southern voice in publications. Thus, the ethical question regarding the subversion of bibliometric coloniality is not, to use the words of Becker (1967), 'whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on' (239).

3. The ethical role of the researcher and his/her positionality

By assuming that social injustice carries epistemic injustice at its core (Santos 2011), we recognize the role of Southern epistemologies and Southern voices in addressing social gaps and inequalities. From the framework of the sociology of knowledge, we understand that North–South relations inscribe certain regimes of truth that regulate the production of knowledge as well as its economic and political value. The political economy of truth is linked to certain elements (Foucault 2003); it is guided by scientific discourse and the institutions that produce it; it is subject to economic and political use; it is an object of dissemination and consumption by the media, educational, and intellectual domains; it is controlled by political and economic interests; and it becomes the object of ideological debates and struggles. We argue that positionality and the ethical role of the researcher are strongly linked to these elements because they establish specific modes of enunciation that are connected to both the social struggles and the role of intellectuals in shaping the regimes of truth: 'The intellectual can operate and struggle at the general level of that regime of truth so essential to the structure and functioning of our society' (Foucault 2003, 132).

Authorship matters in our debate, as the author function (Foucault 1984) regulates the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society. Southern scholars, including Indigenous (Leonard 2017; Smith 1999) and Black (Ball et al. 2003; B. Makoni 2021), have claimed the importance of positionality in knowledge production and dissemination, such as positionality as playing an important role if we

intend to problematize how institutional racism has contributed to invisibilize and over-look Southern scholars, such as Indigenous, Black, Latin, and Asian women, as denounced by several critical scholars. 'Nonwhite and radical white scholars from diverse fields have argued that scholarly practices are undergirded by the colonial legacies of white supremacy and racial injustice' (B. Makoni 2021, 49). We argue that positionality interferes not only with the choice of objects and themes of research but also with the modes of conducting and disseminating its results. Positionality also may interfere in the very notion of authorship and authority in research.

Such discussion is in line with a claim for a politics of representation in research in which Indigenous and Southern experiences stop being considered as object and raw data of Northern research. 'Theories within a given disciplinary field are developed in the Euro-American metropoles, while the south is positioned as the field site, contributing raw data, but not being seen as a place which creates innovative social and linguistic thought' (Deumert and Storch 2020, 5). We recognize that there is a connection between the politics of identity, the politics of representation, and the regime of truth that regulates what counts as Southern epistemologies and methodologies in contemporary debate about ethics in research. 'This centering of the human experience has placed the spotlight on fieldwork and direct engagement with both individuals and communities, from whom language data are typically extracted' (D'Arcy and Bender 2023, 50).

The right to represent oneself has been one of the main claims in decolonial projects, as stated by Smith (1999):

> Indigenous communities have struggled since colonization to be able to exercise what is viewed as a fundamental right, that is to represent ourselves. The representing project spans both the notion of representation as a political concept and representation as a form of voice and expression (150).

Such politics of representation underlies the ethical role of the researcher and the role of his/her positionality in reframing what counts as research. The politics of research also should be located in a broader economy of knowledge that includes

> an organization of labour, production, circulation, and exchange. The raw material is information, there is a labour force that collects and processes this material, and there are definite labour processes.... There is an institutional machinery, involving research universities and institutes, and a distribution system for processed knowledge that includes a higher education system which now has more than two hundred million participants worldwide. (Connell 2020, 155)

By engaging in discussion about the role of Southern epistemologies and methodologies in research, we raise several ethical questions about not only the politics of knowledge production but also the right of Southern voices to claim for a politics of representation as part of a major and deeper decolonial struggle. By doing so, these discussions reconnect social struggles with academic responsibility (Freire 1987).

