

# DECOLONIZING ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION WITH LITERATURE BY BLACK AND INDIGENOUS WRITERS

## DECOLONIZANDO EDUCAÇÃO LINGUÍSTICA DE INGLÊS COM LITERATURA DE ESCRITORAS/ES NEGRAS/OS E INDÍGENAS

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss decolonial English Language Education with literature produced by black and indigenous writers. English language classrooms have been traditionally guided by principles that underscore systemic knowledge through an overemphasis on grammar in line with the Grammar Translation Method (QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017; PEREIRA, 2016, 2019) and by misconceptions about the limitations of teaching foreign languages for communicative purposes, especially in public schools (LEFFA, 2009; PEREIRA, 2019; QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017). With this in mind, I have proposed a concept of English Language Education that involves teaching the language while having a critical attitude toward social, racial, and gender problems, engendered by coloniality, with the use of literary texts (PEREIRA, 2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, MOTA, 2020; MOTA-PEREIRA, 2022), especially the ones produced by black and indigenous writers. Besides, the use of literature contributes to nurturing a taste for reading literary texts, which, among the aforementioned benefits, also fosters emotional consciousness and practices, including empathy (GHOSN, 2001). Considering these reflections, in this paper, I analyze autoethnographically (HUGHES; PENNINGTON, 2017) classes I taught in an online course for public school students in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, which is part of the extension activities of a Teaching Practicum course. In these classes, literature by black and indigenous writers was the main material for decolonial English Language Education.

**Keywords:** decoloniality; English; language education.

### RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir o ensino decolonial de língua inglesa com literatura produzida por escritores negros e indígenas. As aulas de língua inglesa têm sido tradicionalmente pautadas por princípios que valorizam o conhecimento sistêmico através de uma ênfase exagerada na gramática alinhada ao Método Gramática Tradução (QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017; PEREIRA, 2016, 2019) e por equívocos sobre as limitações do ensino de línguas estrangeiras para fins comunicativos, principalmente em escolas públicas (LEFFA, 2009; PEREIRA, 2019; QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017). Pensando nisso, propus um conceito de Educação Linguística de Inglês que envolve o ensino da língua com uma atitude crítica em relação aos problemas sociais, raciais e de gênero, engendrados pela colonialidade, com o uso de textos literários (PEREIRA, 2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, MOTA, 2020; MOTA-PEREIRA, 2022), especialmente os produzidos por escritoras/es negras/os e indígenas. Além disso, o uso da literatura contribui para fomentar o gosto pela leitura de textos literários, o que, entre os benefícios citados, também promove consciência e práticas emocionais, incluindo, a empatia (GHOSN, 2001). Considerando essas reflexões, neste artigo, analiso autoetnograficamente (HUGHES; PENNINGTON, 2017) aulas que ministrei em um curso online para alunas/os de escola pública de Salvador, Bahia, Brasil, que faz parte das atividades de extensão de um componente curricular de Estágio Supervisionado. Nessas aulas, a literatura de escritoras/es negras/os e indígenas figurava como o principal material para uma educação linguística decolonial de inglês.

**Palavras-chave:** decolonialidade; inglês; educação linguística.

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## 1. PAVING THE WAY

In regular public schools in Brazil, English language teaching is mostly associated with the study of grammar topics (QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017; PEREIRA, 2016, 2019), which has proved to be ineffective in fostering language proficiency. This inefficiency is expressed by the fact that Brazil has the 58<sup>th</sup> position in English proficiency among 111 countries and regions (EDUCATION FIRST, 2022). The schools in Salvador are no exception to this landscape.

As a professor of Teaching Practicum courses at a public university in Bahia, I have observed the overemphasis on grammar topics in the syllabus for English language teaching in Bahia. This is also the reality in other cities in Brazil (QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017) despite the tenets recommended by the Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum (BRAZIL, 2018), henceforth, BNCC, which conceive of English learning as interaction and as a conduit for global citizenship as well as multicultural, multimodal, and multilingual experiences (BNCC, 2018) in theory.

