Southern perspectives of language and the construction of the common

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we build on the decolonial integrational linguistic perspective proposed by Makoni and Pablé. Based on integrationist principles, through which we avoid all-encompassing interpretations and methodologies that do not adequately engage with local experiences and voices, we construe decolonization as an ongoing project that interrogates the epistemological and political boundaries that isolate the Other from the common world. We argue that public or shared experiences recognized as 'Global South/s' can contribute to our ways of approaching the common and expand our understanding of the meaning of development. We provide an overview of the notion of the common and discuss the role played by languages and Southern epistemologies in its construction. We then propose an active and dynamic notion of the common that recognizes our capacity to build collective and plural spaces through common acts of learning and sharing.

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1. Introduction: 'Theorizing language can be dangerous' (Taylor, 1997, p. 1)

We consider this as an honor and privilege to contribute to this Special Issue. It is ironic that we are contributing to the Special Issue in honor of Talbot Taylor because even though he neither worked on decoloniality nor Southern Epistemologies there are some aspects of his research which are relevant to the overall argument we are making about decolonial Integrational Linguistics. Like Taylor (1997, 1981) we are interested in 'folk linguistic' approaches to theorizing language. The difference though between our position and that of Taylor lies in that we are interested in the political implications of 'folk linguistic' theorization and not folk linguistic theorization per se. We therefore examine the political implications of 'folk linguistics' from decolonial and Southern Epistemological perspectives.

Decoloniality helps us to illuminate the political nature of knowledge production from various perspectives, including coloniality-modernity pairing (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007), which hierarchizes and legitimizes knowledges and epistemic domination; the politics of refusing the subjugation to a representation, which works by disfiguring and dehumanizing (Fanon, 1966; Mbembe, 2019); and the complex relationship between various domains affected by colonization, such as economic, educational, social, cultural, epistemological, religious, and geopolitical. All of these have a bearing on notions of language in decoloniality. Although we recognize the role of epistemic domination (Mignolo, 2009), from a decolonial perspective, we concentrate on a recovery of historical voices and narratives that have been silenced due to domination including Southern Epistemologies about multilingualism. We analyze the 'normative and evaluative metadiscourses

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typically dismissed as unscientific inessential, peripheral and supplemental to language' (Taylor, 1997, p. 9) analogous to Cameron's (1995) Verbal Hygiene. We expand decolonial perspectives through the use of Southern epistemologies, which is based on coloniality as a matrix of power, to include an analysis of patriarchy, racism, and capitalism (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Makoni et al., 2021, 2022; Pennycook and Makoni, 2020).

One of our primary objectives in this paper is to present the political implications of some of the ontologies that constitute the basis of decolonial Integrationist Linguistics and Southern Epistemologies. One such ontology of language in decolonial Integrationist Linguistics is what we believe to be the complex relationship between language and memory. We further argue that the musicality of language, as an ontology, has been downplayed in African orthodox sociolinguistics, and, according to wa Thiong'o (2022), each language has its own musicality.

An ontological orientation that we resist in decolonial Integrationism is that of the objectification of language, which is one of the hallmarks of Western ontologies. In decolonial Integrationist Linguistics, 'An individual does not speak French, English, Wolof, Bambara, or Swahili; rather from the linguistic corpus at his or her disposal, a corpus that is not a priori delimited and necessarily includes other languages, he or she makes linguistic choices of identification' (Amselle, 2020, p. 52). This means that we problematize a quantitative perspective of language insofar as: 'We argue that ontologically the pluralization and enumerability of languages may not be a useful way of capturing diversity, enumerability is a global north ideology and a defining feature of modernity, where numbers are a category used by the state apparatus counting languages and speakers is a strategy o management by the state framed as objective and not expected to differ cross-culturally. From an ontological perspective, however, such certain domains of experience—water, people,—may need to be categorized differently' (Makoni and Pennycook, forthcoming).

