Decolonizing English Language Teaching with Literature in a course at a federal university in Bahia

Decolonizando o ensino de língua inglesa com literatura em um componente de uma universidade federal na Bahia

Decolonizando la enseñanza del inglés con la literatura en una materia de una universidad federal en Bahia

CADERNOS de LINGUAGEM & SOCIEDADE

Papers on Language and Society

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RESUMO

Ao longo de minhas experiências de ensino, tenho enfatizado a necessidade de incorporar a concepção de educação linguística de língua inglesa (Decolonialidade e[m] Linguística Aplicada, 2022; Pessoa et al., 2020) em minhas aulas em uma mirada decolonial. Em direção a uma proposta afinada com pedagogias decoloniais (Walsh, 2018; Oliveira, 2028; Pessoa et al., 2020; Mota-Pereira, 2024), ministrei aulas em um componente de língua inglesa na Universidade Federal da Bahia e decidi colocar essas teorias em prática, utilizando, entre outros materiais, textos literários. Proporcionei aos alunos não apenas oportunidades de estudar uma língua sob uma perspectiva não hegemônica, mas também de expandir seu pensamento crítico sobre questões sociais, raciais e de gênero no Sul Global. Neste artigo, analiso, autoetnograficamente (Ifa; Moura, 2019; Pereira, 2020), aulas e experiências nesse componente curricular.

Palavras-chave: Educação Linguística de Inglês; Decolonialidade; Autoetnografia; Sul Global.

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ARTIGO

ABSTRACT

Over my teaching experiences, I have emphasized the need to incorporate English language education (Decolonialidade e[m] Linguística Aplicada, 2022; Pessoa et al., 2020) in my classes from a decolonial perspective. Moving toward a proposal in line with decolonial pedagogies (Walsh, 2018; Oliveira, 2028; Pessoa et al., 2020; Mota-Pereira, 2024), I taught a group of English learners in a course at the Federal University of Bahia and decided to put these theories into practice, using, among other material, literary texts. I provided students with not only opportunities to study a language from a non-hegemonic light, but also to expand their critical thinking about social, racial, and gender matters in the Global South. In this paper, I analyze, autoethnographically (Ifa; Moura, 2019; Pereira, 2020), classes and experiences in this course.

Keywords: English Language Education; Decoloniality; Autoethnography; Global South.

RESUMEN

A lo largo de mi experiencia docente, he enfatizado la necesidad de incorporar la enseñanza del inglés (Decolonialidade e[m] Linguística Aplicada, 2022; Pessoa et al., 2020) en mis clases desde perspectiva decolonial. Avanzando hacia una propuesta que resuena con las pedagogías decoloniales (Walsh, 2018; Oliveira, 2028; Pessoa et al., 2020; Mota-Pereira, 2024), impartí clases a un grupo de estudiantes del inglés en la Universidad Federal de Bahia y decidí poner en práctica estas teorías, utilizando, entre otros materiales, textos literarios. Ofrecí a los estudiantes no solo oportunidades para estudiar un idioma desde una perspectiva no hegemónica, sino también para ampliar su pensamiento crítico sobre cuestiones sociales, raciales y de género en el Sur Global. En este artículo, analizo, de forma autoetnográfica (Ifa; Moura, 2019; Pereira, 2020), lecciones y experiencias en esta materia.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza del inglés; Decolonialidad; Autoetnografía; Sur global.

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INTRODUÇÃO

As a black woman, born in the Northeast of Brazil, which is more geopolitically aligned with the geopolitical South (Pennycook; Makoni, 2020), coming from a low-income background, I have never related to the representations of middle or upper-class characters with elitist habits in the English textbooks (Siqueira, 2012; Borelli et al., 2020; Mota-Pereira, 2022) in the classes I attended or taught. The lack of identification with these representations played a role in my self-esteem as a learner and a teacher. Although it did not discourage me from studying or teaching this language, it made me feel inadequate as an English speaker and as a teacher in some moments. For me, not being seen in the field that I studied meant not being able to exist in it.

The absence of a sense of belonging as a speaker and teacher was caused by similar situations reported by Lisboa and Nascimento (2024), who refer to questions commonly asked of English teachers with the expectation that they have a standard profile or a profile that is prone to standardization. Additionally, both authors state that they were not accepted for jobs because their qualifications would not favor passive subjugation to norms. I have faced comparable situations in my life and acknowledge that some moments when people asked me questions about having lived abroad or where I had learned to speak English were motivated by their surprise at seeing a black English teacher from a low-income social class. As for not being subject to norms, my writing style in English, which expresses a Brazilian and plurilingual identity, has made me unsuitable for publications, for example, which require standardization.