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From the National Curriculum Parameters, henceforth, PCN, (BRASIL, 1998) to the BNCC (BRASIL, 2018), foreign language teaching has been portrayed as a catalyst for a more holistic education of students as citizens that reflect on matters aimed to expand sociocultural awareness. This concept of teaching is aligned with Language Education (HASHIGUTI; SOUZA, 2022), which involves cultural, historical, and social aspects, alongside varieties in how the language is used (HASHIGUTI; SOUZA, 2022).

Despite the fruitful purposes of the PCN (BRASIL, 1998) and BNCC (BRASIL, 2018), some incongruences have prevented the principles of Language Education from being fully implemented in English classrooms. Concerning the BNCC, some incongruences regard the lack of clear guidelines on how to put these principles into practice; discrepancies between the ideal settings that underpin the guidelines and the realities of public school classrooms; and contradictions in terms of discourses of plurality and critical thinking in contrast to an emphasis on neoliberal principles (CARVALHO; SILVA; DALBONI, 2017). In this regard, the focus on neoliberalism is easily noticed in the excessive use of the word “work” in the BNCC (2018) and goals related to it even at a junior high school level. That said, English language teaching in public schools seems to be deprived of effective guidelines to implement Language Education (HASHIGUTI; SOUZA, 2022). However, it is possible to decrease this gap through ongoing reflection and research by in-service teachers and teacher education programs sensitive to the importance of conducting meaningful, effective, and socially relevant classes unaligned with coloniality (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2019).

Literature lends itself to conveying possibilities to address the coloniality of being, knowledge, and power (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2019). These colonialities have, as some of their main axes, racism (GROSFUGUEL, 2019; OLIVEIRA, 2018) and other types of oppression, including gender and social class. Relatedly, literature can be a decolonial response to them.

In this article, I aim to analyze, through an autoethnographic approach (HUGHES; PENNINGTON, 2017), decolonial English Language Education experiences in online classes for public school students. These classes were part of extension activities of a Teaching Practicum course in which literature was one of the materials I used. Besides, my goal is to defend the use of literature to decolonize Language Education in public schools in Salvador, the capital of Bahia, which is marked by social and racial issues. The reflections, despite local, also resonate with other contexts in Brazil and beyond.

## 2. FROM THE “VERB TO BE” TO BEING AWARE OF SOCIAL AND RACIAL MATTERS FROM A DECOLONIAL COSMOPERCEPTION

To raise reflections on English language education in the city of Salvador, I evoke the memory of a class I observed in one of the teaching practicum courses I taught. It was another day of observation of a student teacher’s class in a regular public school in Salvador and one of the students asked if the student teacher would teach an English lesson about the “verb to be”. This comment was followed by another remark about the fact that this was the only subject he had studied at school. Although it is evident that this student learned other grammar topics, it is possible that because this is usually the initial subject teachers tackle in their classes, it is the one that remained in the student’s memory as a first impression about the language. I have witnessed similar situations in other classrooms, which have made me see the “Verb to be” as a metaphor for what learning English at some schools means, namely, grammar-centeredness (QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017; PEREIRA, 2016, 2019).

The student’s remark also made me reflect on the emphasis on systemic knowledge in English classes at public schools and its impact on the low English proficiency levels among the population (EDUCATION FIRST, 2022). Furthermore, I associated this reflection with the lack of social awareness that has allowed for the growth of intolerance and hate speeches against oppressed people consistent with far-right ideologies. If, since the nineties, with the PCN for junior high school (BRASIL, 1998), discussions on cultural plurality, ethics, environment, work, consumerism, and sexuality – the seven cross-curricular themes proposed by the PCN (BRASIL, 1998) – were part of schools’ curricula, there might not be so much room for hate speech and violence against minoritized groups. The fact that such negative phenomena happen suggests that education has been deprived of its main purposes of emancipation and social justice.