We feel very strongly, in African languages, the influence of writing on the conceptualization of writing—what Taylor (1997) refers to as 'scriptism'. It is the scriptivist orientation toward language that leads to notions of language as 'hermetically sealed entities' (Makoni, 1998). Philosophically, one of the ontologies of language that has been created by Western scholarship is one that maintains sharp boundaries between the use of language by humans and other species and the use of language by our ancestors—modes of language that are rarely included in Western scholarship about language. Ontologically, we argue that the use of language is embedded in local, social, and cultural frameworks of references—in contexts in which it is not conceptually feasible to distinguish between the language that we use with the living, on the one hand, and our ancestors and spirits that guide our lives, on the other hand. Languages from such perspectives emerge from moment to moment and are not entities that pre-exist their usage.

The study of Southern epistemology is an open-ended and never-ending project because, '[t]here is always something to learn from different ways of learning, knowing, expressing, and living' (Gordon, 2021, p. 1). From such a perspective language learning is never complete, it is a process which is never ending-and is always partial. Southern Epistemologies leads us therefore to rethink as others have argued the ontological validity of terms which imply completeness such as 'target language, native speaker, mother tongue' etc. Even though decolonization is one of the critical concepts we are using, decolonization has to be used carefully because its meanings varies depending on our understanding of the nature and type of colonialism. In addition, we should be careful to avoid the use of decolonization as an umbrella concept with little potential to deal with singularities. In this sense, we take into account Táíwò's (2019) concerns regarding 'the ease with which the decolonizing trope is deployed without deep attention to the complexity of the issues involved' (p. 138).

For decolonization and southern epistemologies to succeed, we need notions of political action (Jansen, 2019). In a fundamental way, we argue that decoloniality "means analyzing and starting from that which has been publicly suppressed but is actively in use in private domains. We talk about the knowledges which have been suppressed but not erased because erasure is never complete, or from that which is dismissed as local and autochthonous and of marginal or little significance intellectually and politically). In addition, Southern perspectives can contribute to expand our understanding of how resistance is locally experienced, producing creative modes of living: 'In the face of the structural violence perpetrated in the name of neoliberalism, as this suggests, the 'global south/s' is producing and exporting some ingenious, highly imaginative modes of survival—and more' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2015, p. 18; Makoni et al., 2022). Southern perspectives on language may show us how languages emerge as a product of imaginative modes of survival in communication. The argument we are making that language emerges from communicational practices resembles to some extent Taylor's (1981) Principle of Intersubjectivity, which works as a "matter of intersubjectivity because it represents the use of language as making possible the mutual sharing by speaker and hearer of something represented as essentially subjective: namely, what the speaker has to say." (Taylor, 1997, p. 2).

Makoni and Pablé (forthcoming) expand the integrationist approach by arguing for the need to

> explore the various possible common grounds between integrational linguistics and decolonial linguistics as well as possible tensions that arise from different interests and convictions. In decolonial integrationist thinking, critique and innovation emerge from a clash between the old centers with 'excentric' and different modes of thought and life.

In this article, we contribute to the theoretical framework first proposed by Makoni and Pablé (2022) by developing perspectives and orientations of those who have been excluded in African sociolinguistics, such as voices and experiences of children and those who live in rural areas. We agree with Taylor (2017) that children are 'competent participants in the metalinguistic practices of their linguistic community. Along with their development of ways of doing language, children become increasingly sophisticated participants in their linguistic culture's ways to reflexively engage with that 'doing" (p. 8).

Our theoretical objectives in decoloniality and southern epistemologies aims at being consistent with African theorization (Fanon 1963, 1966). We understand that decolonization as an ongoing project interrogates the epistemological and political forces that minoritize the majority. Mbembe (2001) explains that 'the *idea of a common human nature, a humanity shared with others*, long posed, and still poses, a problem for Western consciousness' (p. 2, emphasis in original).

The structure of this paper is as follows. We first provide an overview of the notion of the common and discuss the role played by languages in its construction. We then argue for the importance of southern epistemologies of language and its politics. We then conclude by illustrating how some of the conceptual approaches proposed by Talbot Taylor are potentially helpful in enhancing our understanding of decolonial Integrational Linguistics.