I convey my personal experiences affected by representations, limited and limiting conceptions about English language learning and teaching, to introduce my reflections in this paper on the importance of decolonizing English language teaching, starting from the choice for the term English language education (Decolonialidade e[m] Linguística Aplicada, 2022; Pessoa et al., 2020) instead of English language teaching. Concerning the difference between them, I rely on Menezes de Souza's (Decolonialidade e[m] Linguística Aplicada, 2022) conceptualization of language education, which is defined as beyond the teaching of linguistic aspects, embracing discursive and cultural varieties and differences. For this distinction, I also resort to Pessoa et al.'s (2020) definition of this type of education as dialogical, in which both teachers and students are learners. In line with this concept of education, I incorporate a discursive perspective about language (Decolonialidade e[m] Linguística Aplicada, 2022; Jordão; Fogaça, 2012), contrary to prevailing modern linguistic ideologies, which conceive of language as an abstract homogenizing entity instead of viewing it as a plural social phenomenon (Bastos et al., 2021).

Reflections on language education (Decolonialidade e[m] Linguística Aplicada, 2022; Pessoa et al., 2020) intertwine with musings impelled by my condition as a black woman. The intersection of these two aspects of my identity, that is, race and gender, made me wonder if, by teaching English, I would be choosing the side of hegemony and, therefore, oppression. In this regard, I have been

questioned about my positioning as a decolonial thinker and an English teacher, which some people see as a contradiction, as if it were incongruent to speak about decoloniality in this language (Conti, 2023) or to work with it. What these people may not notice is that, in their argument, they defend other European languages that are only less hegemonic (Conti, 2023).

Memories of situations that made me feel unsuitable because I belong to a subaltern position and navigate spaces of privilege, as a professor and a PhD, shatter representations of my identity. Because of these fractured representations, I started questioning my beliefs and the epistemologies that guided me. In a moment of deep crisis, I fortunately found the African American thinker bell hooks and read her text “Language” (hooks, 1994), which redirected my attention to the oppressive uses of English instead of seeing these acts of domination as intrinsic to the language. From this point, I decided I would not reproduce the colonial (Hsu, 2015; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; hooks, 1994) and neoliberal (Hsu, 2015) uses of this language, but that I would southernize my praxis through my readings, writings, cultural, and aesthetic experiences, travel destinations, and other paths. For my decolonization, reading literary texts produced by writers from the Global South (Mota-Pereira, 2024) has helped me access manifold cosmoperceptions (Oyewùmí, 2021) and delve into the plurilingual realities of the countries in them.

In this paper, I discuss this self-decolonization and present how I southernized the syllabus of an English language course I taught at the Federal University of Bahia using literature and other media (Pereira, 2017). To accomplish this goal, I resort to autoethnography (Ifa; Moura, 2019; Pereira, 2020) in terms of methodology and situate the epistemological bedrock that underpins my reflections in the field of Critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook, 2001) and others.

1. SOUTHERNIZING MY PATH TOWARDS DECOLONIAL PRAXIS

Academia can be seen as a place of oppression, but also of possibilities (hooks, 1994). I have been affected by both its oppressive mechanisms and its liberating alternatives. Liberation is certainly the prevailing representation of my academic life. Nonetheless, I have also experienced its oppressive side. For instance, when I started my career as a professor, as I discussed elsewhere (Pereira, 2020), I felt compelled to incorporate canonical references to my syllabus, because I thought this was my students’ and colleagues’ expectations. I used to think that adopting the world’s most well-known references would make me suitable for the position I had.

Years later, I learned, in a workshop I delivered at a public school, that the most important suitability is bridging academia and local realities. This lesson stemmed from a question raised by a seventh-grade student about the incongruence between Human Rights speeches, which were the gist of my workshop, and the deprivation of rights in poor communities. As he recounted his experiences of violence and scarcity in his early teenage years, I saw my plan to discuss Human Rights being dismantled. What I learned from the sessions made me redirect my attention from

canonical references in English language teaching to a concept of education that fights oppressions. This was the moment when I started to include thinkers such as Paulo Freire (2005), bell hooks (1994), and Kumaravadivelu (2003) to my classes, along with local authors who mull over English language education. It was a very important stage of my process of decolonization (Monteiro, 2023; Mota-Pereira, 2022; Borelli et al., 2020; Maldonado-Torres, 2019; Oliveira, 2018; Walsh, 2018) through southernization (Pennycook; Makoni, 2020).