Regarding English classrooms, the allusion to the “verb to be” means the absence of Language Education (HASHIGUTI; SOUZA, 2022) and the predominance of language teaching, which limits itself to systemic

knowledge. Contrary to this paradigm that privileges grammar-centeredness, in my Teaching Practicum courses, I emphasize the importance of teaching English while addressing social, racial, cultural, and gender matters in the classes. The reason is not only because these topics can make the classes more meaningful, but also because they are socially relevant in a country where ideologies (ALTHUSSER, 2008) of dominance and oppression are ubiquitous and undoubtedly ingrained in inequities.

Addressing plurality and various epistemologies could enhance the learners' repertoire of wisdom for a society in which differences would be seen as a conduit for enriching experiences and creativity (LORDE, 2019). When the schools do not address plurality, they contribute to a project of homogenization associated with coloniality that values normativity. Within normativity, there is an ideal profile defined, according to Lorde (2019, p. 241, my translation), as "white, thin, man, young, straight, Christian, and economically stable"<sup>1</sup>. The same definition applies to Brazil. People who do not belong to this profile are easy targets of prejudice, which derives from a hierarchical methodology of classifying people, intrinsically related to coloniality. Maldonado-Torres conceptualizes coloniality "[...] as a global logic of dehumanization that can exist even in the absence of formal colonies."<sup>2</sup> (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2019, p. 35-36, my translation). One of the mechanisms of dehumanization is racism, which is an "organizing principle or structuring logic of all the social configurations and dominance relations of modernity"<sup>3</sup> (GROSGOUEL, 2019, p. 59, my translation) and a bedrock of other types of hierarchy.

The event of colonialism conveyed a system of coloniality based on hierarchization through discourse, science, religion, and other mechanisms, on which the atrocities of enslaving people were justified. One of the mechanisms of coloniality is stories, as Chinua Achebe (2000, p. 59) claims, which furnish manifold experiences, since "man is a story-making animal". In the history of colonialism, stories were aimed to dispossess (ACHEBE, 2000) and they gained great reverberation that still resonates with curricula. To illustrate, the teaching of literature at Letters undergraduate programs still emphasizes literary texts produced in England and the United States (ROSA DE ARAÚJO; TIRABOSCHI; FIGUEIREDO, 2022). In contrast to the emphasis on hegemonic literature in most universities, at the Federal University of Bahia nowadays, professors who teach literature courses do not focus only on works produced in hegemonic countries. In most of them, the study of black literature is generally part of the syllabus. Despite this example and others that there might be in Brazilian universities, the association of literature studies with hegemonic countries is often common.

The prominence of works from hegemonic countries reinforces the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2019). These colonialities align with altericide (MBEMBE, 2014), which does not only converge with necropolitics (MBEMBE, 2018) that decides whose lives matter and have the right to live, but also with the extermination of a mode of being, knowing, feeling on behalf of parameters and models based on hegemonic standards. These standards, in terms of race, mean whiteness.

In this vein, hooks (2010, p. 23) states that activists of the Black Power movement were the first ones to denounce white supremacy in how education was structured, "teaching white children ideologies of dominance and black children ideologies of subordination". Woodson (1999), in the 1930s, posited that the silence about the prolific African intellectual, scientific, and literary production in schools and the overemphasis on a white curriculum made black students ignore African cultural and scientific contributions. The same evidence is expressed by Gonzalez (2020) about the Brazilian education system. She claims that "[...] neither in school nor in the books where we are told to study is there any mention of the effective contribution of the popular classes, women, blacks and indigenous people in our historical and cultural formation."<sup>4</sup> (GONZÁLEZ, 2020, p. 204, my translation).

Gonzalez's (2020) musings find common ground with Lorde's (2019) on the importance of differences. For Lorde (2019), the difficulty of dealing with them may cause some oppressed groups not to acknowledge other people's oppressions. For instance, she mentioned the feminist movement of white feminists that failed to

1 In the original, "branco, magro, macho, jovem, heterossexual, cristão e financeiramente estável".

2 In the original, "colonialidade pode ser compreendida como uma lógica global de desumanização que é capaz de existir até mesmo na ausência de colônias formais".

