

VISUAL CULTURE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: VISION AND RE-VISION OF REPRESENTATION THROUGH GENEALOGY AND CULTURAL TRANSLATION

CULTURA VISUAL “ATRAVÉS DO ESPELHO”: VISÃO E REVISÃO DA REPRESENTAÇÃO POR MEIO DA GENEALOGIA E TRADUÇÃO CULTURAL

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ABSTRACT

Based upon Foucauldian and Derridean post-structuralist philosophy of language, Sousa Santos and Menezes de Souza's sociological approaches to language, Hall's productive conceptualization of culture and on Mirzoeff, Stam and Shohat's visual studies, this paper seeks to engage with discussions on visual culture, cultural translation and language education. Of qualitative/interpretative nature, this reflection is divided into five main sections: in the introduction, it presents philosophical and sociological approaches to (visual) language and culture. Section one problematizes visual culture by means of the genealogy of invisible bodies. Next section evolves from the grammar-translation model to cultural translation in visual culture. Then, it revisits and deconstructs dominant literacy models through cultural translation. Finally, this genealogical perspective towards the visual shows how the traditional historical formations have taken over back again the political and educational scenarios in our country, and thus sadly promoted a politics of manipulation and alienation.

Keywords: post-structuralist philosophy of language; visual culture; cultural translation; language education.

RESUMO

Baseando-se nas filosofias pós-estruturalistas foucaultiana e derridiana, nas abordagens sociológicas da linguagem de Sousa Santos e Menezes de Souza, na conceituação produtiva de cultura de Stuart Hall e nos estudos visuais de Mirzoeff, Stam e Shohat, este artigo busca relacionar cultura visual, tradução cultural e educação linguística. De natureza

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qualitativa e interpretativista, esta reflexão é dividida em cinco seções principais: na introdução, abordagens filosóficas e sociológicas em relação à linguagem visual e cultura são apresentadas. A seção um problematiza a cultura visual, por meio da genealogia de corpos invisíveis. A próxima seção explora a evolução do modelo de tradução gramatical para a tradução cultural na cultura visual. Em seguida, o artigo revisita e desconstrói modelos de letramento dominantes por meio da tradução cultural. Finalmente, esta perspectiva genealógica em relação ao visual mostra que as formações históricas tradicionais retornaram aos cenários políticos e educacionais em nosso país e infelizmente têm promovido uma política de manipulação e alienação.

Palavras-chave: filosofia da linguagem pós-estruturalista; cultura visual; tradução cultural; educação linguística.

INTRODUCTION: PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO (VISUAL) LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Why should one insist on philosophical and sociological perspectives in order to think of social relations and education? Why would anyone attempt to, deliberately, eliminate philosophy and sociology from school curricula? In times of overabundance of hegemonic mass and social media communications – ever more present and virtually prodded -, how does one make sense of social relations? In times of conspicuous presence of glocal relations (ROBERTSON, 1995) and communications – all of which being politicized -, how can one deal with superdiversity and pluriversity intrinsic to these realms? In times of extremisms, fascisms, neoliberalism, and so many other isms more and more present in many nation states (Brazil included) in the world, how does one acknowledge their own roles within the placement of such isms? Moreover, what are the roles of language (visual language) and culture (cultural translation) within these contexts, especially in times of political clout and polarization, of non dialogue and violence? By the same token, what does language education, philosophy and sociology have to do with all this? Too many whys, hows and whats.

Albeit complex and multifaceted, these questions are at stake for everyone who wishes to ethically respond to, and collectively unpack the challenges every citizen faces every time she gets reluctant, surprised, shocked, frustrated, coerced and/or shaken by the religious, racist, homophobic, anti-environmentalist, pro-guns, market-driven + corporate + neoliberal, and authoritarian decisions the present Brazilian government has taken. Let us face the facts through some of the most recent (shocking) snapshots:

- *How Bolsonaro's Chaotic Foreign Policy Worries the Rest of South America*. Diplomats across the region have begun to regard Brazil as a source of instability.
- *An Official In Brazil's New Right-Wing Government Said "Boys Wear Blue And Girls Wear Pink"* "It's a new era in Brazil: Boys wear blue and girls wear pink. Brazil's new minister for women, family, and human rights tweeted.
- *Brazil's Bolsonaro ridiculed after tweeting explicit carnival video*. Brazilian president tweeted pornographic clip reportedly filmed during carnival in apparent attempt to hit back at criticism.
- *'Exterminator of the future': Brazil's Bolsonaro denounced for environmental assault*. Jair Bolsonaro is transforming Brazil into an "exterminator of the future", the activist and politician Marina Silva has warned, as she and seven other former environment ministers denounced the far-right president's assault on rainforest protections.

These are some of the recent projections of Bolsonaro's government; unfortunately, the list is endless. This political clout is not new in our history, neither are political corruption and the maintenance of social inequality and disenfranchisement. Nonetheless, what is unbeknownst in our history is the positive support given – by many millions of Brazilians – to snapshots such as the ones aforementioned. Thus, how can one find laughter in racist and homophobic jokes? How can one even try to minimize the effects of such attitudes by calling them *mi mi mi*? How can a Brazilian possibly discriminate LGBTQIA+ communities and often times kill them just because they are not framed within the heterosexual matrix? How can one support misogyny? How can a Brazilian stand in favour of deforestation and destruction of its own land? How can anyone support the insanity of this misgovernment? Many more hows.

At this point, it becomes crystal clear why education in general, and philosophy and sociology specifically, are being not only demoralized, but also vanished from the agenda. For philosophy makes one think, rethink and think through perspectives other than theirs, and for sociology provides the analytical tools for one's understanding of society and human relations, it is safe-bed to assume that an authoritarian government would rather seek citizens who passively agree with its unsustainable, anti-human rights decisions. Isn't it easy to understand why Marx and Freire have also been eliminated from the educational agendas?

As manipulation and massification have been basically promoted and spread through mass and social media by this government – images have played a pivotal role within this scenario - this paper summons the reader to help us not only find prompt answers to the questions posed in the beginning of this section, but also to

philosophically and sociologically position them(our)selves in relation to such grim political/educational scenario.