As Rupi Kaur (2017, p. 79) expresses in one of her poems about becoming a butterfly, “growth is a process” and so is decolonization. The abovementioned experience at a public school helped me change my attitude, but it was not enough for a holistic decolonization. Likewise, it was not sufficient to read manifold references (Monteiro, 2023; Mota-Pereira, 2022; Borelli et al., 2020; Maldonado-Torres, 2019; Oliveira, 2018; Walsh, 2018) in the field to decolonize myself and my pedagogical praxes. In this sense, another step toward my self-decolonization was to reflect on my epistemological choices and notice whether there was a balance of references in the same fashion that Achebe (2000, p. 73) argues for a “balance of stories”. In search of balance, due to an excessive emphasis on texts produced in the Global North in the initial years of my teaching praxis as a professor, I started to focus on the Global South in terms of references, pedagogical praxes, linguistic concepts, and cosmoperceptions (Oyewùmí, 2021).

My process of self-decolonization and decolonization of my praxiologies (Pessoa et al., 2020) was enhanced by educational theorists from the Global South and literary texts that gave me access to experiences and cultural aspects, which I would not have known if not through them (Pereira, 2019). Knowledge from manifold experiences and modes of being and living was also widened by trips to countries like South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Singapore, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Barbados, and New Zealand, and the study of languages such as Arabic, Japanese, Guarani, Swahili, and Mandarin.

Concerning theory, the focus on Global South thinkers made me problematize and unlearn (Walsh, 2018) the western-based compartmentalization (hooks, 1994) of life and education, body and mind, and have a broader perception of the holistic nature of education, which also encompasses emotions and spirituality (hooks, 1994). Additionally, I strengthened the notion of the political nature of education (Freire, 2005) and the importance of relying on learners’ social milieu (Freire, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2003) while focusing on other people subalternized by capitalist modernity, as decolonial pedagogies teach (Oliveira, 2018; Borelli et al., 2020).

Prioritizing subalternity redefined my literary interests. I started reading black and indigenous writers’ (Mota-Pereira, 2024) literary texts, which broadened my repertoire for my classes and life. The lessons I learned from texts such as *The Alternative* by Solomon-Islander Saunana (1980) and *The Whale-Rider* by the Maori Ihimaera (2008) pointed to colonialities (Maldonado-Torres, 2019) and differences in cosmoperceptions (Oyewùmí, 2021), which I not only read but experienced through the characters’ personal and cultural crossings.

As for my travels, visiting countries in the Global South expanded my cultural, social, and emotional knowledge while also giving me perceptions about language use other than the ones found in textbooks, which portray languages as deprived of their social (re)configurations and implications, instead of recognizing them as discourse (Bastos et al., 2021; Decolonialidade e(m) Linguística Aplicada, 2022; Jordão; Fogaça, 2012). In countries such as South Africa, Singapore, New Zealand, Egypt, and Morocco, I noticed how the borders among languages are, as Makoni (2005) put it, an invention, not being fixed in compartments (Makalela, 2019). To illustrate, I mention a scene from the novel *Johannesburg* by the South African writer Melrose (2017), in which Peter talks to Duduzile in Zulu about a sad situation, and she is surprised that this white man can speak Zulu fluently. Conversely, the use of multiple languages is not a surprising fact in South Africa. During my stay in this country, I observed how plurilingual, or in Makalela's (2019) term, multilingual this country is, and witnessed several situations in which people talked to each other in different languages instead of using a common language or a lingua franca.

South African plurilingual practices converge with Makalela's (2019, p. 17) discussions about ubuntu translanguaging pedagogies, which "reflect the ubuntu principles of ecological interdependence". According to this type of pedagogy, having diverse languages in the same classroom is fruitful and reflects the belief that languages are mutually dependent and that "one linguistic entity does not survive without the other, as is decreed in the ubuntu value system of existence: I am because you are, you are because we are." (Makalela, 2019, p. 17).