3 In the original, "princípio organizador ou uma lógica estruturante de todas as configurações sociais e relações de dominação da modernidade".

4 In the original, "nem na escola nem nos livros onde mandam a gente estudar se fala da efetiva contribuição das classes populares, da mulher, do negro e do índio na nossa formação histórica e cultural".

address the subjugation caused by racial prejudice. In the same vein, black women may not be sensitive to their lesbian counterparts. In the face of these categories of oppression, it is necessary to continuously ask oneself what oppressions are not being considered and try to amplify the spectrum of discussions on oppressed groups as much as possible.

Learning to deal with plurality is a requisite for social justice and change. If this lesson is incorporated, it will construct a foundation on which differences will be valued and the coloniality that engenders oppression will be undermined. But where can one learn to have a decolonial attitude? The answer should be in schools. However, decoloniality is not part of school agendas. In general, in schools and other educational institutions, there is a clear denial of plurality in curricula as part of a coloniality project to maintain ideologies of dominance.

Education could be one of the most effective ways of changing society because schools are places where there can be room daily for discussions on coloniality and decolonial attitudes. Besides, in Brazil, a curriculum that embraces African, African Brazilian, and indigenous history and culture is mandatory by Law 11.645 (BRASIL, 2008), which was preceded by Law 10.639 (BRASIL, 2003). Even though the first law was enacted twenty years ago, the advances toward an antiracist education are still slow and insufficient for a country with many social problems rooted in racial inequity. There have been more discussions on racism and other types of oppression in schools, but they are often limited to specific moments instead of being part of daily life in the classrooms.

Addressing racial matters should be a continuous act. On this account, in the Teaching Practicum classes at the undergraduate level and Epistemologies of Applied Linguistics, at the graduate level, I have addressed the importance of teaching classes from a decolonial cosmoperception. I incorporated the notion of cosmoperception after reading *The Invention of Women* by Oyewùmí (2021), in which I learned that activating other types of perception besides sight broadens our experiences. According to Oyewùmí (2021), the Westernized culture privileges the sight to the detriment of other modes of connection and apprehension of the world. In this regard, having a decolonial mode of existence involves learning to perceive, feel, and sense reality without the limitations imposed by a sole channel for knowledge and other experiences.

Bearing the importance of decolonizing English language teaching in mind, emotion, spirit, and body, I have conducted classes in an English online course for public school students. The next section of this article aims to describe and analyze these experiences guided by an autoethnographic approach (HUGHES; PENNINGTON, 2017).

### 3. DECOLONIAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION EXPERIENCES AND WHAT THEY TEACH

Since 2020, I have resorted to autoethnography as a methodological approach to analyzing experiences. For this article, I relied on it to scrutinize the lesson plans I wrote for an online course combined with reflective materials, including journals, activities, and the recording of the classes. I interpreted them based on the theoretical underpinning, which I discuss throughout this article.

My decision for autoethnography lies in the goal of decolonizing positivist methodologies, which require, according to Collins (2019), that the researcher and the object of their investigation are distant, and that emotions, ethics, and values are disregarded. This positivist view of research has long prevailed in academia and it has prevented other kinds of knowledge, especially wisdom, from being considered valid (COLLINS, 2019).

The dissociation between academic life and emotions is also discussed by hooks (1994, p. 16) in *Teaching to Transgress*, in which, she claims that much emphasis is given to intellectual activity, which resonates with the “mind/body split”. In the context of classrooms, this dichotomy discards the other components that are part of students’ and teachers’ subjectivities, like emotions, spirituality, sensations, and experiences. The response to the lack of a holistic concept of education is engaged pedagogy (HOOKS, 1994). This kind of pedagogy values personal, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional growth and considers education, in Freire’s terms, as “the practice of freedom” (HOOKS, 1994, p. 14). This concept of education was inspired by the Freirean notion of “conscientization”, which, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (FREIRE, 2005), means the combination of reflections and actions, based on the idea of praxis (FREIRE, 2005), which hooks (1994, p. 14) interpreted as “critical awareness and engagement”.