Based upon Foucauldian and Derridean post-structuralist philosophy of language, Sousa Santos and Menezes de Souza's sociological approaches to language, Hall's productive conceptualization of culture and on Mirzoeff, Stam and Shohat's visual studies, this paper seeks to engage with discussions on visual culture, cultural translation and language education in an attempt to tackle some of the questions posed in this article

Moreover, visual culture is related to culture since it refers to the images a culture produces and consumes in order to teach subjects how to fit into dominant ideologies and, thus, turn them into legitimate members of specific cultural groups. In the age of the digital, imagetic language has become central to the representation of culture since there is a predominance of visual forms of media, communication and information. In fact, nowadays, we experience culture predominantly based on visual experiences mediated by technology that similarly to verbal language create a visual culture that is not natural but social and cultural.

Of qualitative/interpretative nature, this reflection is divided into five main sections: the first one problematizes visual culture other-Wise by means of the genealogy of invisible bodies. Next section evolves from the grammar-translation model to cultural translation in visual culture. Then, it revisits and deconstructs dominant literacy models through cultural translation. Finally, this genealogical perspective towards the visual shows how the traditional historical formations have taken over back again the political and educational scenarios in our country, and thus sadly promoted a politics of manipulation and alienation. Therefore, genealogy has the potential to lessen the alienation provoked by the invisibility of certain bodies and the narratives they create to tell their stories. Moreover, the re-readings of the world through cultural translation can subvert hegemonic representations and reveal the mechanisms that a culture uses to mold and even manipulate our perceptions of "the real".

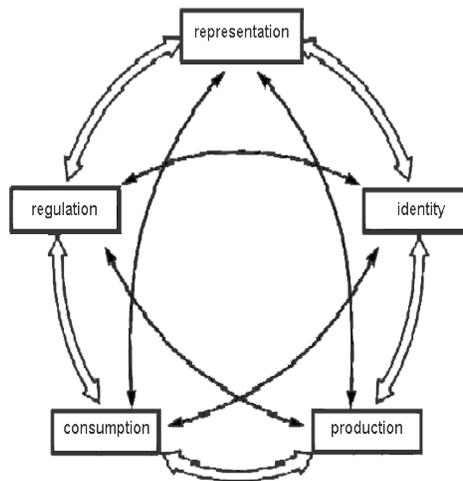
1. VISUAL CULTURE OTHER-WISE: TOWARDS A GENEALOGY OF INVISIBLE BODIES

In this section, we briefly discuss the new roles visual culture assumes in contemporary language education. We also point to the need of cultural translation. In a few words, we define culture in accordance with Stuart Hall (1997, p. 2) for whom

Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – ‘the giving and taking of meaning’ – between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves their thoughts and beliefs about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world, in broadly similar ways” (HALL, 1997, p. 2).

In relation to language and culture, the author goes on to argue that “culture is about shared meanings and language is the privileged medium in which we make sense of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged. Meanings can only be shared through our common access to language” (HALL, 1997, p. 1). By juxtaposing language and culture otherwise, Hall not only questions this dichotomy by claiming their interdependence, but also doubts many of the divisions put forward in relation to culture: higher (elite) x lower (popular) language and culture, Big C x little c culture, global x local languages and cultures.

That being said, Hall rightly contends that culture and representation are intimately connected in what he calls The Circle of Culture:



Source: HALL, 1997, p. 1.

Image 1.

Source: HALL, 1997, p. 1.

Culture is a complex and intricate web of social dimensions in which representation, regulation, identity, consumption and production walk hand in

hand with language and contexts in order to produce meanings, cultural meanings. We agree that “things in themselves rarely if ever have any one, single, field and unchanging meaning” (HALL, 1997, p. 3) thus meanings are intertwined within this complex circle of culture:

Our whole conception of ourselves as a people, individually and collectively, is based on those pictures and images which may or may not correctly correspond to the actual reality of the struggles with nature and nurture which produced them in the first place. But our capacity to confront the world creatively is dependent on how those images correspond or not to that reality, how they distort or clarify the reality of our struggles. Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self; between my own self and other selves; between me and nature. Language is mediating in my very being. And this brings us to the third aspect of language as culture. Culture transmits or imparts those images of the world and reality through the spoken and the written language, that is through a specific language (NGUGI, 1986, p. 15).

Therefore culture (intrinsically connected to language) in this vein questions some naturalized views, so to speak: 1. Culture as a synonym of Nation-state and as Edward Said (1993) puts it, this vision can bring severe consequences (for example, some nations/cultures are more prestigious and recognized as superior to others); 2. Culture is necessarily seen within binary oppositions (for example, high culture versus low culture, developed vs underdeveloped, modern vs primitive); 3. Culture as the representative of the civilizing mission of Illuminism in the sense that there are some peoples who consider themselves more developed and cultured thus it is their duty to illuminate the ‘primitive’ barbarian’ peoples; 4. Culture means material artifacts as the one presented in museums, crafts, fairs, etc.; 5. We experience a global culture (in this view, local cultures are taken as inferior or have to surrender to global imposition). These hegemonic views of culture need to be problematized provided that they influence social relations at global and local levels, often times supporting racisms, misogyny, sexism, and homophobia, amongst others.

Conversely, the debates on visual culture contend that “The emergence of visual culture as a transdisciplinary and cross-methodological field of inquiry means nothing less and nothing more than an opportunity to reconsider some of the present culture’s thorniest problems from yet another angle” (ROGOFF 2002, p. 26). In the views of Shohat and Stam (2002, p. 37), “‘visual culture’ as a field interrogates the ways both art history and visual culture have been narrativized so as to privilege certain locations and geographies of art over others”, and later claim that this happens “often within a stagist and ‘progressive’ history where realism, modernism and postmodernism are thought to supersede one another in a neat and orderly linear succession”. Thus the authors are willing to address “visual culture in

a way that does not always assume Europe as the normative culture of reference" (SHOHAT; STAM, 2002, p. 37).

An example is the complex racial representations in social media in Brazil which create juxtapositions and ask us to position ourselves in relation to representations made in mass media, social media and other contexts. Following Schwartz (1996, p. 25), since colonial period, "these distinctions based on color, occupation and status produced a complex system of multiple hierarquies of honor and esteem". Still according to him, "this tended to reduce the complexity to contrasting dualisms". This means that up to today, mestiços, mamelucos, blacks and pardos have all been categorized within the non-white side. What we see here is the historical structure of the modern/colonial world that, as Mignolo & Schiwy (2002) defend, assumes that "the colonial difference is the logic of colonial dichotomies" (p. 252). Therefore, to negotiate colonial difference, the social position of black bodies has to be

compulsively told and retold repeatedly, since every time more and more the retellings are perceived as being simultaneously rewarding (convince the narrator of his/her own supremacy) and terrifying (since they remind the narrator of the fictional and tenuous qualities of his/her own supremacy¹ (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2004, p. 124).