2. Construction of the common and the role of language

We discuss the relationship between the notion of language and the concept of the common, which is seen as a shared space of speech, public communication, action, plural coexistence, visibility, and audibility (Arendt, 1998; Bollier and Helfrich, 2012; Hardt and Negri, 2009). We seek to articulate this concept with reflections on the perspectives of language that follow recent debates on the 'Global South/s' and language studies (Makoni et al., 2021, 2022; Pennycook and Makoni, 2020; Severo and Makoni, 2020, 2021). We argue that public and shared experiences recognized as 'Global South/s' can contribute to our ways of approaching the common and expand our understanding of the very meaning of development: 'For people of the Global South, for whom the commons tends to be more of a lived, everyday reality than a metaphor, the language of the commons is the basis for a new vision of "development"' (Bollier and Helfrich, 2012, p. 22). We are concerned with political and linguistic approaches committed to grassroots experiences.

The concept of the common stands as a political, social, cultural, and ethical response to the neoliberal model, especially in regard to how life has been objectified, privatized, and hijacked from the public sphere by neoliberal reason. Neoliberalism encompasses various interpretations that range from Marxist perspectives to liberal ones. Our focus is on the relation between neoliberalism and techniques of power, control, and commodification of subjectivities and social relations. Neoliberalism is concerned with governmental rationality; it 'is precisely the deployment of the logic of the market as a generalized normative logic, from the state to innermost subjectivity' (Dardot and Laval, 2014, p. 24). It is worth mentioning how neoliberalism connects to neo-conservatism by transforming the moralizing of the working individual into an enterprise form. 'Much more than a mere "zone of contact", the articulation of the enterprise with the family represents the point of convergence or overlap between neo-liberal normativity and neo-conservative moralism' (Dardot and Laval, 2014, p. 346).

This discussion matters because, if we attempt to consider the common as political and as a theoretical tool to problematize the neoliberal rationality, Southern experiences can teach us lessons about resistance and plurality. Different from neoliberal reason, we make the claim for a reason of the common in line with the following proposal: 'The practices of "communization" of knowledge, mutual aid and cooperative work can delineate the features of a different world reason. Such an alternative reason cannot be better designated than by the term reason of the commons' (Dardot and Laval, 2014, p. 357).

We engage with an active and dynamic notion of the common that recognizes our capacity to build such collective and plural spaces through acts of learning and sharing. Hardt and Negri (2009) explain, 'Everyone needs to learn how to work with language, codes, ideas, and affects—and moreover to work with others, none of which comes naturally' (p. 125). Languages play an important role in such struggles that are concerned with an inverse process of restoring the humanity against the objectification and commodification of life, subjectivity, and languages by neoliberalism.

> Evoking speech and language here is important not only thanks to their power of revelation and their symbolic function but above all to their materiality. In every truly democratic regime, a materiality of speech exists that stems from the fact that, at bottom, all we have is speech and language for giving utterance to ourselves, to the world, and for acting upon this world. (Mbembe, 2019, p 182, p 182)

We argue that neoliberal rationality affects languages and discourses, regulating not only what is said but also how it is said, to whom, and under what conditions and circumstances. If neoliberalism is guided by the slogan of problem solution, it may affect the rationality that underlies language policy and planning by transforming languages into things/problems to be fixed/solved. It follows that, 'if large portions of our words, phrases, or parts of speech were subject to private ownership or public authority—then language would lose its powers of expression, creativity, and communication' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. ix). By focusing on Southern epistemologies, we seek to recognize the role of innovation, reanimation, transgression, and invention) to a decolonizing project of language studies. An example of how an approach to language practices may resist instrumentalization and algorithmization is the integrationist perspective toward proverbs in African contexts:

> By considering proverbs to be the products (oral, written, drawn, painted, pantomimed . . .) of someone in an always unique communication situation, our research proceeds with a reorientation towards the proverb maker and can thus dispense with the need to define the term 'proverb'. (Khasandi-Telewa et al., 2022, p. 7208, p. 7208)