Although Freire’s works were not produced in the context of discussions on decoloniality, his praxis resonates with it. He defended a proposal of education in which students would be vocal about their realities and knowledge as co-authors of the learning process. In this sense, learners would be educators too and teachers would

be learners that would acquire knowledge with their students (FREIRE, 2005). A concept of education in which everybody's knowledge is valued materializes decolonial pedagogy, especially in public schools, where most students come from unprivileged social contexts, which are a milieu of subaltern groups.

According to Oliveira (2018, p. 102), decolonial pedagogy “requires thinking from people subalternized by coloniality, such as indigenous people, blacks, women, homosexuals and other markers of differences opposed to hegemonic white and Eurocentric educational logics”<sup>5</sup>. In contrast to this concept of education, more often than not, English classes are deprived of cultural (PEREIRA, 2016), social, gender, and racial matters (PEREIRA, 2019) and centered on grammar (QUEVEDO-CAMARGO; SILVA, 2017; PEREIRA, 2016; 2019). This model of classrooms is followed despite the laws aforementioned, 10.639 (BRASIL, 2003) and 11.645 (BRASIL, 2008), which oblige the teaching of indigenous and African Brazilian cultures in regular schools that would make the classes not only more intercultural but also political. Conversely, what prevails in basic education is English language teaching, that is, the teaching of the language for the language's sake, instead of English Language Education, which would involve social and cultural aspects beyond linguistic features (HASHIGUTI; SOUZA, 2022).

When I discussed the non-cultural character of English language teaching in regular schools, I presented some alternatives for intercultural principles (Pereira, 2016), which are still very relevant. Nonetheless, in this article, I opt for a decolonial cosmoperception, considering the importance of decolonizing English language classes because of its evident colonial coloration (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003).

Coloniality in English language classrooms can be noticed in several aspects, including the textbook adopted, which can contribute to reinforcing or fighting it (MOTA-PEREIRA, 2022b; MOTA-PEREIRA, 2022c). In English language teaching, most textbooks have been a strong ally of hegemonic ideologies. In my teaching experiences and research in the field, with rare exceptions, I have observed that they ignore the plurality and the richness of manifold types of English spoken worldwide and encompass an artificial type of language and representations of the world (SIQUEIRA, 2012).

The artificial and biased quality of textbooks can be subverted by using materials produced by teachers and writers out of hegemonic centers. This would mean taking a decolonial action and having “an attitude of the mind” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 540). According to Kumaravadivelu (2003), decolonization is more than acknowledging nativization, that is, the linguistic changes caused by indigenization. It entails changing policies and “involves not only decentering the authority Western interests have over the ELT industry but also, more importantly, restoring agency to professionals in periphery communities.” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003, p. 540)

One of the strategies to act against coloniality in English language classes is to choose works by subaltern groups that present different cosmoperceptions. Literature is a very fruitful alternative in this sense.

The use of literature in English language classrooms favors the presentation of cultural (PEREIRA, 2016), social, racial, and gender matters (PEREIRA, 2019), displays other types of English, such as Black English, represents contexts where other languages are also spoken along with English (MOTA-PEREIRA, 2022c), and enhances students' repertoire of experiences that provide them with various sources of wisdom while reflecting, through alterity, on their own lives (PEREIRA, 2020). The importance of using literature also relies on the fact that it inspires the reading habit (PEREIRA, 2019), which fosters the foreign language learning process among other benefits. Despite its fruitful character, literature is not commonly used in lessons because of an emphasis on communicative language teaching, which values more pragmatic material (BRUN, 2004). The predominance of this type of material neglects that fiction has always been part of English classes (BRUN, 2004). For example, teachers often tell stories at the beginning of a class to contextualize a topic.

Despite the utilitarian side that literature can have, I argue that in a country like Brazil with so much need for more empathy, which is evident in the support of far-right principles by part of the population, it is necessary to furnish classes, especially in regular schools, with reflections that can widen sensitivity and expand the wisdom on different modes of existence beyond the ones promoted by modern capitalist paradigms. For this purpose, literary texts produced by black and indigenous writers can be a prolific alternative and I have had some experiences that can illustrate this.