On the meme below, taken from a post made on Facebook by a friend of the researchers on a national holiday, the visual language uses symbolic language to represent the expectation/reality dichotomy. The "expectation" scenario for the holiday is constructed by an image that shows two white feet seemingly relaxed on the beach (suggesting vacation), whereas the photograph on the right reads "reality", while the image is reconfigured with two black feet, a broom, and a floor being washed (suggesting housework, cleaning and work). The juxtaposition of both images, as we have indicated so far, retells again and again the white man's story about black bodies, by positioning them in the base of the social pyramid and does this in naturalizing ways. Moreover, it repeats colonial images of black bodies "washing away" their color (and race) by using a white soap and therefore, reproduces the Victorian allegory that "the magical fetish of soap promises that the commodity can regenerate the Family of Man by washing from the skin the very stigma of racial and class degeneration" (McCLINTOCK 1998, p. 310).

1. Our translation: "compulsivamente ser contadas e recontadas repetidas vezes, sendo que, cada vez mais, são percebidas como sendo simultaneamente gratificantes (convencem o narrador de sua própria supremacia) e aterrorizantes (lembrem o narrador da ficcionalidade e da tenuidade de própria supremacia).

Along with the subtitle “The social and racial contrast in two images”, it portrays and delates two very different realities. On the top there is the graduation of the Faculty of Medicine of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and below we can see street sweepers who work for the Rio de Janeiro City Hall participating in a strike against the delays in the payment of their wages. Both pictures were taken in 2015.



Image 2. Expectation and reality

Source: Pinterest²

These memes raise questions that relate race to social class and lifestyle in Brazil. White people can occupy positions of prestige in our society, such as becoming physicians and consequently can afford expensive vacations near the sea. On the other hand, black people in our country are caught in the legacy that was inherited from the historical process of slavery and these power relations are inherent in such visual representations and made explicit.

Besides that, those memes reflect and reinforce stereotypical perspectives on the black/white dichotomy. For Hall (1997) “(...) we need to reflect further on how this racialized regime of representation works. Essentially, this involves examining more the set of representational practices known as stereotyping”. In the words of the author, “So far, we have considered the essentializing, reductionist, and naturalizing effects of stereotyping (...) as a signifying practice, it is central to

2. <https://www.pinterest.nz/pin/766949011520644099/?nic=1>

the representation of racial difference" (HALL, 1997, p. 257). Still according to Hall (1997, p. 258), stereotyping is part of "the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what belongs and what does not or is Other, between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'" and, eventually, "Us and Them". "This racialized discourse is structured by a set of binary oppositions. There is the powerful opposition between 'civilization' (white) and 'savagery' (black)" (HALL, 1997, p. 243).

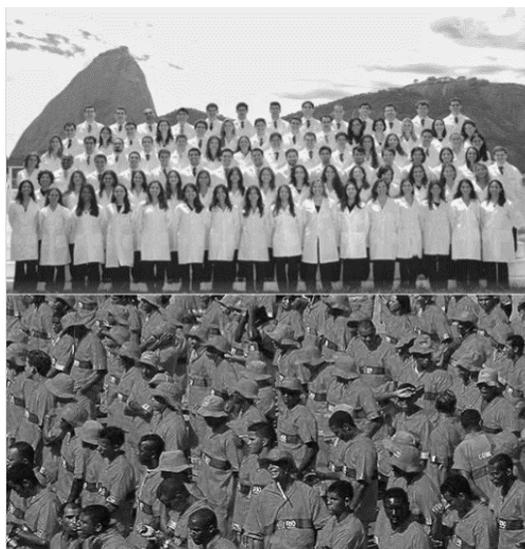


Image 3. The social and racial contrast

Source: Site de Mídia Ninja³

In order to understand what is at stake in both images (2 and 3 above), Menezes de Souza (2009) calls for the need of critical self-reflexivity:

What the approach indeed proposes is that the *frameworks* which produce the *fundaments* on which community *truths* are based (and in terms of which readings and interpretations are deemed valid) need to be seen as *contingent* (historically variable and contextually dependent). This perception of the contingency (and *not* the lack) of socio-historic frameworks of fundaments of truth and ethics and social justice requires what Hoy calls 'critical self-reflexivity' or more simply, the understanding that one's truths and fundaments are the products of one's own history and community (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2009, p. 88).

3. <https://www.facebook.com/MidiaNINJA/posts/o-contraste-social-e-racial/1022446721246806/>

It is, therefore, critical self-reflexivity that can create a space for visual supplements to come into existence and create a play (DERRIDA, 1978) to the already existing structure making it suffer a displacement. In the next visual example, the Vitruvian man (image 4), Leonardo da Vinci's symbol of the Renaissance that places the man with the perfect proportions in the center of the universe is displaced by Harmonia Rosales' Black Vitruvian woman (image 5) from her collection B.I.T.C.H – Black Imaginary To Counter Hegemony. As Harmonia Rosales reveals in her website, in this collection this displacement is achieved by "replacing the white male figures (the most represented) with people I believe have been the least represented. By contemporizing the meaning behind these iconic paintings we can begin to recondition our minds to accept new concepts of human value."⁴

