Learning English in the Amazon region of Brazil: corpovivências of Youth and Adult Education students

Aprendendo inglês na Região Amazônica do Brasil: corpovivências de aprendizes da Educação de Jovens e Adultos

Aprendiendo inglés en la Región Amazónica de Brasil: corpovivências de estudiantes de la Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I problematize the corpovivências of four Youth and Adult Education (YAE) students in the context of our 2023 English classes at a Federal Institute in Western Pará, Brazil. This qualitative study is informed by the principles of critical (language) education research. The empirical material analyzed was generated during a series of English classes with two distinct cohorts enrolled in a technical course in Information Technology, which is integrated into the high school curriculum. The classes took place on October 10 and 17 and were framed by students' engagement with the animated film *Mary and Max* (2009), which served as a catalyst for discussions on identity, belonging, and social/racial inequalities. As a result, the study helped students recognize that English can serve as a means to critically make sense of both themselves and their town, Óbidos-PA, thus highlighting the importance of an embodied approach to language education.

Keywords: Youth and Adult Education; Critical (Language) Education Research; corpovivências; coloniality; decoloniality.

ARTIGO

RESUMO

Neste artigo, problematizo as corpovivências de quatro estudantes da Educação de Jovens e Adultos (EJA) no contexto das nossas aulas de inglês realizadas em 2023, em um Instituto Federal localizado no Oeste do Pará, Brasil. Este estudo qualitativo é pautado pelos princípios da pesquisa crítica em educação (linguística). O material empírico analisado foi gerado durante uma sequência de aulas de inglês com duas turmas distintas de um curso técnico de Informática integrado ao ensino médio. As aulas ocorreram nos dias 10 e 17 de outubro e foram organizadas a partir da interação das/os estudantes com a animação *Mary e Max* (2009), que serviu como catalisador para discussões sobre identidade, pertencimento e desigualdades sociais/raciais. Como resultado, o estudo ajudou as/os estudantes a reconhecer que o inglês pode servir como meio para compreender criticamente tanto a si mesmas/os quanto sua cidade, Óbidos-PA, destacando, assim, a importância de uma abordagem corporificada para o ensino de línguas.

Palavras-chave: Educação de Jovens e Adultos; Pesquisa Crítica em Educação (Linguística); Corpovivências; Colonialidade; Decolonialidade.

RESUMEN

En este artículo, problematizo las corpovivências de cuatro estudiantes de la Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos (EJA) en el contexto de nuestras clases de inglés realizadas en 2023 en un Instituto Federal ubicado en el Oeste del estado de Pará, Brasil. Este estudio cualitativo está guiado por los principios de la investigación crítica en educación (lingüística). El material empírico analisado fue producido durante una secuencia de clases de inglés con dos grupos distintos de un curso técnico de Informática integrado a la educación secundaria. Las clases se llevaron a cabo los días 10 y 17 de octubre y fueron organizadas a partir de la interacción de las/os estudiantes con la película animada *Mary and Max* (2009), que sirvió como catalizador para discusiones sobre identidad, pertenencia y desigualdades sociales/raciales. Como resultado, el estudio ayudó a las/os estudiantes a reconocer que el inglés puede servir como un medio para comprender críticamente tanto a sí mismas/os como a su ciudad, Óbidos-PA, destacando así la importancia de un enfoque corporificado para la enseñanza de lenguas.

Palabras clave: Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos; Investigación Crítica en Educación (Lingüística); Corpovivências; Colonialidad; Decolonialidad.

INTRODUCTION

The myth of English as an International Language (EIL) is an invention of Western imperialism. As Pennycook (2006, p. 90) argues, it has been "created, promoted and sustained to the benefit of Western powers, global capitalism, the developed world, the centre over the periphery, or neoliberal ideology." The applied linguist (2006) continues to state that the consequences of such a myth are real and felt differently, and most times harshly, in subaltern bodies and territories.

In this train of thought, it is paramount to understand that the English language plays a unique role in the Amazon region of Brazil. Globally recognized as the lungs of the planet, the region will host the next UN Climate Change Conference (COP30), which will take place in Belém, the capital of the state of Pará, in November 2025. To facilitate negotiations and enable visitors to interact with local sellers, the amount of people learning English in the state has skyrocketed in recent months[1].

Once again, English appears to be functioning as a commodity in Brazil, "accompanied by a mantra loaded with cultural, historical, moral, and economic superiority, a mantra that presents the English language to us as the language of superior cultures, of metropolitan cultures, of truly scientific and reliable knowledge[2]" (Jordão, 2004, p. 5).

Another current phenomenon is the increasing number of federal institutes and federal universities in the North of Brazil, which is bringing people from different parts of the country to work and live in the region. I am one of these people who have been living in the state of Pará for more than two years now. I currently work at the Federal University of Pará[3], but I also worked at the Federal Institute of Education, Science, and Technology of Pará[4] in the municipality of Óbidos – located on the left bank of the Amazon River, at its narrowest and deepest point. This is the last paper I am publishing regarding my teaching praxis at the latter.

According to its official website (2024)[5], the village of Óbidos was elevated to the status of a municipality on October 2, 1854. Similarly to what Pennycook (2006) asserts about EIL, Óbidos was forged to benefit, value, and perpetuate European ontoepistemologies once it was named in honor of another city with the same name located in Portugal. The town is a legacy of Portuguese colonization, emphasizing the Western perspective while overlooking the existence and importance of the *Pauxi* Indigenous People who inhabited the land long before the Portuguese invasion (Barros; Aquino, 2022).