In 2022, because of the Coronavirus pandemic, two colleagues and I assigned online groups for the students of Teaching Practicum courses. These classes were part of an online English course aimed at public school

5 In the original: “requer pensar a partir dos sujeitos subalternizados pela colonialidade, como índios, negros, mulheres, homossexuais e outr@s marcadores das diferenças contrapostas às lógicas educativas hegemônicas brancas e eurocentradas”

students at the junior high and high school levels. In the second semester of 2022, online teaching had ended and the student teachers restarted in-person classes. Despite this, I decided to keep the online course as part of the extension activities and taught some classes myself.

In the Online Course, I implemented a decolonial pedagogy (OLIVEIRA, 2018; MOTA-PEREIRA, 2022c, 2022c). In one of the classes, I aimed to discuss how education can contribute to a better mode of existence in a world guided by capitalist tenets that value consumption and give little importance to the environment. The purpose of denouncing the dangerous side of capitalism aligns with decolonial pedagogy because this system is one of the pillars of coloniality that engenders power and social asymmetries that nurture domination (OLIVEIRA, 2018). The class involved reflections on how people use their free time if they associate pleasure with consumption, and if they ever think about the carbon footprints their habits can produce. After a brief definition of the term “carbon footprint”, I asked a question about what they do to reduce it and what some of its consequences are. I conducted this discussion with questions at the students’ level that could be answered in English and Portuguese on a translingual basis. The discussions paved the way for the literary text I chose to engage the students in reflections on the importance of living in harmony with other beings, not only humans. To illustrate these reflections, I used an excerpt from *The Whale Rider* (IHIMAERA, 2008), which expresses the respect the Maori people have for the sea. I asked the students to read the text and, then, invited them to comment about the Maori’s attitude toward the sea comparing it with that of Western people. At this point, I told them about the concept of *Bem Viver* (ACOSTA, 2016) and the importance of knowing different ways of coexisting with other beings that are not limited to Westernized ones. The other procedures included a question about how we can heal the world through education as an introduction to the song sung by Michael Jackson, *Heal the World*. The purpose of playing this song was to engage the students in a reflection about everybody’s role in helping build a better place for this and the next generation because the current model, based on principles of coloniality, has proved itself ineffective for social justice, respect for plurality and all sorts of life, and peace.

The procedures and material of this class fostered learner participation, and social and environmental awareness, and made the class more meaningful and socially relevant. This outcome aligns with Language Education (HASHIGUTI; SOUZA, 2022) because I addressed language while also raising awareness of social and environmental matters. This model of education also lends itself to emancipation, which derives from critical thinking combined with action, that is, praxis (FREIRE, 2005). While planning the class, I was concerned about giving students opportunities for language practice too. In previous experiences with Teaching Practicum courses, I witnessed situations in which there was much emphasis on meaning and social relevance to the detriment of opportunities for using the language. Considering this, I made sure all the procedures of the class would include meaningful language practice to tackle topics of social relevance in speaking and writing activities such as dialogues with insightful reflections, paragraphs to express opinions, and short presentations, to name but a few. The relevance of the topics was combined with a discussion on one of the main problems in Brazil: the indiscriminate use of nature as a sheer resource, which is rooted in the colonial system of exploitation that defines the type of colonialization of the country.

In 2023, the Online English Course continued, and I planned to deepen decolonial topics. The planning was guided by the goal of addressing relevant topics regarding social, racial, and gender matters (PEREIRA, 2019) to foster critical thinking (FREIRE, 2005; HOOKS, 2010) and conscientization (FREIRE, 2005) alongside functions (BROWN, 2007) that would enable the students to use the language for communication and the expression of opinions and feelings.

At this stage of the course, one of its meaningful and socially relevant goals is the discussion on different types of English and how coloniality has played a role in shaping people’s conception of a speaker of this language (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003). This goal guided one of the classes. Among the materials of this class, I resorted to a quote from the chapter “Language: Teaching New Worlds/New Words” by hooks (1994) to discuss how the English language was refashioned by the African languages of enslaved African people to whom English was imposed, thus demonstrating that there was a resistance to this imposition. They, who were obliged to speak English, also transformed the imposed language.