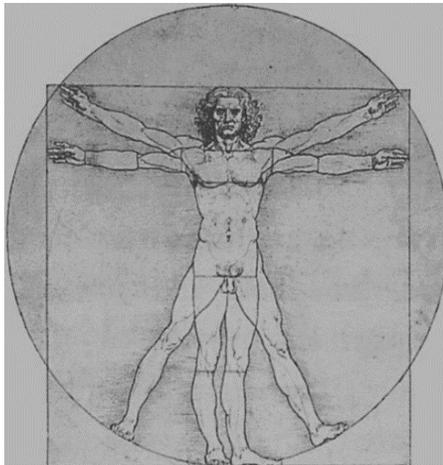


Image 4. The Vitruvian man

Source: Leonardo da Vinci's page⁵

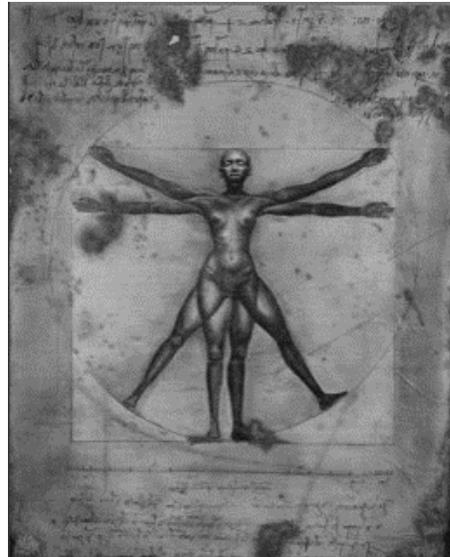


Image 5. Black Vitruvian Woman

Source: Harmonia Rosales on Pinterest⁶

If the Vitruvian man is the structure, the center that opens up and closes off the play it makes possible, this visual center, which is unique, "while governing the structure, escapes structurality" (DERRIDA, 1978, p. 279). The Black Vitruvian

4. <https://www.harmoniarosales.com/collections>

5. Available in: <https://www.leonardodavinci.net/the-vitruvian-man.jsp>. Acesso em 29 de novembro de 2016.

6. Available in: <https://br.pinterest.com/faustobraganti/harmonia-rosales/?lp=true>

Woman, on the other hand, with her repetitions, substitutions and transformations brings other human bodies with their own histories into play. This visual revealing of bodies and discourses that have been kept invisible and silenced repeat master narratives while substituting the dominant perspective with the view from “below”, from the margins of dominant narratives. This would be the “event”, according to Derrida, that causes “a rupture and a redoubling” (p. 278) to the structure, transforming our beliefs, influencing our values and changing the way we see things.

By all means, the event rethinks the visual structure by repeating some of its structural aspects and critically expanding and reviewing others. The authors of visual utterances use digital media as active, agentive participants

who speak in the given language, who structure utterances in that language and who therefore introduce into the potentialities of language itself their own actualizing language intention. Thus there are always two consciousnesses, two language-intentions, two voices and consequently two accents participating in an intentional and conscious artistic hybrid (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 359-360).

The dialogic relation created between the images contrasted above establish a negotiation of cultural difference while meaning emerges from those sociocultural and ideological tensions. Centrifugal and centripetal forces operate in this dialogical meaning-making process since the Black Vitruvian Woman is not just a rupture, but also “a redoubling” (DERRIDA, 1978, p. 278). The re-interpretation by Harmonia Rosales above, “Instead of avoiding the black body”, because “it has been so caught up in the complexities of power and subordination within representation” (HALL, 1997, p 274), the artist positively “takes the body as the principal site of its representational strategies, attempting to make the stereotypes work against themselves” (Ibid.).

The black, female body dialogically and symbolically displaces the default Vitruvian Man, his masculine, white and European Modern epistemologies and their scientific rationality and objectivity. Colonization, in this sense,

provided a model for the subalternization of knowledge, which was then reconverted after the eighteenth century and inscribed onto the nation-state ideology. At the end of the twentieth century we are witnessing a desubalternization or, if you wish, a decolonization of knowledge that places translation/transculturation in a different epistemological level and structure of power (MIGNOLO; SCHIWY, 2002, p. 21).

At the same time that visually the body of the Vitruvian Woman is caught up in Western epistemologies and systems of thought, her subaltern position enables her to question the dominant masculine cosmo-vision by not submitting herself

to processes of integration or assimilation to the hegemonic values. Therefore, Menezes de Souza (2007, p. 11) reminds us, that this emergent subjectivity as

a social subject, passes from being a mere character in a modernist story told by someone else (unknown), politically, in the postmodern context, to be the narrator of their own history. It is important to remember that in this process of telling your own story, one is no longer in the totalizing modernist context of a concealing homogeneity, of a single story or master narrative; in the context of postmodernity, on the contrary, the social subject is invariably found in the crossing of multiple and heterogeneous histories, cultures and ideologies that contribute in varied and complex ways to their formation⁷ (our translation).

De-centering and *différance* (PETERS & BIESTA, 2009), or engaging with other forms of looking into life is what this image invokes. "As saying something, not just about the people or the occasion, but about the Otherness, their difference. Difference has been marked (...) Difference signifies. It speaks" (HALL, 1997, p. 230).

Moreover, just like cultural, digital and linguistic turns, the visual turn can be understood as "the crisis caused by modernism and modern culture confronting the failure of its own strategy of visualizing. In other words, it is the visual crisis of culture that creates postmodernity, not its textuality" (MIRZOEFF, 1998, p. 4). Modernity created its own code of visibility and turned invisible bodies and languages that didn't conform to the male, white, heterosexual and middle class dominant visibilities.

There's no doubt, that images as signs are here to stay and call on us to theorize on them as language, since "While print culture is certainly not going to disappear, the fascination with the visual and its effects that was a key feature of modernism has engendered a postmodern culture that is at its most postmodern when it is visual" (MIRZOEFF, 1998, p. 4). However, we resist structuralist models of analysis and interpretation that seek to establish the grammar or syntax of the visual mode of meaning-making and try to reiterate, in the next session, the cultural aspect present in the construction and interpretation of visual language.

2. FROM THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION MODEL TO CULTURAL TRANSLATION IN VISUAL CULTURE

7. o sujeito social, de mero personagem numa história modernista contada por outro (desconhecido) passa, politicamente, no contexto pós-moderno, a ser o narrador de sua própria história. É importante lembrar que nesse processo de se contar a própria história, não se está mais no contexto modernista totalizante de uma homogeneidade escamoteadora, de uma história única ou narrativa mestre; no contexto da pós-modernidade, pelo contrário, o sujeito social se encontra invariavelmente no cruzamento ou travessia de histórias, culturas e ideologias múltiplas e heterogêneas que contribuem de formas variadas e complexas para a sua formação.