In the light of the discussion abovementioned, it seems notable that EIL and the town of Óbidos, Pará, have something in common: *they were both invented by white people[6] to privilege*

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[1] Available at: < https://agenciapara.com.br/noticia/64610/curso-de-lingua-inglesa-amplia-oportunidades-de-trabalho-a-alunos-do-capacita-cop-30-no-para >. Accessed on: Apr. 15, 2025.
[2] All English translations of cited materials are the author's responsibility.
[3] In Portuguese, Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA).
[4] In Portuguese, Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Pará (IFPA).
[5] Available at: < https://obidos.pa.gov.br/o-municipio/historia/ >. Accessed on: Feb. 14, 2024.
[6] I refer to the tendency to consider the behaviors, culture, lifestyle, and beliefs of white individuals as the ruler by which all other groups are measured.

Western ontoepistemologies. As an effort to identify, question, and interrupt (Menezes de Souza, 2019)[7] such narratives, my main objective in this paper is to problematize the corpovivências of four Youth and Adult Education (YAE) students in the context of our 2023 English classes at a Federal Institute in Óbidos, Pará, Brazil.

Grounded in a decolonial perspective, the concept of corpovivências seeks to interweave seemingly personal desires, dreams, and experiences with coloniality and its multiple dimensions (Almeida, 2023). This qualitative study is informed by the principles of critical (language) education research (Pasque, 2024; Silvestre; Rosa-da-Silva, 2022; St. Pierre, 2004). The material analyzed was generated during a series of English classes with two distinct cohorts – first- and third-year students – enrolled in a technical course in Information Technology, which is integrated into the high school curriculum. The classes discussed herein took place on October 10 and 17, 2023, and were shaped by students' engagement with the animated film *Mary and Max* (2009), which served as a catalyst for discussions on identity, belonging, and social and racial inequalities. The research agents were selected according to the following criteria: a) their presence and active participation in the aforementioned classes; b) the production and submission of the activities (a letter to a foreigner and a written narrative about their English classes in the year of 2023); and c) their presence and engagement in a yearning circle, which took place on February 19, 2024.

This paper is organized as follows. The introduction provides a brief contextualization of the specific part of the Amazon from which I am enunciating, presents the main objective of the study, and offers an overview of the methodological approach. The first section discusses critical and decolonial perspectives on Language Education. In the second section, the methodology employed in the research is described in a detailed manner. The third section critically examines the experience of the four Youth and Adult Education (YAE) English learners. Lastly, I present my concluding reflections on the experience.

1. CRITICAL AND DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION

In this section, I begin by problematizing key concepts of critical language education, then I discuss the concept of coloniality and its three dimensions – power, knowledge, and being – and finally, I share the notion of corpovivências as a possibility for identifying, questioning, and interrupting forms of coloniality. Both critical and decolonial perspectives have informed my praxiologies as an English teacher for more than a decade. In 2014, I was first introduced to some principles of Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), and in 2018, I delved into decoloniality. Both epistemologies were central to what I investigated during my Master's and PhD, and both are part of my trajectory within and beyond the university.

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[7] Since the statement was made during an interview with Lynn Mario Menezes de Souza, I have cited only his name in the text. However, the full reference to the interview is included in the references section to provide complete source information.

This alignment with critical English teaching is also reflected in the work of Pessoa (2014), who contends that language and the classroom cannot be delinked from the people who inhabit them, nor from broader power dynamics. Drawing on the works of different Brazilian scholars (Ferreira, 2006, 2007; Moita Lopes, 2002, 2003; Souza, 2011), and non-Brazilian ones (Auerbach, 1995; Kubota, 2004; Pennycook, 1999, 2001, 2004), Pessoa (2014) posits that her research group has been doing critical English teaching since 2005. This initiative, in her words, has helped the group to reflect "collaboratively on it in order to better comprehend what we do and who we are as individuals and language teachers in this world of possibilities" (Pessoa, 2014, p. 354).

Rosane Rocha Pessoa and her unwavering efforts to counter social inequalities and coloniality through English teaching hold profound significance in this study, as she is one of the key researchers responsible for introducing me – and many other applied linguists from the state of Goiás and the Midwest region of Brazil – to the notion of critical English teaching. Moreover, her book chapter *Ensino Crítico de Línguas Estrangeiras*, co-authored with her advisee at the time, Marco Túlio de Urzêda-Freitas (Pessoa; Urzêda-Freitas, 2012), was the first text I read on critical language teaching. That reading marked an experience that eventually led to my first published book chapter, which focused on a practicum experience with critical English teaching (Almeida, 2017a).

This brief testimony about Rosane, my PhD advisor, relates to my engagement with critical and decolonial studies, as her work – and that of many other Brazilian scholars and non-scholars – has led me to the realization that "knowledge is intimately intertwined with our lived experiences" (Pessoa; Almeida, 2024, p. 22), a view that aligns with her assertion that the classroom, broader power dynamics, and language are inseparable from the people involved. Moreover, Rosane's work, along with that of her advisees, illustrates how we have been Southernizing Applied Linguistics from the Brazilian Midwest to the North. These works have drawn on and produced metalanguages that embody and contribute to the decolonial enterprise in these regions of Brazil.

Sousa (2017, p. 17) emphasizes that CAL aims "to problematize issues of privilege, power, oppression, inequalities, injustices, reproduction of the status quo – in short, aspects that cause human suffering – using language as a tool for this purpose." Building on these principles, the author's study was grounded in local aspects and needs, which contributed to the collaborative construction of the work that *they* developed. In this regard, the scholar (2017, p. 124) emphasizes that "the knowledge we have about the contexts in which we work and the people present in them can assist us in making decisions regarding the development of research." This perspective aligns with what Dulci and Malheiros (2021, p. 174) advocate regarding the formulation of research objectives, which, they argue, must be "communal before being scientific."