Experiences in countries in the Global South also allowed me to access several literary texts and notice aspects that reading about characters' lives provides. Moreover, I grasped linguistic nuances through the study of languages spoken in these countries, which I regard as an important stage of my self-decolonization. Having graduated at a time when only European languages were part of the curriculum affected me in a way that, for many years, I could only envisage the possibility of studying such languages. When I started reading authors like Walter Mignolo (2018, p. 114), who shed light on the "'colonial matrix of power'" and the disregard to knowledge that is not Eurocentered, including all that is produced in languages like Persian, Urdu, Mandarin, and Arabic, I realized that if I wanted a decolonial shift, I should decolonize my ideologies about language learning. At this point, I reflected on how I would approach linguistic decolonization if I only studied colonial languages, and for colonial reasons, that is, because they are the most dominant languages.

A very significant movement toward linguistic decolonization happened when I studied Guarani in a course offered at the university where I work. The study of this language introduced me to the Guarani way of living with their deep connection with nature, which led me to the concept of *Bem Viver* (Acosta, 2019), books by indigenous Brazilian writers, a trip to New Zealand, and the Maori ethnicity, accessed through the works by Ihimaera (2008) and Smith (2012). Because of an increasing interest in ecological matters, I watched a lecture about Ecolinguistics by Arran Stibbe and got inspired to study Japanese, especially because of the concept of "satoyama" (Stibbe, 2015,

p. 32), in which culture and nature are interwoven. This concept coincides with *Bem Viver* (Acosta, 2016) in the purpose of a harmonious coexistence between human beings and other beings.

The next step of my decolonizing path was the study of Arabic, motivated by the commitment to positioning myself against all kinds of prejudice, including Islamophobia, and deconstructing "single stories" (Adichie, 2009). Arabic has inspired me to visit Arab countries, understand the richness of the diverse cultures under the overarching Arab world, and realize that the defense of their language might be a barrier for other people to know their stories, but it is the bedrock on which their connection and communion are lived. More recently, I have studied Mandarin and Swahili. My studies of Mandarin are stirred by a curiosity about Chinese culture and the constant relations between this country and Brazil, which has shaped the hope of a new design of the World Order. As for Swahili, I felt compelled to study it after reading a book by Nascimento (2016), who defended an African lingua franca and saw Swahili as a very suitable language for this purpose, since it is widely spoken. I do not endorse having a lingua franca in the face of African plurilingualism, but this is a better alternative than always relying on a European language as a lingua franca.

Epistemologies and literary texts from the Global South, travel destinations, and languages have paved my path toward decolonial pedagogies (Monteiro, 2023; Mota-Pereira, 2022; 2024; Oliveira, 2018; Walsh, 2018). In sequence, I will discuss, on an autoethnographic (Ifa; Moura, 2019; Pereira, 2020) basis, a lesson sequence that I taught in an English language course at the Federal University of Bahia, in which I implemented a decolonial pedagogy (Monteiro, 2023; Mota-Pereira, 2022, 2024; Oliveira, 2018; Walsh, 2018) by southernizing topics, materials, and activities.

2. SOUTHERNIZING ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR A DECOLONIAL PEDAGOGY: REFLECTIONS ON A LESSON SEQUENCE

A decolonial positioning is a life choice that encompasses what Kumaravadivelu (2003, p. 540) calls "an attitude of the mind". By stating this, he means that decolonization is not limited to a specific phenomenon, but that it should be part of processes that involve ideologies and actions. Additionally, he states that English language teaching has favored colonialities, which serve a project of domination through, for example, the teaching of a level of English that would be only enough for subaltern work positions in India. This strategy aligns with one of the effects of coloniality, which, according to Maldonado-Torres (2019), is to keep the subaltern in fixed positions. The relationship between the widespread use of English and the labor market is also discussed by Hsu (2015), who denounces the neoliberalism employed by the imposition of English in the Philippines and Puerto Rico, where the study of this language has been naturalized as the norm and allowed the broad reach of US companies.

The colonial and neoliberal projects displayed by Kumaravadivelu (2003) and Hsu (2015) are not alien to Brazil. To illustrate, the guiding document for basic education in the country, the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (Brazil, 2018), henceforth, BNCC, highlights labor as one of the main

purposes of basic education, even in middle school. Carvalho et al. (2017) unveiled the neoliberal aims that undergird the BNCC (Brazil, 2018). In this regard, neoliberalism is at the roots of the decision to have English as the only mandatory foreign language in basic education, which has affected other language teacher education programs. The choice of English favors the agenda revealed by Hsu (2015) of making it possible for US markets to have a ubiquitous dissemination through language domination.