Modernity cultivated the culture of Enlightenment by seeking the legitimation of the human sciences, since there was a need to relate science to Truth and nurture the belief that there is only one true way of reading reality and this would be the reading science makes of the real. Therefore, the disentanglement between knowledge and what is considered religion, opinion, ideology and myth (SEIDMAN, 1994, p. 3) was necessary and, more importantly, “the distinction between mind and world and the view that language functioned as a neutral medium for the mind to mirror or represent the world” (SEIDMAN, 1994, p. 3). The scientist, the central figure of the process of purification of the mind from the social conditions in which it was formed (LATOURET, 1993), is a modern artifact with the ability to read the world from nowhere (MENEZES de SOUZA, 2011).

This “process of mathematization and professionalization” (SEIDMAN, 1994, p. 4) of the human sciences organized knowledges around an ideology of scientific Enlightenment and social progress. Modernity taught us to believe in the abstract, generalized and objective truths science “invented” since western knowledge was unable to recognize that these scientific truths have been historically constructed in the midst of a wave of veneration of western reason. This embodied reason though belonged to subjectivities of the global North and had a certain gender, color of skin, religion and sexuality, came to be seen as universal. Postmodernity seeks to expand this fictional center where all wisdom emanates and introduce knowledges that emerge from “Other” subjectivities whose identities don’t necessarily fit the model of modern humanism:

In other words, the postmodern turn in the human studies is linked to the rise of a social condition of postmodernity. A postmodern reconfiguring of knowledge is thus crucial to understand the contemporary west and to preserve a connection between the human studies and its emancipatory aims. Proposals for a human studies that is deconstructive or genealogical and that imagines altered relations between knowledge and power and between knowledge producers and citizens are intended to preserve the critical spirit of the Enlightenment in a postmodern culture (SEIDMAN, 1994, p. 4).

Seidman (1994, p. 4) defends that the postmodern turn in human sciences demands a reconfiguring of knowledge and society. In this epistemological shift, knowledge is perceived as related to questions of power attributed to certain subjectivities (ontologies) and their ways of knowing the “real” while they turn invisible and oppress other kinds of knowledges that have been “suppressed, silenced, and marginalized” (SOUSA SANTOS, 2018, p. 8). These knowledges “rather than abstract universality, they promote pluriversality” (SOUSA SANTOS, 2018, p. 8). In the words of Seidman (1994):

The shift from metanarratives to local narratives and from general theories to pragmatic strategies suggests that in place of assuming a universal mind or a rational knowing subject, we imagine multiple minds, subjects, and knowledges reflecting different social locations and histories. (SEIDMAN, 1994, p. 5).

In the introduction to his groundbreaking collection of thinkers of the postmodern turn, Seidman (1994) mentions that “Foucault speaks of dominant and subjugated knowledges, multiple subjects or producers of knowledges, and the interconnection of knowledges to various axes of domination and resistance.” (p. 6). On the other hand, Rorty openly declares philosophy’s failure to take into consideration the pluriversality of human thinking:

Philosophy assumed the role of legitimating science as knowledge. Toward this end, philosophy assumed a separation between the knowing mind and the world; language was viewed as a neutral medium of representation and knowledge was framed as a mirroring between word and world (in SEIDMAN, 1994, p. 6).

This mirroring between word and world is the founding stone for the approach to language teaching known as the grammar translation method of language teaching, the most traditional teaching methodology for studying Ancient Greek and Latin, that focuses on the translation of classical texts using grammar and vocabulary not in order to speak and communicate meaning, but for the need of translating. This approach to teaching languages, not only foreign ones but also mother-tongues, became dominant during modernity and promoted its legitimation of science since in linguistics the standardization of language by studying syntax, grammar, phonetics and phonology sought to create areas of study that would study linguistic phenomena in a synchronic manner. Variations were put aside, forgotten and silenced since the desire to be accepted as a science demanded the mathematization of how languages work.

Yet, this structuralist and transparent way of perceiving language does away with the imagery, the visual representations or images that come to mind when verbal language is used. Inevitably, the cultural context where verbal language is employed influences the imagery of those who are engaged in constructing meanings. An example of this cultural aspect of languages can be observed when we google a New Year’s wish in two distinct languages: Happy New Year in English and הַבּוֹט הַנּוֹשׁ in Hebrew. Linguistically the happiness aspect is missing in Hebrew that wishes “A good year” in literal translation.



Image 6. Happy New Year

Source: Page of Times Now News⁸

Image 7. הברוט הנש

Source: Page of *Brachot*⁹

The images that appeared on Google show that the Christian visual imaginary on New Year is differently constructed from the Jewish one. Visually and symbolically, the New Year in most parts of the world, influenced by the dominant Christian imaginary is represented with colorful fireworks going off on the turn of the year suggesting an explosion of happy feelings. On the other hand, הברוט הנש, or Happy New Year, in the Jewish imaginary, is represented with different symbols of “sweetness”, such as apples, honey and pomegranates while wishing for a sweet year. In this culture, a good year is measured by its sweetness.

In a modern conception of language the sign “New Year” is not perceived as constructed, but as a given, a reality. The displacements that occur in the space that is opened between the signifier (the word) and the signified (the meaning) are silenced and there is a tendency to homogenize the meanings for all producers, consumers and interpreters. However, as Menezes de Souza (2004) explains this view seeks to disengage meaning from its social and historical context that produces both language and the referent. On the other hand, when a sign is culturally and socially perceived, a process of disentanglement between the signifier and the

8. Retrieved on: <https://hindi.timesnownews.com/trending-viral/article/happy-new-year-2019-welcome-new-year-2019-with-these-beautiful-quotes-messages/339056>. Access on 1 jan 2019.

9. Retrieved on: <https://תוכרב.co.il/מיוזרהב-מילוויא-הברוט-הנשל-הכרב/> שבדכ Access on 1 jan 2019.

signified occurs that admits the induction of the producer and interpreter of meaning in the meaning-making process.

In the example presented above, a postmodern analysis of the different images that the other languages and cultures bring to mind when they represent visually the “New Year”, can point to the absence of a fixed reality that is represented in a transparent, unmediated manner. As Menezes de Souza (2004, p. 115) discusses, this view of reality and representation suspends the historical and social dimension of the perception of language. Therefore, the process of cultural translation is “not just inter-language but inter-cosmologies” (MIGNOLO; SCHIWY, 2002).