With regard to how language has been understood in the field of (Critical) Applied Linguistics, Fabrício (2006, p. 48) argues that many studies associate language with a series of relations in constant flux, "understanding that it is inseparable from the social and discursive practices that construct, sustain, or modify the productive, cognitive, and desiring capacities of social actors." As I

claimed in my Master's thesis, the notion of language as an apolitical, neutral, and non-critical communication tool has been challenged and redescribed in critical studies, which have understood it as a dynamic web, highlighting its historical, colonial, social, political, subjective, and contextual nature (Almeida, 2017b).

In order to engage in a meaningful discussion about decoloniality, it is essential to first understand how coloniality operates and becomes pervasive throughout the Global South. For this reason, I begin by examining the concept of coloniality and its dimensions before articulating the notion of *corpovivências* as a political and embodied praxis grounded in decolonial thought.

Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243) distinguishes between colonialism and coloniality. In his words, the former "denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire," whereas the latter "refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). Although coloniality is pervasive and constitutive of modernity, its effects are felt/lived/known in different ways by colonized peoples, depending on their corpovivências (Almeida, 2023).

Ballestrin (2013, p. 100) affirms that "coloniality is reproduced in three dimensions: power, knowledge, and being." Concerning the coloniality of power, Quijano (2005) argues that the notion of race was fundamental in establishing mechanisms of imposition, exploitation, and the hierarchical division of labor during colonization. In this context, Borelli (2018, p. 42, emphasis in the original) highlights that "whites, 'superior,' were the only ones performing wage labor. Indigenous peoples and blacks were left with slavery or servitude, both non-wage forms of labor."

The Brazilian sociologist Jessé Souza (2021, p. 20) asserts that, in order to discuss racism – which persists as an offshoot of coloniality of power – in Brazil or elsewhere, one must take into consideration "the inextricable amalgam between social class and race; otherwise, we will fail to understand how success and social failure are already embedded in the family socialization and early schooling of the poor and Black social class/race". The author goes on to explain that this amalgam constructs a class/race – that of the poor and Black – condemned to an endless state of barbarism.

With respect to the coloniality of knowledge, Ballestrin (2013) notes that this is one of the most recurrent topics in the discussions of the Modernity/Coloniality (M/C) Group, formed by Latin American intellectuals who have critically questioned and redefined social sciences in the Global South in the 21st century through the concept of the "decolonial turn." Borelli (2018, p. 44) emphasizes that the coloniality of knowledge is established through a perverse logic responsible for determining which forms of knowledge expression are worthy of existence and which ones deserve to "disappear from the map." This exclusion, according to the scholar, draws on the ideals of objectivity and universality that define valid knowledge.

As I argue, "teachers who establish bonds with students premised on principles of submission, docility, dependency, and mere content acquisition of their given subjects do not contribute to the resistance and re-existence of knowledge(s) otherwise" (Almeida, 2023, p. 86). On the contrary, they are perpetuating the coloniality of power.

Yet, simply recognizing the knowledge(s) and corpovivências of our learners through an unquestionable acceptance of everything that is shared is also insufficient (Borelli, 2018). Teachers should, in turn, align themselves with the desires, ambiguities, insecurities, and conflicts of their students in a way that enable both parties to recognize the transformative power of their collaboration in identifying, interrupting, and transforming the colonialities that certainly intersect their trajectories in often similar ways (Almeida, 2023).

Finally, the coloniality of being is a concept initially proposed by Mignolo (1995) and later expanded by Maldonado-Torres (2007). He states that invisibility and dehumanization are central dimensions of the coloniality of being, as the concept emerges from the need to account for the effects of coloniality not only in the mind but also in the lived experience. In his analysis, the coloniality of being, often encountered in contexts of war, "is transformed into an ordinary affair through the idea of race, which serves a crucial role in the naturalization of the non-ethics of war through the practices of colonialism and (racial) slavery" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 257).

Martins (2023) mentions three core components of coloniality and its plural dimensions: 1) a metaphysics catastrophe; 2) the naturalization of war; and 3) the various modalities of human difference – rooted in constructs such as knowledge, science, race, sex, gender, class, and religion – that became integral to the modern/colonial experience. According to her, these elements "help to differentiate modernity from other civilizational projects and to explain the ways in which coloniality organizes multiple layers of dehumanization within modernity/coloniality" (Martins, 2023, p. 179).

Having discussed some core elements of coloniality and its multiple dimensions, it is relevant to emphasize the importance of embracing non-white, anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-heteronormative, anti-capitalist, and anti-Eurocentric ontoepistemologies as a vital part of the Decolonial Turn. As Maldonado-Torres (2017, p. 261-262) argues, this movement "introduces questions about the effects of colonization in modern subjectivities and modern forms of life as well as contributions of racialized and colonized subjectivities to the production of knowledge and critical thinking."

In this vein, I proposed the concept of corpovivências (Almeida, 2023) as an alternative for being, thinking, listening, hearing, tasting, learning, and living the decolonial horizon. As it seeks to interweave seemingly personal desires, dreams, and experiences with coloniality and its multiple dimensions, the concept of corpovivências (experiences lived through the body) is always connected to broader desires, dreams, institutions, and overarching structuring projects. In my doctoral dissertation and subsequent works (Almeida; Moura, 2024, Pessoa; Almeida, 2024), I share personal corpovivências to illustrate how colonial notions of race, science, knowledge, sexuality,

gender, class, spirituality, and language have not only been reproduced, but also critically questioned – and, to some extent, interrupted – through my engagement with critical and decolonial perspectives to English language education.