The common involves both the material resources of the world—air, land, water, soil, and so forth—and the outcomes of social production, such as knowledge, languages, information, and affections (Hardt and Negri, 2009). The common also is related to the idea of the public, understood as the space of visibility and audibility (Arendt, 1998). The sharing of the common

is a condition for a 'democracy of the multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. viii), in which the multitude implies a relationship with difference and a recognition of singularities that often imply meeting those who come from the outside, bringing cultures, languages, knowledge and experiences. The democracy of the multitude is not the same as the massification of society:

> What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. (Arendt, 1998, pp. 52–53)

We argue that language plays a relevant role in the construction of relationships, bonds, and social cohesion, transforming mass indifferentiation into a space for plural relationships. Southern language policies concern our capacity and desire to build such plural bonds. This means that '[t]his common is not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships, and so forth' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 139).

In addition, by differentiating the notions of the common and mass society, we highlight the role of singular experiences, such as an individual's language experiences, in shaping the idea of a democracy of the multitude: 'The common is composed of interactions among singularities, such as singularities of linguistic expression' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 124). In this context, the language of the common has to do with our capacity to make sense of ourselves as individuals and as part of a community. In this regard, we engage with how integrationism recognizes the role of an individual's language experience in the construction of a sense of communication: 'Rethinking linguistics involves examining how we interpret and construct our day-to-day communicational acts, what views of language are held by certain individuals, and the source and roles that these views play in our living and learning experience' (Davis, 2003, p. 14). By being attentive to the individuals' language acts and views in regard to their linguistic experience, we point to how integrationism may contribute to a politics of recognition of Southern voices.

In sum, insofar as the colonial project worked as a politics of silencing by dividing, segregating, and dehumanizing people and their voices, decoloniality concerns our sense of being in the world and belonging to it. In this respect, the notion of the common matters: 'If, ultimately, humanity exists only through being in and of the world, can we found a relation with others based on the reciprocal recognition of our common vulnerability and finitude?' (Mbembe, 2019, p. 3). Such a discussion contributes to the debate on the notions of citizenship and human rights by reaffirming the political and ethical dimension underlining such notions. We will return to this discussion in the next section.

3. Southern epistemologies of language and the politics of recognition and the recognition of politics

Regarding the discussion of human rights, de Sousa Santos et al. (2021) identify three tensions of the modern concept of human rights: between the destruction of the environment and the right to development; between the individualism of a human rights framework and the collective claims and solidary agendas of peasant communities and the Indigenous people in the Global South; and between the limits of human rights to approach the rights of non-human subjects and the anti-anthropocentric claim. The critique of anthropocentrism in regard to the concept of language and language rights runs parallel to the critique of the morality that underlies neoliberal rationality. The precariousness of life is directly related to the environmental crisis, including the relationship between human and non-human animals and nature. An anti-anthropocentric outlook requires a new ethics, capable of expanding the meaning of life itself, by questioning the anthropocentric morality that ratifies human life as having more value than other forms of life. In line with this, we understand that '[t]his view of universal and equal human dignity cannot be supported without a drastic revision to aspects of our morality, which most people do not want to make' (Singer, 2009, p. 568). This review of the morality and the normative system that regulates us also includes a review of the morality that underlies what is understood by language. This includes the very role of modern linguistics in using the idea of a rational language, reinforcing the language myth (Harris, 1998; Taylor, 1997), to legitimize human superiority in relation to other non-human lives . The ontologies which are trampled upon in contemporary Linguistics also draw upon images and metaphors from water, which if taken into account we would be able to have more robust approaches to language including 'bottled language', drawing upon 'hydrocolonialism' (Hofmeyr, 2022). Most of the ontologies about language in dominant language scholarship draw on ontologies from land (Pennycook, 2022), and not water, even though most of the planet is water, and we are water. We argue for the use of alternative ontologies from water.