4. The role of collective work and solidarity in challenging neoliberal logics

Power relations are inscribed into the regimes of truth that regulate knowledge production, dissemination, and appropriation insofar as there are several agents and partners

who participate in this process (D'Arcy and Bender 2023). From a critical and ethical perspective, defining the role played by researchers and participants in ethnographic research may be a difficult task in knowledge production. Field work is necessarily a collective intellectual process, as it depends on local relations, alliances, and the construction of mutual confidence. In the face of the complex network of human and non-human actors involved in research, we argue in favor of a framework that surpasses a 'one-on-one engagement' (D'Arcy and Bender 2023, 51) to include a set of elements that integrate the several steps of the research as the choice of the object until methodological decisions, construction of partnerships, collective writing, and dissemination of the results occur.

By recognizing the collective nature of any process that concerns research and knowledge production, we engage with a solidarity-based epistemology (S. Makoni et al. 2022) in language research and language studies, whose ultimate objective is to fight epistemic injustice. The creation of a more solidarity-based epistemology cannot be divorced from the broader economy and politics of knowledge production in universities. This means that such epistemology also should be able to problematize structural power relations that have contributed to reproducing racial inequalities and white supremacies in universities. Solidarity-based epistemology also should be able to bring together researchers from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, gender, ethnic, geographic, and epistemological orientations. This includes the role of a politics of representation that seeks access in academic contexts, which involves the institutional and financial relation between Northern and Southern universities. In view of the income inequalities between these universities, financial collaboration matters.

> The income of elite universities in the global North isn't just double that of universities in much of the South; it is ten or twenty times more. Since the 1950s a lot of research around the global South has been funded by international aid, from sources such as the Ford Foundation or the Centers for Disease Control. (Connell 2019, 11)

South-South cooperation also can work as strategy of empowerment and mutual support, as seen in the motto, 'South/South co-operation is certainly on the agenda now' (Connell 2019, 12).

Solidarity is an important decolonial tool, as it contributes to problematizing the individualistic orientation strongly present in research and research dissemination. In higher education, solidarity also should include pedagogical strategies and practices that are able to 'reconceptualise humanisation as a site of relationality and interdependency by recasting day-to-day relations and encounters with difference' (Zembyla 2018, 7). By solidarity in research, we do not mean a romanticized notion of collaboration that overlooks power relations. Rather, collaborative works imply accepting the conflictive process of meaning making, negotiation, and sharing that traverses knowledge production. There is no way to dismantle the neoliberal rationality (Mbembe 2017) implied in the contemporary economy of knowledge without collaborative social practices. Such practices are 'vital—indeed, necessary – to overcome the daunting problems now before us as a consequence of the persistent global domination of an exploitative economic and political system which has brought humanity to the brink of disaster' (Jones and Magalhães 2020, 4).

5. Conclusion

The critical perspective we adopt connects the discussion of Southern epistemologies with a critique of the broader economic and political background that characterizes the hierarchical relation between Northern and Southern regimes of truth and economies of knowledge. This includes the need for a redefinition of what counts as a university in attention to its social role, autonomy, and legitimacy. A university that is committed to social justice and Southern epistemologies and methodologies should be able to invest in access though affirmative action and financial supports; expand its relationship with the local community, the state, social movements, and industries; enhance research and training in dialogue with the public interests; and vitalize the ecology of knowledges, that is the dialogue among different academic and non-academic knowledges (Connell 2019; Santos 2011, 2014). Finally, decolonization of a university allied to Southern epistemologies and methodologies in language studies should be engaged with a critique of the colonial legacy, institutional racism, and market forces.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Shades of Decolonial Voices in Linguistics (Multilingual Matters, 2023), co-edited with Sinfree Makoni, Cristine Severo, Anna Kaiper-Marquez and Višnja Milojičić. Language planning and policy: Ideologies, Ethnicities and semiotic spaces of power (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), co-edited with Sinfree Makoni and Cristine Severo. The Languaging of Higher Education in the Global South (Routledge, 2022), co-edited with Sinfree Makoni, Cristine Severo and Anna Kaiper-Marquez. And African Literacies: Ideologies, Scripts, Education (Cambridge Publishing Scholars, 2014), coedited with Kasper Juffermans andYonas Asfahan.

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