Ngugi (1986) in his groundbreaking, though controversial book *Decolonizing the mind* associates language to culture and image-forming:

Language as culture also has three important aspects. Culture is a product of the history which it in turn reflects. Culture in other words is a product and a reflection of human beings communicating with one another in the very struggle to create wealth and to control it. But culture does not merely reflect that history, or rather it does so by actually forming images or pictures of the world of nature and nurture. Thus the second aspect of language as culture is as an image-forming agent in the mind of a child (p. 15).

In the example of the images that are brought to mind when the wish for a Happy New Year is made in the two languages bespeak the cultural aspect of languages and their image-ry and assume that not only verbal languages need cultural translation, but also visual ones. This would create a rupture in the structuralist notion of the “grammar” of visual design and make us explore other possibilities of meaning-making through the fascinating maze of cultural translation.

Alas, grammatically oriented teaching methods are of interest to academics or dilettantes fascinated with languages in a linguistic or intellectual manner. This view defends that the use of a language that obeys the standardized (and invented) rules of language reflects a superior way to describe reality and has become dominant in modernity in our teaching practices. Yet, the dichotomy between semantics and pragmatics points to this misconception of language that exists out of context and is neutral and objective in the way it constructs its meanings.

3. REVISITING AND DECONSTRUCTING DOMINANT LITERACY MODELS THROUGH CULTURAL TRANSLATION

The dominant literacy models have basically fostered a language education that focuses on memorization, linearity and normativity. Often times this leads teachers to concentrate on the teaching of grammar rules and vocabulary, thus

reinforcing hegemonic views of language and neglecting language variation. The question we raise here is the thin line that separates what is considered creativity from the concept of “mistake”. To illustrate our point we bring three examples of phonetic spelling of words. In the first case (images 8 and 9), we refer to the Brazilian landscaper Lindomar Lourenço Martins, popularly nicknamed Jaburú, employee of the Jaciara City Hall in Mato Grosso who wished to bid Merry Christmas to his fellow citizens in a bed of grass. He spelled “Felis” instead of Feliz, spelling the word in a phonetic manner, since what we hear is /felís/. Still, an uproar occurred on the social media. Someone who was passing by took a picture of the message Lindomar was mowing, causing the linguistic bias and language police to laugh at the good intention of the landscaper. The City Hall itself came to the defense of the employee by denouncing the reaction that turned Lindomar’s good intention into a laughing stock.



Image 8. Felis Natal
Source: Portal do Amazonas¹⁰

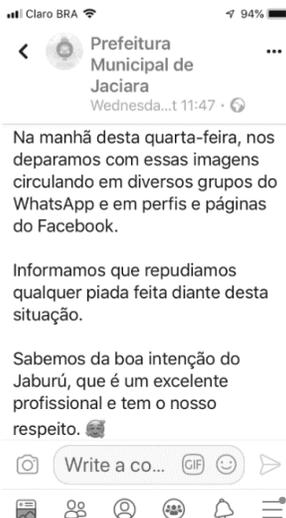


Image 9. City Hall’s Pronouncement

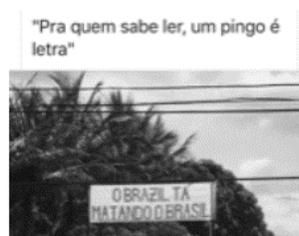


Image 10. Visual contrast between Brazil and Brasil
Source: Reddit page Brasil¹¹

On the other hand, in image 10 we can see an outdoor that reads “O Brazil tá matando o Brasil”, a verse taken from Maurício Tapajos and Aldir Blanc’s famous song “Querelas do Brasil”, a title that makes reference to Ary Barroso’s “Aquarela

10. <http://portaldoamazonas.com/felis-natal-sim-prefeitura-apoia-funcionario-apos-erro-ortografico>

11. https://www.reddit.com/r/brasil/comments/b1176d/%C3%A9_isto/

do Brasil". While "Aquarela do Brasil" glorifies the natural beauties, culture and people in Brazil, "Querelas do Brasil", or "Brazil's squabbles" denounces a Brazilian elite that oppresses and turns invisible the popular cultures in this country. In the verse "Brazil is killing Brasil", the simple substitution of the letter s, makes the spelling of the word in English in opposition to the Portuguese spelling.

As a response to the reaction in the social media, the landscaper immediately mowed his message on the lawn and his written mistake led to its erasure, became a kind of "non-writing". This leads us to reflect on how we can think critically about the linguistic phenomenon of the "mistake" in digital times when texting has created new language varieties characterized by their written informality, but also completely separated from written language outside the technological spaces. These digital languages are abbreviated because of the accelerated forms of communication in digital times. Shlowiy (2014, p. 458) states four forms of abbreviation: 1. Initials and acronyms ("LOL" for "Laughing Out Loud"); 2. Substitution of "a letter by another letter, a group of letters by a letter, or by a number. This reduces redundant letters and makes substitution to improve correspondence with the spoken word. It attempts to get rid of difficulties of current spelling" ("thnx" for "thanks"); 3. Letter omission ("abt" for "about") and 4. Emoticons and other pictograms (☹, 😊).

This abbreviated and economic written language register, used in the digital, has penetrated our lives, however users of this language are contextually sensitive and employ it only when they're involved with digital media. Nevertheless, although the phonetic spelling of words is common on social media, outside the digital world the "incorrect" substitution of any letter is seen as a mistake.

What should our toolbox be in this analysis? On which basis, does the first manifestation receive an outcry from people on social media? And on which grounds is the second one accepted as artistic and innovative language, a sort of translanguaging¹² (GARCÍA; WEI, 2014, p. 21)? How does the context where languaging¹³ (GARCÍA; WEI, 2014, p. 8) takes place influence the meaning that is attributed to linguistic variation and change (BAGNO, 2006)? How do sociocultural aspects influence our appreciation or not of innovative forms in written language?