In Southern epistemologies and decolonial Intergrationist Linguistics we are radically committed to plural and historical perspectives of society. This has implications ontologically on how notions about rights can be framed. We therefore argue that language rights and 'human rights can, and should, be reformulated on the basis of experiences which confront us with a pluriverse, composed of world views which permeate and extend beyond the borders of modern Western thinking' (de Sousa Santos, 2021, pp. 21–22). We therefore propose that the framework of language rights in the democracy of the multitude should take into account the complexities of sociolinguistic contexts, which is characterized by: '(a) fuzziness of language boundaries, (b) fluidity in language identity, (c) identity claims versus language communication, (d) complementarity of intra-group and inter-group communication' (Khubchandani, 1997, p. 87). Other elements include 'the mobility and density of the population, as well as inter-group and intra-group communication' (Makoni, 2012, p. 2) and history as a core element to contextualize how rights are violated in different contexts, thus avoiding depoliticizing violence by the rhetoric of human rights .

The salvationist rhetoric of language rights applied to Southern contexts does not necessarily contribute to a real emancipatory agenda; conversely, it may enhance inequalities and conflicts by reproducing a logic of division and homogenization. One example is the limits of Northern concepts of multilingualism Promoting northern multilingualism in the Global South/s conceptually fails to address the pluralism inherent in notions of southern multilingualisms' (Pennycook and Makoni, 2020, p. 127).

We argue that Southern perspectives are engaged with a politics of recognition that subverts the colonial will of representation: 'The will to representation is at bottom a will to destruction aiming to turn something violently into nothing' (Mbembe, 2019, p. 139). This means that we should be able to disengage from the 'Western culture's metafiction', which includes a critique to the idea of representation, as framed by Taylor (2017, p. 8)

> [...] we risk repeating the error of the metafiction's representationalism (surrogationalism) if—by introducing elements of the *explanans* into the *explanandum* itself—we construe the expressions we find in *either* 'lay' *or* 'expert' metadiscourse as verbally-instantiated representations of underlying or second-order 'somethings': whether abstractions, constructs, concepts, attractors, mental states, virtual objects, etc. (cf. Segerdahl, under review). I suggest, in other words, that we should focus our attention on what people say and do in metalinguistic practices.

Representation is a symbolic act that transforms subjects into objects, denying the right of the individuals to create a self-image through their actions and voices. According to Mbembe (2019), 'This subject grapples with an image that has been pinned on it, which it labors to rid itself of, whose author he is not and in which he scarcely recognizes himself' (p. 139). Such negative politics of representation reproduce racial violence that includes several 'technologies such as language, the radio, and even medicine, which are endowed, as befits the occasion, with a deadly power' (Mbembe 2019, p. 139). We advocate that decolonizing perspectives of language should be engaged with the role of languages in creating self-images and constructing 'ethical relationships between the Self and the Other' (Gordon, 2021, p. 36). One example is the demand for recognition that characterizes Black students' struggles for decolonizing South African universities, the educational system, and the curriculum: 'Black students not only feel alienated within the dominant white culture and authority of the English liberal universities, but also feel they are not recognised in their full humanity in these strange environments' (Jansen, 2019, p. 18).

Such struggles also include the recognition of African multilingualisms from a theoretical perspective that is able to grasp its complexities, such as the notions of Southern multilingualisms (Pennycook and Makoni, 2020), multilingua francas (Makoni and Pennycook, 2012), language inventions (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007), urbilingualisms (Mazrui, 2017), Afro-diasporic language practices (), African(ist) perspectives on vitality (Lüpke, 2017), African rural multilingualism (Lüpke et al., 2020), and *ubuntu* translanguaging (Makalela, 2016). In regard to the connection between ethics and the concept of language, it is worth mentioning how *ubuntu*, an expression of African humanism, can contribute to expanding our view of language by radically articulating it in terms of the notions of person, interdependence, incompleteness, indeterminacy, and morality (Makoni and Severo 2017) African philosophical ideas, such as *ubuntu*, with Central American concepts, such as *nepantla* (in-betweenness), can provide renewed ways of thinking about language that can no longer be considered in separate, atomistic, but rather as always, mutable, relational and reciprocal (Makoni and Pennycook, 2022). We expand African ontological views to include other African philosophies, such as the Wolof *nite* and the ancient Egyptian philosophy *maa't*. These philosophies, which provide a basis for African cosmologies, can be extended to form philosophical predicates for African notions about language.