The discussion on linguistic domination and colonialism preceded the reflection on a poem by Kamala Das quoted in the High School National Exam (ENEM) in 2018. The poem expresses a non-native English speaker’s perception of language, who does not conform to the norm and speaks it with all the features that express her

identity, which is that of a person who owns the language because she speaks it. This class also involved a discussion on English as a lingua franca, which was underpinned by an excerpt from a text by Cogo (2013), reinforcing the conception of English as not limited to standard varieties.

The theoretical texts underpinned the issue denounced in the poem and made the students reflect on the English varieties they can encounter and the ones they speak. The results of this metalinguistic lesson, in which language was discussed, were felt the following week when a Brazilian guest who has lived in the United States for five years participated in the class for the students to interview her. Among the questions, a student asked what types of English she spoke and, after she said that her English was Brazilian with right sentences and mistakes, a language she kept learning continuously, a student paraphrased on the chat a line from Kamala Das' poem, in which she states that her English may be funny, but it is human. This citation suggests that the study of theoretical texts, but, especially, literature gave the students an example of a personal experience that certainly contributed to making it part of their subjective and epistemic repertoire. Literature facilitates the process of projections and embodiment of wisdom.

The procedures for reading these texts included asking questions for contextualization, skimming through them to identify the main idea, studying keywords, reading aloud for pronunciation practice, producing sentences, restating, copying, and, more specifically in the case of the poem, reading aloud for oral performance. These tasks were guided by reflections on what it takes to study a language and not only to learn it (LARROSA, 2020). Therefore, I aimed to have the students study the language while also mulling over the texts, getting familiar with the ideas, reflecting, and associating them with their perceptions and those of people belonging to the margins of the native speaker model, which still figures as a strong paradigm.

Another material used in this class was a song by Bob Marley, *Redemption Song*. This song conveys the theme of slavery and presents a creolized English spoken in the Caribbean. In addition to studying the lyrics, I invited the students to reflect on this creolized variety, which enriches, rather than diminishes, the plurality of the language. This was an opportunity to state, in line with hooks' text (1994), that no language is imperialist *per se* and that it is how it is used that defines whether it is oppressive. At this moment, I invited them to reflect on what attitude they would choose, that is, if they would reinforce or combat oppression. To finish the class, I highlighted the lines of the song that call for emancipation from mental slavery. One of the paths towards this goal is to identify and challenge coloniality to open and reinforce new routes. To achieve this aim, using literature and other media by black and indigenous writers is an alternative.

This class made room for a considerable amount of learner participation and practice. However, I do not consider it purely learner-centered (BROWN, 20007). Rather than centering it only on the learner, this class was also world-centered (LARROSA, 2020). It aimed to embrace reflections beyond the individual layer to redirect attention to life in its broad sense. Literature is a very suitable material for such purpose because it expands perceptions through other experiences fictionalized in the stories that one might not have the chance to access while raising empathy and other emotions (GHOSN, 2001).

An example of a literary text that stirs the readers' imagination and emotions while giving them knowledge of indigenous cosmoperceptions is the story of James Poneke in *The Imaginary Lives of James Poneke* (MAKERETI, 2018). This novel is based on a person whose life is revealed in a newspaper article, which was one of the raw materials that the writer used to create the story. In the following class, which was about the importance of studying, I quoted an excerpt from the novel to illustrate the character's longing to study after contextualizing the plot.

The Artist's work now took his full focus and he had no time to follow through with his earlier promises to encourage me in higher studies, though I took my own opportunities to read from his father's library or find what education the city offered up in its buildings and stores. (MAKERETI, 2018, p. 156).