Forewarned by Carvalho et al. (2017), I read the BNCC (Brazil, 2018) through critical discourse analysis lenses (Fairclough, 2016; Resende, 2019) and noticed the presence of neoliberal goals and capitalist ideology (Althusser, 2018), starting from the overemphasis on work. This domineering agenda is combined with the use of the term citizenship to urge for tolerance and wellbeing instead of naming, explicitly, the mechanisms that engender social injustice, which involve the main axes of coloniality, that is, racism and capitalism (Oliveira, 2018) besides other forms of hierarchization such as sexism, LGBT+phobia, ableism, and ageism. Not naming these types of prejudice maintains the homogenizing notion of equal rights and citizenship that equips people to ignore and naturalize asymmetries, discourses on racial democracy (Nascimento, 2016), and the association of capitalism with democracy that overshadows its injustices.

The perception of the lack of a political tone in the BNCC (Brasil, 2018), which could be clear about taking the oppressed side (Freire, 2005), made me read this document critically. Thus, in teaching practicum classes, for instance, I always raise reflections on the importance of addressing local subalternities and naming them explicitly. Such orientation mirrors decolonial praxes, as claimed by Borelli et al. (2020, p. 315), who state that “we can use our English to problematize discourses of oppression and promote discourses that favor plurality and localized knowledges”. This tenet guided the planning of my classes for an English course I taught at the university.

In this English course, I first got students to know each other, guided by hooks (2010, p. 20), who asserts: “I do not begin to teach in any setting without first laying the foundation for building community in the classroom. To do this, teacher and students must take time to get to know one another.” For this initial moment, I relied on a scene from a novel by Sapphire (1997), in which the teacher, Blue Rain, got students to introduce themselves by presenting herself first and bringing about aspects of her personal life to create an environment of trust. She gave a list of items for this moment of introductions, which included their likes, aptitudes, and basic personal information. I did a similar activity and made room for students to express themselves on other aspects that they could feel comfortable sharing. I gave this prompt at the beginning of the course because I did not know the students’ level and wanted to provide the building blocks for everybody to participate in English. In addition, I got some input about students’ previous learning experiences, their needs, and shared my tentative proposal for the classes. At this point, I elicited their expectations and wishes for the course.

Borelli et al. (2020) gave a more enriching and decolonial alternative to this moment of introductions. Instead of providing a prompt for some information, aiming at getting to know students and language practice, the teacher had them read a short text about identity, exploring its meaning. The activity created a safe space where students felt comfortable sharing aspects of their identities that revealed subalternities highlighted by the teacher as fruitful.

Throughout the course, inspired by authors like Monteiro (2023), Mota-Pereira (2022), Borelli et al. (2020), Pereira (2019), I also tried to make room for the expression of students' identity (Borelli et al., 2020) while raising conscientization (hooks, 1994; Freire, 2005) about colonialities (Monteiro, 2023; Maldonado-Torres, 2019; Oliveira, 2018), among which I emphasized the ones related to racism, sexism, and capitalism. From the outset, I subverted the syllabus as it was conventionally designed. According to the course syllabus I had consulted before taking over the group, the topics were centered on grammar and functions. I noticed that it was mainly oriented by Communicative Language Teaching (Brown, 2007), which guides practices toward linguistic and communicative competence (Pereira, 2017) and fails to embrace social and political reflections. Guided by concepts of Language Education (Decolonialidade e[m] Linguística Aplicada, 2022; Pessoa et al., 2020), I followed a more decolonial proposal based on my research in the field of decoloniality and the intersection between literature and teaching. My initial plan was to resort to texts and materials mostly produced by black and indigenous women from the Global South (Pennycook; Makoni, 2020). I made this decision considering intersectionality (Collins; Bilge, 2016) and Lorde's (2019) musings on not hierarchizing oppressions.

Regarding the decolonial orientation of localizing knowledge, I noticed that discussing race, gender, and social class echoed the social, cultural, and political landscape where the course took place, and all the moments of language practice were fueled by subjective and collective input. Having social, racial, and gender matters in mind, body, spirit, and emotions, I used literature extensively in my classes, beginning with an excerpt from a novel by Sapphire, an African-American writer who discusses subalternity, as I mentioned. This reference set the tone of the course, which prioritized voices from the Global South.