> A language is because another language is. In this connection, languages are a representation of the human cultural logic of being and they are therefore inseparable from the soul of their speakers. When framed in this light, African languages' endowment with ubuntu allows for fuzzy processes of simultaneous disruption of orderliness and recreation of newness. (Makalela, 2016, pp. 191–192)

In this context, Makoni and Severo (2017) explore how different elements are managed in this African humanism, turning language experience into a complex set of interdependent dimensions: *unzimba* (body), *umoya* (breath), *umphefumela* (spirit), *amandla* (energy), *inhliziyo* (heart), *umqond* (head), *ulwimi* (language), and *ubuntu* (humanity; Venter, 2004).

Other examples include the political role of oral tradition in the construction of the common by recognizing that the use of first person inscribes the subject of enunciation in spaces of visibility and audibility (Severo, 2020). Oral tradition also can contribute to problematizing Eurocentric regimes of truth that legitimize what counts as historical evidence: 'In appreciating narratives of cultural history, in particular, we need to rethink the all-too-easy lines we draw between truth and lying' (Okpewho, 2003, p. 228). Insofar as the hegemony of the written over the oral derives from colonialism, the invention of the printing press, and capitalism, revisiting the boundaries and hierarchies between oral and written integrates a decolonial project (wa Thiong'o, 2006).

In line with the discussion of the oral tradition, African proverbial discourses also may contribute to expand our epistemological view of language by signaling the contextual and impermanent nature of knowledge, as stated by Khasandi-Telewa et al. (2022). By adopting an integrationist perspective of language aligned with Southern epistemologies, the authors make the following claim:

a linguistic analysis of proverbs grounded on metalanguage as used in ordinary discourses is a more legitimate as source of social critique than a detached metalanguage in spite of the postmodern fluidity and unpredictability of ordinary discourse from which such a metalanguage is drawn. (p. 7223)

Finally, we propose that Southern perspectives of language should be engaged with how people experience language in their daily life. Regarding the challenges of such approach to language, we follow Makoni and Pennycook, 2022:

The challenge is for Southern socio- and applied linguistics to break free from assumptions about separate languages, endangered languages and language rights, and instead move toward a more complex and appropriate understanding of language in the Global South/s, which may also liberate the Global North from its narrow and inadequate notions of language.

The ontologies that are overlooked in grassroots contexts link music, painting, and public transport (Makoni and Makoni, 2010) and cross multiple languages. In other words, the categorical distinctions that are made between music, painting, language(s), and public transport might not be relevant if we build ontologies grounded in speaker perspectives.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we discuss how Southern perspectives can contribute to questioning and inverting the epistemological order of things, as suggested by Comaroff and Comaroff (2015):

But what if, and here is the idea in interrogative form, we invert that order of things? What if we subvert the epistemic scaffolding on which it is erected? What if we posit that, in the present moment, it is the global south that affords privileged insight into the workings of the world at large? (p. 1)

We argue for the need to reinvent our political language in regard to the idea of creating a common and plural world. This includes seriously engaging with lay metalinguistic practices as a means of reducing '"the authoritative influence of the Western cultural metafiction on the language sciences' (Taylor, 2017, p. 8). Southern epistemologies, together with the critique of the language myth, may contribute to expanding our comprehension of the role of languages in contemporary struggles, mainly those concerned with the questioning of the neoliberal rationality that operates by commodifying life and discourses. This means that '[w]e need a new discourse and new social practices that assert a new grand narrative, a different constellation of operating principles and a more effective order of governance' (Bollier and Helfrich, 2012, p.19). As such, we advocate that the transformation of our vocabulary, strongly rooted in the idea that 'humans must indefinitely exploit, monetize and financially abstract a finite set of natural resources (oil, minerals, forests, fisheries, water)' (Bollier and Helfrich, 2012, p. 21), can contribute to *make sense of a multitude of experiences and voices that have been undermined.*

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