12. translanguaging refers to new language practices that make visible the complexity of language exchanges among people with different histories, and releases histories and understandings that had been buried within fixed language identities constrained by nation-states (Mignolo, 2000 apud. GARCÍA & WEI, 2014, p. 21)

13. The term languaging is needed to refer to the simultaneous process of continuous becoming of ourselves and of our language practices, as we interact and make meaning in the world. (GARCÍA & WEI, 2014, p. 8)

In the digital era, verbal language has been undergoing innovative shifts, becoming more and more phonetically and economically represented in its written, thus visual form and therefore, challenging us to make sense of this proliferation of visual signs. At the same time, critical applied linguistics has become disenchanted with teaching and learning practices that limit the play of fantasy and imagination. Certain linguistic expressions have gained such symbolic power that inhibit people from freely and creatively using language to express their identities and realities. However, even the most traditional linguists wouldn't be able to deny the constant language shifts that introduce innovative features to language that can make it accessible and a tool for voice for people that previously used language mainly in its oral form. Still, issues of social class, education, culture and power are involved in the interpretation of linguistic expression:

In contemporary society, writing in a dominant language is seen as 'the sine qua non condition for education and culture' (Menezes de Souza, 2007: 155), although this is not so in all spaces and has not been this way for all times. Because of the interest in writing as a technology or code for dominant languages and not as a series of ideological social practices (Street, 1993), the study of written multilingual discourse has been underresearched (Sebba, 2012) (GARCÍA, WEI, 2014, p. 26).

The examples discussed above somehow show us that socioeconomic inequalities penetrate writing practices inscribed in material urban spaces, so that different interpretations are attributed to linguistic repertoires displayed in those spaces. The role language plays in giving some sense to identity and the use of unfamiliar linguistic forms to help the Self voice their individuality is usually highly discouraged.

In the case of the English phonetic spelling of eyes, the substitution of s by z might be considered a benign transformation, as in the movie "All Eyez on me" (image 11) whose spelling can even gain the status of a political intervention. The movie that tells the story of rapper, actor and activist Tupac Shakur, does something similar to what the Brazilian city hall employee did by adopting the phonetic spelling of s in eyes /aiz/. Moreover, in 2Pac's album "All eyez on me", Tupac Shakur's singles "2 of Amerikaz most wanted" and "The outlawz" repeat the same phonetic substitution of s. However, in this case, the effect in the reception is completely different from the one Lindomar's "Felis" received and more similar to "O Brasil tá matando o Brasil". The 'z' in boyz, eyez, Amerikaz and outlawz exposes a stylistic choice that promotes "an anti-establishment identity in rap music"¹⁴. Something

14. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/04/how-john-singletons-boyz-n-hood-got-its-name/588385/>

similar happens also in the film "Boyz n the Hood" by John Singleton, a movie that "expanded the Los Angeles film canon".

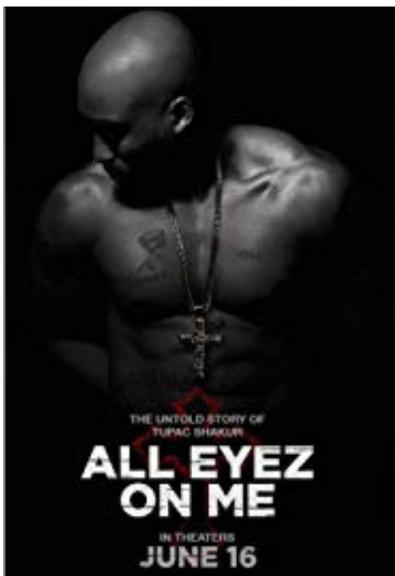


Image 11. Cover of the
Source: IMDb site¹⁵



Image 12. social media
Source: The New Yorker¹⁶

Philosophy questions power and points to the need to improve our doubts. What are the similarities and differences in the three aforementioned categories of substitution of the letters s and z with their phonetic equivalent? Modernity established that behind each linguistic expression there is a mind that can be evaluated according to the use this mind makes of language. Postmodernity calls for the need to start reading language and culture from a decentralized point of view that will allow the inclusion of realities and literacies considered peripheral, marginal, or not as refined or sophisticated as the ones that occupy the center, introducing, thus, Derrida's (1978) notion of decentering.

Postmodernity also makes a critique of the standardization of national languages that sought "to create a uniform and homogeneous pattern that rose above regional and social differences to become an instrument of political and cultural

15. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1666185/>

16. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/postscript/mourning-john-singleton-a-guardian-of-black-cinema>

unification"¹⁷ (BAGNO, 2006, p. 22). Yet, this supposed unification is something constructed to serve the interests of a nation in relation to other nations. Inside the national territories, the centrifugal forces create power relationships among the users of language:

With this, any use that escapes this idealized model, any option that is far from the consecrated literary language, is seen as a mistake; every pronunciation, every vocabulary, and every syntax that reveals the discredited social origin of the speaker; all that does not consist of the uses of urban literate classes with access to formal schooling and legitimized culture. Thus, the great majority of people are excluded from "good talk" - a type of exclusion that is largely perpetuated to the present¹⁸ (BAGNO, 2006, p. 24).

This substitution in Brazilian Portuguese of a fricative voiced consonant by its unvoiced pair, such as /z/ → /s/ is quite common in speech, like in the case of "Feliz". Still, in written language, the substitution of /z/ by /s/ is taken as an open declaration of low social class status, illiteracy, poverty and socially unprivileged citizens. Literate societies with their graphocentric orientation recognize the value and importance of writing and its norms that praise "correct" spelling. Pedagogically speaking, the "mistake" has to be explored, studied and explained may it be of a phonetic, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, discursive or cognitive order (BAGNO, 2006, p. 27). Being aware of the sociolinguistic profile of the students, the educator enhances and expands the students' verbal repertoires and communicative skills:

One of the tasks of language teaching in the school would be to critically discuss the social values attributed to each language variation, drawing attention to the burden of discrimination that weighs on certain uses of the language, in order to make the student aware that their linguistic production, oral or written, will always be subject to social assessment, positive or negative. For example, by finding non-standard forms of oral and written production of our students, we can offer them the option of "translating" their utterances into a form that is prestigious, so that they can become aware of the existence of these rules¹⁹ (BAGNO, 2006, p. 29).