In this work, four YAE students living in the Amazon region of Brazil offer powerful testimonies of how they have resisted, re-existed, and reforested this territory with their corpovivências – within and beyond the context of English language classes. In the next section, I outline the study's methodology, describe the context in which it took place, and introduce the four students who kindly participated in the study.

2. METHODOLOGY

First and foremost, it is important to emphasize that "research carries within itself the weight of coloniality" (Silvestre; Rosa-da-Silva, 2022, p. 158). Considered a pivotal aspect of any academic work, "methodology should never be separated from epistemology and ontology" (St. Pierre, 2004, p. 3). In order to identify, question, and interrupt the embedded colonialities in the research, we must move "beyond designations and frameworks given a priori" (Silvestre; Rosa-da-Silva, 2022, p. 161), and embrace alternative methodological paths that prioritize our subjectivities and knowledge(s) as well as those of our research agents (Silvestre, 2016).

In this regard, Silvestre and Rosa-da-Siva (2022, p. 62) mention three possible ways to confront colonialities in the research: "a) the relationships among the people constructing the research; b) the knowledge enacted in the research construction; and c) the affectivities and subjectivities evident in the constitution of the research." They assert that these paths must be understood as local undertakings and real opportunities to build alternative methodological horizons in research within the field.

In concert with the authors, I advocate for the urgent reinvention of our study methodologies. In my doctoral dissertation, for instance, I did not focus only on the academic scholarship, resorting to other types of knowledge such as "those from my mother, friends, family members, as well as from Afro-diasporic and indigenous thinkers who are not actively engaged in the university, in the quest for alternative paths to question and interpret the material of the thesis" (Almeida, 2023, p. 37).

As Silvestre and Rosa-da-Silva (2002) alert us, these problematizations about research do not intend to deny the relevance of science. Conversely, they are meant to build more just alternatives to it, "promoting the common good, and not just a [white] group that seeks to be dominant" (Rosa-da-Silva, 2021, p. 51). Therefore, as an English teacher engaged in fighting colonialities, I see the importance of understanding "the complexities of our inter/national history and local contexts" (Pasque, 2024, p. 12-13). Once we do this, I believe we exercise one of the main purposes of research, which is to "problematize this world in which inequalities prevail in all spheres of social life" (Pessoa, 2019, p. 174).

2.1 The Federal Institute we speak from, the Information Technology course, the study context, and its research agents

The Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology – Óbidos campus was founded on August 16, 2011, during the third expansion phase of the Federal Network of Professional Education. Currently, the campus[8] offers five technical courses integrated to high school curriculum: *Agroecology*, *Forestry*, *Information Technology*, *Environmental studies* and *Systems development*, one undergraduate course: *Systems analysis and development*, and one graduate course: *Educational technologies*.

In addition to regular education, the *Information Technology* course is offered in the modality of Youth and Adult Education (YAE), which has students who did not have the chance to access or continue their studies at the age established in national education documents. From this perspective, it is paramount to state that YAE in Brazil:

> […] works with individuals marginalized by the system, with attributes that are always accentuated as a result of additional factors such as race/ethnicity, color, gender, among others. Black people, Quilombolas, women, Indigenous peoples, peasants, riverside peoples, young people, the elderly, underemployed, unemployed, and informal workers are emblematic representatives of the multiple exclusions that Brazilian society imposes on a large part of the economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged population (Brasil, 2007, p. 11).

According to its Political-Pedagogical Project (IFPA, 2020), the aforementioned course aims to contribute to the enhancement of technological services offered to society, particularly in the town of Óbidos, Pará. As stated in the document, this educational goal is to be achieved "through a process of appropriation and production of scientific and technological knowledge(s), capable of advancing human education and the economic development of the region, in concert with the processes of democratization and social justice" (IFPA, 2020, p. 10). Aligned with these educational aims, this research was carried out with students enrolled in the course.

One of the topics covered in both *Língua Inglesa I*[9] and *Língua Inglesa III*[10] syllabi (IFPA, 2020) of the Information Technology course (YAE modality) is the study of different textual genres in English classes. Based on this guideline, I planned a series of eight classes with two distinct cohorts: first- and third-year students. The classes discussed herein took place on October 10 and 17, 2023 (four classes on each day), and were structured around the students' engagement with the film *Mary and Max* (2009), which served as a catalyst for discussions on identity, belonging, and social/racial inequalities. In short, *Mary and Max*[11] is an Australian animated film written and directed

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[8] Information available at: < https://obidos.ifpa.edu.br/cursos-ensino >. Accessed on: Apr. 20, 2025.
[9] There were five regular students enrolled in the course.
[10] There were six regular students enrolled in the course.
[11] For further information, access "Comentários do filme – Mary e Max: uma amizade diferente." Available at: < https://repositorio.ufsc.br/handle/123456789/195785 >. Accessed on: Apr. 21, 2025.

by Adam Elliot. The story revolves around the friendship between two pen-pals: Mary, a lonely Australian girl, and Max, a middle-aged American man with Asperger's syndrome.

On October 10, the cohorts watched the movie. I informed them that it would be played in English with Portuguese subtitles. After the screening, we held an oral discussion about the main characters and shared some curiosities related to Australia and to the United States as portrayed in the movie. Following the discussion, I explained the structure of a letter and asked students to write one, sharing some curiosities about their routines in Óbidos, Pará, and posing a few questions about their pen pal's routine. Their letters were to be written in English and addressed to someone living in an English-speaking country. Two letters were addressed to Americans, and the other two to Australians.