I quoted this excerpt to illustrate a discussion on different types of education and how it is not limited to the classroom (HOOKS, 2003). I also got the students to read it to engage them in reflections on autonomy, directing their attention, through language practice, to what they can do to learn English. The reflection on autonomy linked two other stages of the class: the reading of excerpts in English from *Quarto de Despejo* (JESUS, 2014) by Carolina Maria de Jesus, who narrates her reading and writing autonomous habit; and the novel *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer (2015), which tells the story of a boy who studied autonomously and learned how to build a windmill that would help farming in a context of lack of electricity and

water. Both stories are inspiring and aim to demonstrate that one should not underestimate the potential found in unprivileged contexts. However, I made it clear that these examples do not mean that discourses of self-sacrifice and meritocracy should be encouraged. Another goal was to present works by Indigenous, African Brazilian, African, and women writers aiming to decolonize curricula that have overemphasized white, class-privileged, and patriarchal knowledge (GONZALEZ, 2020). By focusing attention on these stories of black protagonists, my goal was guided by what Chinua Achebe (2000, p. 73) calls “the balance of stories”. Emphasizing stories by black and indigenous writers does not mean that those by white people should be rejected. It means that these are the stories that should be highlighted after centuries of overemphasis on the canon, predominantly produced by male white writers.

Manifold experiences can also be reached through other media such as films and news reports, like Malala’s, who also figured among the references I used in the abovementioned class to illustrate girls’ fight for education in a gender-biased oppressive system. However, the cognitive and emotional processes involved in reading literature feel more engaging since it is the reader who imagines voices, sounds, and pictures in an active exercise that intensifies projections and cosmoperceptions. Therefore, in this aesthetic praxis, wisdom and feelings gained by studying the texts remain more easily and significantly in the mind and the body.

#### 4. TOWARD NEW PATHS

The reflections in this paper find resonance in works (MOTA, 2010; PEREIRA, 2016, 2019, 200; MOTA-PEREIRA, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c) in which applied linguistics and literary studies intersect. In line with these works, I have mulled over the relationship between English Language Education and Literature for more than a decade and one of the points of departure for these studies was the longing to reconcile two areas commonly taken as opposites: Linguistics and Literature (MOTA, 2010). Furthermore, literature has always been a substantial part of my learning process in foreign languages, thus being easily incorporated into my teaching praxis. It not only fosters the learning process by presenting new vocabulary and sentences in context, but also allows for wisdom about countries where it is produced, a repertoire of experiences, and cultural, social, racial, gender, and linguistic matters.

The examples of literary texts in English Language Education analyzed in this article illustrate strategies aimed at decoloniality. In the context of English language classes that have valued hegemonic countries and privileged individuals, the study of black and indigenous people’s texts, language varieties, and cultures makes it possible to know different cosmoperceptions that can teach other modes of existence as alternatives to paradigms based on the coloniality of power, being, and knowledge (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2019). It is widely known that such paradigms have failed to build a society where social justice, equity, and plurality prevail. Therefore, it is necessary to learn from other epistemologies and ontologies that can be accessed through non-hegemonic groups’ literature, theories, and other experiences.

In Brazil, where coloniality manifests in situations of racism, sexism, and capitalism, Language Education should mean more than simply implementing a holistic kind of pedagogy. It should entail the project of raising conscientization (FREIRE, 2005), and critical thinking (FREIRE, 2005, HOOKS, 2010), which could contribute to emancipation from ideologies that have served to oppress and subjugate. In this sense, decolonial Language Education is a prolific alternative for this country and others where oppressive systems prevail.

Using literature is not the only option for Decolonial Language Education and it should not be seen as a one-size-fits-all solution. Nonetheless, the benefits of using it are manifold and involve the development of competencies that widen the students’ cosmoperceptions. While literature by black and indigenous writers is not the sole response to a country that holds the title of having been the last country to abolish slavery and acts against its environment (MARQUES, 2017), it is one of the means toward new paths.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION DECLARATION

I declare, for all due purposes, that I am the sole author of the article.

#### DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I declare that there are no conflicts of interest.



## RESEARCH DATA AVAILABILITY DECLARATION

The public data used in the research is available at the aforementioned electronic addresses, allowing broad and unrestricted access.

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