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17. criar um padrão uniforme e homogêneo que se erguesse acima das diferenças regionais e sociais para se transformar num instrumento de unificação política e cultural.
 18. Com isso, passa a ser visto como erro todo e qualquer uso que escape desse modelo idealizado, toda e qualquer opção que esteja distante da linguagem literária consagrada; toda pronúncia, todo vocabulário e toda sintaxe que revelem a origem social desprestigiada do falante; tudo o que não conste dos usos das classes sociais letradas urbanas com acesso à escolarização formal e à cultura legitimada. Assim, fica excluída do "bem falar" a imensa maioria das pessoas - um tipo de exclusão que se perpetua em boa medida até a atualidade.
 19. Uma das tarefas do ensino de língua na escola seria, portanto, discutir criticamente os valores sociais atribuídos a cada variante linguística, chamando a atenção para a carga de discriminação que pesa sobre determinados usos da língua, de modo a conscientizar o aluno de que sua produção linguística, oral ou escrita, estará sempre sujeita a uma avaliação social, positiva ou negativa. Podemos, por exemplo, ao encontrar formas não-padrão na produção oral e escrita de nossos alunos, oferecer a eles a opção de "traduzir" seus enunciados para a forma que goza de prestígio, para que eles se conscientizem da existência dessas regras.

Sharon Todd (2009), the educational philosopher, is building on Arendt when she invites us to revisit education in more humanitarian and pluralist ways: "Thus, I read Arendt's concern with the renewal of the common world as specifically not rooted in idealized conceptions of intrinsic goodness or even the universality of humanity, but with the complexities of the human condition, in all its plurality" (TODD, 2016, p. 16). These complexities can be seen below (image 13), in a meme created by photos taken in Walthamstow, North of London. There have been many racist incidents in the last years in the USA and UK with people getting outraged when others don't speak in English. According to artist Chris Walker, who transformed the racist graffiti, "whoever was responsible clearly has no idea where they are living, I was born in Walthamstow and have lived here on and off for 40 years, it has always been a vastly multicultural community and that's what makes it so great"²⁰. His artwork, in this case, seems to pluralize the way we think about Great Britain, the languages spoken there and the cultures and races that for decades or even centuries have been calling this place "home".

This resistance to languages and cultures that break with the imagined homogeneity of a uniform national language and culture are seen as threats to the stability of the nation-state and seek to suppress manifestations of linguistic and cultural expressions that are categorized as non-national elements (BLOMMAERT; RAMPTON, 2011). The fear of being taken over by what is considered "foreign" can also be seen in the next image, which exposes xenophobia inside the educational system, this time in the University of Lisbon. A wood box full of stones was put in the corridors of the Faculty of Law with a sign that reads: Free if you throw them on a "Zuca" (who overpassed you in the Master's). "Zuca", in this case, means Brazuca or Brazilians. The Faculty of Law reacted by "contextualizing" the incident that took place during election time in the faculty when "student-organized campaigning is underway in a space of freedom of opinion and encouragement of responsible civic participation, living with self-criticism, humor and satire". Such a feeble and unconvincing response of the faculty to the expression of hatred towards Brazilians in an educational space that should promote diversity and plurality in all its levels.

20. <https://www.indy100.com/article/racist-graffiti-english-language-walthamstow-london-artist-chris-walker-8658966>



Image 13. Racist graffiti in Britain

Source: Taj Ali's Facebook page



Image 14. Xenophobia in Portugal

Source: Newspaper Público's page

Wrapping up our visual narrative that seeks to denounce racism, linguistic imperialism and cultural invisibility, we consider important to reiterate that visual culture has to do with “doing interdisciplinary work, following in the footsteps of such fields as cultural studies, queer theory and African-American studies” (MORRA & SMITH, 2006, p. 121). Regardless of the fact that visual culture draws on approaches from different fields, it desires to create its own field of study, where it can break away from notions of high and low culture and from the principle of ‘mimesis’ so common in the History of Art. Visual studies have close ties with poststructuralism and postcolonial studies that make it acquire a multicultural identity. The more the human experience is becoming more visual and visualized, the more the fields of visual culture and studies will gain heightened visibility.

We surely desire to distance ourselves from universal truths and generalizations in visual representations and wish to read the world locally through the images that each culture produces to express its local reality:

To be international is not to be universal, and to be universal is not necessary to be in the centers of the world. It can even be universal being confined to its own language, that is, without being translated. It is not about giving the back to the reality of the world, but to think of it from what we are, enriching it universally with our ideas; and accepting to be, in this

21. https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Taj%20Ali%2C%20racist%20graffiti&epa=SEARCH_BOX

22. <https://www.publico.pt/2019/04/29/sociedade/noticia/acto-xenofobia-leva-protesto-estudantes-brasileiros-faculdade-direito-1870928>

way, submitted to a universalist criticism and not properly European or American²³ (SOUSA SANTOS, 2002, p. 52).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This reflection started with many whys, hows and whats. By claiming that one sees Visual culture other-Wise, as a genealogy of invisible bodies, it insists on philosophical and sociological perspectives in order to think of social relations and education. We cannot accept the attempt to deliberately eliminate philosophy and sociology from school curricula. In times of overabundance of hegemonic mass and social media communications – ever more present and virtually prodded; in times of conspicuous presence of glocal relations, one needs to challenge extremisms, fascisms, neoliberalism, and so many other isms more and more present in society. Moreover, the roles of language (visual language) and culture (cultural translation) within these contexts are at stake, especially for those who believe that language education, philosophy and sociology have a lot to contribute to the visibility of excluded, disenfranchised and non-hegemonic bodies. With this in mind, we cannot find laughter in racist and homophobic jokes, we cannot discriminate LGBTQIA+, black, poor, immigrant communities, as we cannot support or give voice to misogyny.

We have also suggested that we move from the grammar-translation model to cultural translation in visual culture, in which our toolbox of analyzing language is expanded, and on which the second one is accepted as artistic and innovative language, a sort of translanguaging amongst languages and visual languages, of contexts where languaging influences the meaning that is attributed to linguistic variation and change. Finally, we have suggested that we revisit and deconstruct dominant literacy models through cultural translation, so that the snapshots and memes discussed here (especially the ones which subjugates and inferiorizes the Other) are not seen as taken-for-granted naturalized forms of human relations; so that language education and language educators take a stand against every form of inequality and social injustice in their language classes.

23. Ser internacional não é ser universal, e para ser universal não é necessário situar-se nos centros do mundo. Inclusive pode-se ser universal ficando confinado à sua própria língua, isto é, sem ser traduzido. Não se trata de dar as costas à realidade do mundo, mas de pensá-la a partir do que somos, enriquecendo-a universalmente com as nossas idéias; e aceitando ser, desse modo, submetidos a uma crítica universalista e não propriamente européia ou norteamericana

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