In the next class, I presented some of the main discussions of the course: language and culture, in which I contended that the word "culture" involves power, society, identity, language, and prejudice. For this discussion, I engaged students in reflections on Adichie's (2009) *The Danger of a Single Story*, raising reflections on stereotypes about people and places, followed by the study of the poem "An Introduction" by Kamala Das, in which the poet expresses her feelings of linguistic belongings and situations of imposed displacement by those who do not see her as having the right to speak a language that is not her mother tongue. These activities had the purpose of tackling ideologies about language.

The discussion on culture was amplified in the following class, which aimed at conceptualizing culture according to different sources and as related to language, ideology,

prejudice, and variety. With this purpose, I referred to the novel *Push* (Sapphire, 1997) as a review, underlining classroom humanization, in consonance with engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), gender issues, and linguistic plurality. Concerning language, I remarked on the plurilingual nature of languages that involve others, such as the case of African languages of the enslaved people, who were obliged to learn English and reshaped it (hooks, 1994). I supplemented this discussion with a reflection on Brazilian Portuguese, presenting the term “pretoguês” (Gonzalez, 1988), that is, Black Portuguese, which means the presence of African languages in Portuguese.

I underpinned the comments on the plurality of the English language with the study of Black English features based on McWhorter’s (2017) book. In this lesson, I raised a debate about language bias and diversity on the grounds of the concept of Standard English and Black English, both presented as varieties of the language. I also highlighted the discrimination against Black English, which is commonly portrayed in a negative light. This class about Black English paved the way to address *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982), from which I used an excerpt discussed through the intersemiotic translation of the novel into a movie. This novel allowed me to bring musings on patriarchy and on how women can find solidarity in each other to face sexism, as the characters in the novel did. Before playing the video segment, I elicited what students remembered about Black English and their previous knowledge about the novel. After a brief presentation about the plot, the next procedures were while-viewing and post-viewing activities that entailed an interpretation of the video segment and features of Black English.

Literature also figured as prolific material in other classes. Part of the syllabus included the study of tales. Aiming at a “balance of stories” (Achebe, 2000, p. 73), I chose an African folktale instead of a Western fairy tale and a short story by Achebe (2018), “Chike’s School Days”. The purpose of choosing a folktale unfolded into a discussion about the importance of oral tradition in the African context. Besides, students had the experience of producing meaning from a multimodal text, since the tale was an animation, while expanding their listening and writing skills in a review. In consonance with this folktale, I assigned a short story by Achebe (2018), in which the main character is passionate about his school, fascinated by the words of the English language, and obedient to colonial conventions taught by his family, who converted to Christianity.

In the next classes about “Chike’s School Days” (Achebe, 2018), I approached colonialism and coloniality, which I conceptualized based on Maldonado-Torres (2019). On the grounds of this conceptualization, I raised reflections on the presence of coloniality in education, which led to a discussion on different types of pedagogy. Considering that the course focused on subalternities, I addressed Freire’s (2005) pedagogy of the oppressed. While introducing the concept of banking and problem-posing education (Freire, 2005), I elicited students’ memories of their school days and what they think English language classrooms look like nowadays. This discussion was part of an underlying goal of the course, which was to introduce students to reflections on teaching in a course that did not plainly aim at this purpose.

Reflections on education were common in the following classes, involving teacher and learner roles. For this purpose, I reviewed “Chike’s School Days” (Achebe, 2018) and introduced another African literary text: *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (Kamkwamba; Mealer, 2019). I used this text to illustrate the Freirean concept of epistemic curiosity (Freire, 2014). Kamkwamba, the protagonist of the story and co-author of the novel, studied by himself and produced a windmill to help his community, affected by long periods of drought and famine. I chose excerpts from this novel because they illustrated his dedication and combined them with the ones quoted from Carolina Maria de Jesus’ (2014) *Quarto de Despejo*, which I translated into English. One of the objectives in using Jesus’ diary was to have students know her thirst for knowledge and writing and her hardship in reconciling her life as a single mother, scrap collector, and writer in the Brazilian context. Another objective was to study an example of journaling that would enable students to write their learner diary, which was part of the process-oriented activities in the course.