On October 17, students were expected to submit their letters. However, some learners had not finished the activity and requested additional time. While some students continued working on their letters, I read and asked questions about the ones that had already been completed. Students used Google Translate to help write their letters in English, and many mentioned they recognized several words they had already learned in class. Most of them followed the letter model I had shared the previous week.

The empirical material analyzed in this study was generated from three main sources: a) letters submitted on October 10, 2023, in which students introduced themselves to foreign correspondents and described their hometown, Óbidos, Pará; b) written narratives[12] reflecting on their English classes throughout 2023, particularly those in which we watched and discussed the aforementioned film; and c) a yarning circle[13] conducted to foster collective reflection on their English learning experiences during the year. Sources b and c were generated on February 19, 2024. By that time, the students who had been in the 3rd grade had already completed their studies, while those who had been in the 1st grade in 2023 were now in the 2nd grade when they wrote their narratives and reflected on their previous year's English classes.

The research agents were selected according to the following criteria: a) their presence[14] and active participation in the aforementioned classes; b) the completion and submission of the assigned activities – a letter to a foreigner and a written narrative on their 2023 English classes; c) their presence and engagement in the yearning circle; and d) their consent to participate in the study. Considering these criteria and the limited space available to problematize all the empirical material

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[12] Other information was required in the narrative, such as a pseudonym, age, race, class identity, and profession.

[13] Only the parts most relevant to the study's topic were transcribed, and some formal adjustments were made, such as verb-noun agreement and omission of false turn beginnings. However, I ensured that their testimonies were not altered.

[14] Idê, one of the research agents of this study, did not attend the class in which we watched the movie *Mary and Max* because she had to take her son to a doctor's appointment in another city by boat. Since there is only one local ferry that leaves town at night, and our classes were held during the same shift, she was unable to attend the class on that night. However, she submitted all the other assignments and had always been a diligent student. That is why I kept her as one of the agents of this research.

generated, five students met the requirements. For this study, I selected four research agents: two from the first-year cohort and two from the third-year cohort.

To preserve ethical integrity, all research agents signed an Informed Consent Form (*Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido – TCLE*), authorizing their participation in the study and ensuring the anonymity of their identities. The four research agents are identified in parentheses by the pseudonyms they chose for themselves, along with the source of the empirical material, date, and grade, as shown in the example: (Abigail, written narrative, Feb. 19, 2024, 1st grade). Following are short descriptions of each research agent's profile according to the information shared in their written narratives.

Abigail is 32 years old and identifies as mestiza. She is a first-year student and places herself in a lower socioeconomic class. In her narrative, she mentions that she was able to learn many things in English that she never thought she would. Despite her difficulties with the language, Abigail stresses that the classes in which she watched a movie with her cohort were unique. In her words, "I honestly found this experience incredible, maybe unique. I loved everything I studied in the English classes in 2023" (Abigail, written narrative, Feb. 19, 2024, 1st grade).

Rebeca is 41 years old and identifies as mestiza. She is a first-year student and works as a saleswoman. She considers herself to be in a lower socioeconomic class. In her narrative, she points out that the she had never liked studying English before, but the classes she attended at IFPA were wonderful. According to her, the teacher's approach "always motivates us to want to learn more English. I could learn many words. Today I can say that I like studying English" (Rebeca, written narrative, Feb. 19, 2024, 1st grade).

Mari is 49 years old and identifies as mestiza. She is a third-year class student and works as a fisherwoman. She places herself in a lower socioeconomic class. In her narrative, she highlights several of the topics studied throughout the year such as the bingo game we played about school objects; numbers; telling the time; the song we learned about the seasons of the year; how to introduce oneself in English; and so on. In her words, "I fell in love with the subject […]. I learned a lot" (Mary, written narrative, Feb. 19, 2024, 3rd grade).

Idê is 54 years old and identifies as black. She is a third-year student and works as an artisan. She considers herself to be in a lower socioeconomic class. In her narrative, she transcribes the letter she wrote and leaves me, her teacher, a message at the end. In her words, "I'm thankful to teacher Ricardo, who, with his caring way of teaching, made me like English" (Idê, written narrative, Feb. 19, 2024, 3rd grade).

In the following section, I problematize the empirical material generated for this study drawing on three main topics: 1) the research agents' corpovivências co-constructed in relation to the film *Mary and Max*; 2) the research agents' corpovivências shaped by their connections to Óbidos, Pará; and 3) the research agents' corpovivências emerging from the 2023 English language classes.

3. EMPIRICAL MATERIAL DISCUSSION

3.1 The research agents' corpovivências co-constructed in relation to the film *Mary and Max*

During our yarning circle, I asked the students how their corpovivências were linked to the movie *Mary and Max*. In this subsection, I problematize the testimonies of Mari and Abigail regarding the topic. Mari said that she identified with the eight-year-old character because both of them had to start working at an early age and did not have many friends during elementary school. While Mary delivered pamphlets to save money for a trip to visit her friend Max in the United States of America, Mari helped her mother raise her own younger siblings. The research agent also shared some of the challenges she faced in school and reflected on how poverty impacted her studies:

> […] Mary worked. She was a girl, and yet she worked. During my entire childhood, I also had to work to help my parents. We lived on the farm, and I always helped them. I was the babysitter for my younger siblings. While my parents worked in the fields, I stayed home to look after them. By the time I was 10 years old, I already knew how to make porridge for my youngest sister. My mom would leave for work and say, "Daughter, listen…" – near our house there was a manioc plantation – "when your sister cries, go there, cut a few pieces of manioc, grate them, and you put them on the fire to boil, and then…" I would do exactly the way she told me. I helped my mom raise my siblings because she needed to work. As the eldest child, I had to take care of the others. Later, I started going to school, and it was really difficult. We were very poor. Everything I wanted, my mom couldn't afford because she had many children. We were seven in total – one passed away, so we became six. I remember that the teachers used to ask us to bring school supplies, and I would go to school with only a black pencil. I often got low grades in Mathematics because the teacher would ask us to color something, and I always colored it black because I had no colored pencils. My mom would say she couldn't afford them, so I colored everything with my black pencil. I started working at the age of 12 in family homes – my mom gave me away as a child worker. That's why I see myself in Mary. I didn't have many friends at school. I always preferred doing my assignments alone, and in that way, I saw myself in her. But I was never bullied – I don't remember ever experiencing that in my life. (Mari, yarning circle, Feb. 19, 2024, 3rd grade)

There are some similarities between Mary and Mari. Both are girls, both started working at an early age, and both were penalized by their teachers. They also had few friends at school. However, the reasons behind these experiences are quite different. For instance, Mari has five siblings, whereas Mary is an only child. Mari lived on the farm in the interior of the Amazon Rainforest, while Mary lived in a big city in Australia. At school, Mari was penalized because of her poverty, whereas Mary was mocked due to her haircut and a birthmark on her forehead. Mary is white, while Mari is mestiza.

Based on these characteristics, it is possible to see that Mari's childhood was marked by a combination of poverty, child exploration, and racial/social/gender exclusion. She began taking care of her younger siblings at the age of ten. Later, at twelve, she started working in family homes. When she finally had the opportunity to attend school, her poverty condemned her – for example, she

received low grades in one subject because she did not have colored pencils. This pattern of exclusion aligns with Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel's (2007, p. 16, emphasis in the original) argument that "racial discourses organize the world's population within an international division of labor that has direct economic implications: the 'superior races' occupy the best-paid positions, while the 'inferior' ones perform the most coercive and poorly paid jobs."

In Mari's case, her social class and gender (a poor woman), and especially her race (mestiza), played a central role in her multiple forms of exclusion within an Amazonian context – despite the fact that she mentions never being bullied in school. In my opinion, this last statement raises important questions: How is it possible to experience such multifaceted exclusion and yet not feel bullied by her classmates? Were her peers subjected to similar exclusions? What was life like for most children in the interior of Pará in the 1980s? And what is it like now? The intrinsic relationship between race, gender, and class may help us understand how many poor, Black, or Indigenous-descendant Amazonians have historically been condemned to what Souza (2021) terms as an endless state of barbarism.

In a rather lighter, yet captivating way of relating the movie to her corpovivências, Abigail tackles the issue of communication. She observes that nowadays, people get uneasy when they need to communicate with someone or research something because things are expected to happen instantly. Individuals want immediate replies. Back in the 1970s – the period portrayed in the movie – people had to wait. According to the research agent, people constructed relationships differently:

> What's most interesting is that, nowadays, it's so easy for us to communicate with someone on the other side of the world, right? We can see the person through our phones, our computers… But back then (as shown in the movie), it wasn't like that. They lived in anticipation. He (Max) would send her (Mary) a letter and then anxiously wait for her reply (and vice-versa). I put myself in their shoes, imagining what it was like to have a friendship like that. When I was younger — and I believe everyone here has been in a love relationship before — we used to send messages and feel anxious waiting for the reply. I keep thinking about what it would be like if we had to live like that today. It would be really interesting, but also a challenge, because we want everything instantly now. Sometimes we're researching something, we ask a question, and we want the answer right away. Back then, it wasn't like that. You sent a letter, and only after some time would you get a reply. And in those letters, people talked about what they liked, they were getting to know each other… It was a different pace, a different way of building relationships. (Abigail, yarning circle, Feb. 19, 2024, 1st grade)

Abigail raises the issue of how communication has changed over the decades, reflecting on how Mary and Max probably felt while waiting for each other's replies to their letters. Although the research agent did not problematize it from a social inequality stance – such as race, gender, or class – it is remarkable how the characters' anticipation touched Abigail to such an extent that she mobilized deeply rooted personal corpovivências (Almeida, 2023), linking these experiences to how people communicate nowadays.

Her remark that people who wrote letters used to share their interests and genuinely sought to know one another made me think of how, in 2024, some American men have been using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to interact with women on dating platforms[15]. As Roman Khaves, one of the co-founders of an AI dating assistant *Rizz*, said in an interview "dating is hard." According to him, dating has "become like a second job for many people – people are struggling. There's a lot of competition out there. Not only do people need to have great photos that stand out, but they also need to know how to start these conversations on dating apps." (Field, 2024, online)

Yes, coloniality has invaded the digital space and has directly affected how people, or maybe chatbots, interact with each other. This is yet another compelling reason to foster a more critical and decolonial language education in our English classes. Although many of us want everything instantly, as Abigail pointed out, any deep and fertile relationship with people, plants, animals, or the Earth itself takes time to blossom. And *this time* we must respect if we are to keep living on this planet.

3.2   The research agents' corpovivências shaped by their connections to Óbidos, Pará

In this subsection, I mobilize excerpts of the letters in which the research agents describe their relationship with the city of Óbidos, Pará. The fragments herein were written by Idê and Rebeca. As previously mentioned, Idê is 54 years old and identifies as black. She could not watch the movie due to the aforementioned reasons, but she wrote her letter. Her recipient is Paulo Sérgio, a man who lives in Australia. Idê starts her letter saying that she is "a woman with a heart full of love and a warrior" (Idê, letter, Oct. 24, 2023, 3rd grade), and mentions that she had to put up walls to protect herself from prejudiced people. This introduction is necessary to understand Idê's narration of the city. In her words,

> I live in a city where people exist in the stone age. The city is not yet well developed as the streets and squares do not have ramps and in some public places there is no access for wheelchair users to enter. Friend, is it similar in your city? Please, tell me a little about it. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your understanding. (Idê, letter, Oct. 24, 2023, 3rd grade)

Idê was born in an Afro-Amazonian community. She had polio at the age of three and became paralyzed. Nowadays, she has one son and lives in Óbidos, Pará. There have been countless situations in which Idê has publicly mentioned that the IFPA campus is the most accessible place for wheelchair users in the city. There are ramps in the pedagogical building, and she could attend all meetings and conferences in the auditorium because of its accessibility.

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[15] Available at: < https://www.cnbc.com/2024/02/14/generative-ai-is-shaking-up-online-dating-with-flirty-chatbots.html >. Accessed on: Apr. 25, 2025.

On the other hand, Óbidos, locally known as *the city of slopes*, does not have proper sidewalks downtown or, in some cases, even paved streets. During our yarning circle, Idê mentioned that the constitutional right to access education is not guaranteed for people with disabilities in many circumstances in Óbidos, Pará. Two examples she gave were the fact that not every school in the city is adapted for people with disabilities or the lack of preparation among teachers to support these students.

As one can see, the exercise of writing a letter to a foreigner describing their hometown gave space for problematizing the social difficulties faced by a wheelchair user in her city. Much more than simply talking about its natural beauties, which is quite common when people refer to the Amazon, local people also counter coloniality in different ways. Idê, for instance, is one of the people who identifies, questions, and interrupts coloniality by existing in places designed for her non-existence.

No matter if it was raining or scorching hot, Idê was one of the most frequent students in the classes, as documented in my electronic class register. Despite her difficulties with English, she often said that, throughout the classes, she was able to enjoy herself while studying the language. This statement helped me reflect on the importance of safeguarding every single public student's right to learn another language.

Rebeca's recipient is João Batista, a man who lives in New York. In her letter, she mentions some of the city's tourist attractions and how she feels blessed to be able to share her meals with her family. She also talks about her desire to travel by plane, albeit she is afraid of heights:

> I live in the city of Óbidos, Pará, with my parents and two brothers. Almost every day we have our meals together, which is a gift from God. Sometimes I feel like flying on a plane, but I am afraid of heights. Here in my city, we have many tourist spots, including a natural stream where we can take a bath in the cold water, which is simply wonderful. (Rebeca, letter, Oct. 24, 2023, 1st grade)

In a modern-colonial world where people are always in a rush, Rebeca's description of the town seems to have come straight out of a dystopian novel. How can someone have meals with their family almost every day? How is it possible to go to a natural stream to enjoy the clean, cold water? Although Óbidos, Pará, faces a wide range of economic, social, political, and infrastructural problems, life in the city does happen at a slower pace – at least from the perspective of someone who comes from a medium-sized city located in the Midwest of Brazil, like me.

Óbidos, Pará, was once the territory of an Indigenous ethnicity called *the Pauxis*. According to Santos, Conceição, and Silva (2020), when an Amazonian village was elevated to the status of a municipality, unlike other regions in Brazil, which were typically named after a geographic feature or a saint of the day, it received the name of a Portuguese city, as the Portuguese government sought to transform the Amazon into a mirror of Portugal.

Despite being popularly known as the most Portuguese city in Brazil, Óbidos

has a multiplicity of peoples with distinct histories, identities, and cultural practices. These were the main peoples who initially took part in its formation, bringing their cultures, particularities, and ways of life to the Amazon. In addition to the Indigenous peoples who were already present, Moroccans, Italians, Jews, Portuguese, and Black people were introduced (Santos; Conceição; Silva, 2020, p. 161).

Having said that, although coloniality is pervasive (Mignolo, 2017), as one can see in Idê's letter, I deeply believe that the corpovivências built within Óbidos, Pará – among its people, birds, rivers, and forest – can be relevant for the decolonial turn we seek. As the aforementioned authors (2020) affirm, although different colonial enterprises have left deep marks on Amazonian peoples, there have been multiple types of resistance and re-existence movements in these territories.

3.3   The research agents' corpovivências emerging from the 2023 English language classes

In this subsection, I problematize the four research agents' opinions regarding their English classes in 2023 and examine to what extent those classes allowed the students who participated in the study to re-signify their relationships with the language. One aspect that deserves attention is the fact that this topic was discussed during our yarning circle, and before mentioning what the English classes meant to them, all students shared parts of their journeys prior to studying at IFPA. It was then that I took advantage of our conversation to endorse that, to understand our learning process, it is imperative to take into account our embodied experiences, what I termed corpovivências.

Rebeca and Idê, despite their different reasons, shared something in common in their narratives. Both said that they did not like studying English before our classes together:

> I never liked studying English, but your classes were always wonderful. You always aimed to make students enjoy and truly learn your subject because you love what you do. Your teaching approach always motivated us to want to learn more English. I was able to learn many words, for example, and today I can say that I enjoy studying English. (Rebeca, written narrative, Feb. 9, 2024, 1st grade)

> To tell you the truth, I didn't like English. I didn't like English because I have difficulty with the language, especially with pronunciation. It's hard. I feel embarrassed to pronounce words and get them wrong, and people laugh. Then, I feel ashamed. But when you arrived, things changed [...]. I learned to like it because of the games you brought to class, like bingo, and the songs we had to sing. That was wonderful. Even though I didn't know how to pronounce everything, I was there imitating the songs, you know? So that's why I liked it! (Idê, yarning circle, Feb. 9, 2024, 3rd grade)

Echoing Mastrella-de-Andrade's (2011) argument that language learners' anxiety is closely tied to speaking – as speaking a foreign language demands immediate exposure – Idê mentioned her difficulty in pronouncing words in English. Although she referred to a time before our 2023 English classes, this sentiment still lingered during our classes, albeit with much less intensity, in my view.