With the activities about *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (Kamkwamba; Mealer, 2019) and *Quarto de Despejo* (Jesus, 2014), I also intended to address the difference between learning and studying, inspired by Larrosa’s (2020) musings on the matter and the social impact that studying can have beyond an individual sphere. At this point, I underscored the importance of education that is not limited to the goals of economic growth and development as implied in the ideologies in the BNCC (Brazil, 2018) and other discourses (Fairclough, 2016; Resende, 2019) around education. In this view, in the following class, I introduced the concept of discourse as social practice and production according to Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2016; Resende, 2019) to engage students in activities about the concept of *Bem Viver* (Acosta, 2016), which, as I already mentioned, refers to the harmonic coexistence among human beings and other beings, considering human and nature rights, and explained the categories of discourse defined by Stibbe (2019) in Ecolinguistics. According to him, there are beneficial, destructive, and ambivalent discourses that act in shaping people’s attitudes toward consumption and the environment (Stibbe, 2019).

The classes on *Bem Viver* also encompassed literature and music. In this regard, I contrasted ideologies (Althusser, 2008) in the songs *Billionaire* by Bruno Mars and *Mountains o’ Things* by Tracy Chapman, which allude to the American Dream on a capitalist basis that refers to a material life that only money can afford in Mars’s song, and consequent exploitation of subaltern people because of social inequalities, as the song by Chapman expresses. In contrast to capitalist ideologies, I brought the poem “Remember” by the Cherokee Native US writer Joy Harjo. This poem conveys an indigenous cosmoperception (Oyewùmí, 2021), which singles out nature and asserts that it is closely interwoven with human life. The poet evokes this interconnectedness through an act of memory.

During the discussions on *Bem Viver*, I shared past experiences teaching this concept to public school students. My goal was to provide students with an example of a lesson on English language education from a decolonial perspective, which was the last topic of the course. In the classes about decolonial English language education (Mota-Pereira, 2024), I addressed the

differences between teaching and education, illustrated how to use literature to tackle topics of social relevance, and gave two examples of literary texts that express an indigenous cosmoperception (Oyewùmí, 2021) by two Maori writers, namely Ihimaera (2008) and Makereti (2018).

The topics throughout the course were combined with the study of linguistic content, which is part of systemic knowledge. However, in contrast to grammar-centeredness, I contextualized all the grammatical topics, having them as building blocks for meaning-making. In addition to linguistic features, the classes covered other components expected of an English lesson, such as writing, reading, listening, and speaking practice, along with the study of strategies that would develop students' competencies to become more effective communicators.

The last topic of the course was English as a lingua franca. While addressing it, I explained that this is the concept of English indicated by the BNCC (Brazil, 2018) and underlined that there are more non-native speakers than native speakers of English, thus problematizing the paradigm of the native speaker as the model (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

As for assessment, it was process-oriented for reasons related to decolonial pedagogy (Mota-Pereira, 2024; Monteiro, 2023; Walsh, 2018; Oliveira, 2018). Alternative assessment (Huerta-Macías, 2002), which privileges a diverse range of activities that meet different learner profiles, was my choice to allow students to reflect on their learning process and study while being assessed. The criteria for their assessment were tailored according to every learner's achievement.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this paper, I reflected on my process of self-decolonization as a path for decolonizing my teaching praxis, which was guided by the concept of language education (Decolonialidade e[m] Linguística Aplicada, 2022; Pessoa et al., 2020) and decolonial pedagogy (Mota-Pereira, 2024; Monteiro, 2023; Walsh, 2018; Oliveira, 2018). In light of these concepts, I discussed how decoloniality reshaped my attitudes toward reading choices, epistemologies, travel destinations, and other exercises of living and being. Similarly, I displayed decolonial epistemologies and ontologies on which I relied to plan and teach the classes in an English course at the Federal University of Bahia.

With this paper, I intend to demonstrate that it is possible to turn a course initially aimed at language practice with a focus on systemic knowledge into a course that also entails social, racial, and gender matters on a decolonial basis. Transformation beyond linguistic goals and the classroom was an important objective that guided my praxis. As I demonstrated in this paper, I believe this course successfully achieved it.

I underpinned decolonial experiences, reported in this paper, with literature and other media (Pereira, 2017; 2019). They provided the input for reflections on manifold modes of existence, language use, and possibilities, through interpretation and imagination, which resignify and reinvent

life, while nourishing a sense of belonging, fostered by an agenda of social, racial, and gender plurality.

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