As Souza (2024, p. 2) points out, we, as YAE English teachers "must not forget where these individuals come from, we need to understand the context of such a specific group and advocate for their right to access foreign language education." Much more than simply acquiring structures, I envisioned classes in which students could *live* the language. I deeply wanted them to feel embraced by the English language and to believe in themselves as important agents in the implementation of a less violent and exclusionary society.

As the aforementioned author states (2024), YAE English teachers face many challenges, such as the reduced number of classes per week and the precarious access to pedagogical resources. These aspects are crucial, and we cannot turn a blind eye to the difference it would make if we had more time to develop our work or the minimum conditions to purchase materials for larger projects.

While we continue fighting for these necessary improvements, I believe in the possibility of co-creating spaces of empathetic listening (Rezende, 2017) with our students, so that they can understand that we do not learn languages solely from grammar or textbooks; we learn them from/with people, their struggles, their dreams, their ongoing fights against coloniality, their resistances and their re-existences.

Abigail and Mari mentioned that they could reflect on distinct language structures because I would explain things in an affectionate and proper way. Abigail stressed that she could realize and understand why she was making some mistakes, while Mari emphasized the contents she learned and how she related to the subject:

> There were many things I learned in the English classes that I thought I wouldn't be able to learn. As I was telling you, the content we studied was just the verb *to be*, so I only learned the basics. There were also some things we learned that were wrong. I realized that while studying with you, who explained everything properly and told us why. Some words I had learned before our classes, I realized I had learned them incorrectly. (Abigail, yarning circle, Feb. 9, 2024, 1st grade)

> The English classes in 2023 were great for me. I already liked the school subject. I think it's very beautiful to speak this language, and you, teacher, with your affectionate way of teaching us step by step how to learn to speak it. I really liked when you did that bingo about school supplies, learning the time, numbers, saying good morning, good afternoon, good evening/night, how to introduce ourselves, and singing in English. I already liked English, but I fell in love with the subject. (Mari, written letter, Feb. 9, 2024, 3rd grade)

Abigail and Mari both highlighted that they were able to learn something in their English classes, with Mari even listing some of the topics covered the previous year. Their descriptions of me, their teacher at the time, are also shared in their accounts. Speaking of my teaching praxis, I deeply believe in the importance of listening to my students' desires, dreams, and aspirations. And I try to do it in a way that their corpovivências can be linked to what we do in the classes. However, as Paulo Freire (1992, p. 67) argues,

> There is no way not to repeat that teaching is not the mere mechanical transfer of the content from the teacher to the student, who is passive and docile. Nor is there any way not to repeat that starting from the knowledge students already have does not mean revolving endlessly around that knowledge. Starting means setting out on a path, moving, shifting from one point to another — not staying still or remaining in the same place. I have never said, as some sometimes suggest or claim I did, that we should revolve, enchanted, around the students' knowledge like a moth around a light.

That is why empathetic listening (Rezende, 2017) must be accompanied by a deep problematization of how coloniality and its multiple dimensions affect our lives, and how we can build collective strategies to identify, question, and interrupt these violences against our bodies, especially our beings, knowledge(s), and language(s). And, as Paulo Freire (1992) suggests, we do it in motion, shifting places and standpoints, building corpovivências otherwise. Mari's, Abigail's, Idê's, and Rebeca's testimonies show parts of their journeys in Óbidos, Pará, toward understanding that learning English can serve as a means to help them revisit, problematize, and, if they find it necessary, re-signify their corpovivências.

FINAL REMARKS

In this paper, I aimed to problematize the corpovivências of four Youth and Adult Education students in the context of our 2023 English classes at a Federal Institute in Óbidos, Pará, Brazil. In an effort to identify, question, and interrupt some Western ontoepistemologies, I adopted the principles of critical (language) education research that embraced the corpovivências of the research agents. Rather than simply analyzing their empirical material, I deeply wanted to learn from/with them, and below are some of the most important lessons these four students taught me.

First, when we focus on building an empathetic listening environment, students speak. It does not matter if it is in Portuguese, English, Spanish, or any other language. They speak. And when they do, teachers must set things in motion and problematize the world with them. Second, our classes must provide students with the support they need to relate those texts (in a broader sense) to their corpovivências. In this study, for instance, students watched a movie about an Australian girl and an American middle-aged man, and were able of relating that seemingly distant context to their lives in Óbidos, Pará. And they did so in English classes, often judged as the most colonial subject. Finally, this experience shows that YAE students in the Amazon region of Brazil carry corpovivências that are equally vital to the decolonial turn we desire, proving that it is time to listen to these people who have been resisting and re-existing in so many ways in the lungs of the planet.

Despite the various challenges faced by the population, Óbidos is home to eighteen *Quilombola* communities located in upland and floodplain areas (Santos; Conceição; Silva, 2020). Some of the research agents in this study are part of these communities or have a close relationship

with them. They are living proof of resistance and re-existence in this world of coloniality, and I feel honored to have built – what I dare say – decolonial corpovivências with them.

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