OTHER THEMES

Decolonizing English Language Teaching for Brazilian Indigenous Peoples

Walace Rodrigues[I]
Francisco Edviges Albuquerque[I]
Michol Miller[I]

[I]Universidade Federal do Tocantins (UFT), Araguaína/TO – Brazil

ABSTRACT – Decolonizing English Language Teaching for Brazilian Indigenous Peoples. This paper investigates the design and methods of English language teaching (ELT) curricula in the Brazilian indigenous educational context. Under Brazilian federal law, English is a mandatory curricular requirement for all, including indigenous students. This paper analyzes contributions relevant to the decolonization of English teaching in indigenous contexts from postcolonial theories on education, perspectives on decolonized ELT, and sociocultural learning theory. An argument is made for the development of ELT curricula and methodology in collaboration with indigenous teachers, in order to prioritize their communities, cultures, and traditional knowledge.
Keywords: **Postcolonial Education. Subalternity. Indigenous Education. Decolonial English Language Teaching.**

RESUMO – Decolonizando o Ensino de Língua Inglesa para Populações Indígenas Brasileiras. Este artigo investiga a concepção e os métodos dos currículos de *English language teaching* (ELT) no contexto da educação indígena brasileira. Pela lei federal brasileira, o inglês é um requisito curricular obrigatório para todos, incluindo os estudantes indígenas. Este artigo analisa as contribuições relevantes para a decolonização do ensino de inglês em contextos indígenas a partir de teorias pós-coloniais em educação, perspectivas sobre *ELT* decolonizado e teoria sociocultural da aprendizagem. Uma argumentação é feita para o desenvolvimento de currículos e de metodologias de *ELT* em colaboração com professores indígenas, a fim de priorizar suas comunidades, culturas e saberes tradicionais.
Palavras-chave: **Educação pós-colonial. Subalternidade. Educação Indígena. Ensino Decolonizado de Língua Inglesa.**

Introduction

In an era of increasing contact between citizens of the diverse nations of the world, the far-reaching impacts of globalization are often linked to the propagation of English as a language for international communication in a variety of settings, including international trade, academic and scientific discourses, and diplomacy, among others. Given its status as an international language, English is also a highly-valued foreign language in Brazil, and its influence represents, at least symbolically, greater access to both national and global markets. As such, federal curricular standards require all students in Brazilian public schools to study English as a foreign language from middle to high school.

These standards also apply to the indigenous populations of Brazil. However, additional federal legislation regulates the ways that English and other subjects must be taught in indigenous communities. The Brazilian Constitution, ratified in 1988, represents a significant landmark in this respect, providing for the inclusion of 'specific, bilingual, differentiated, and intercultural' educational practices within indigenous school settings, thus guaranteeing each indigenous group the right to integrate their traditional knowledge, cultures, and languages into primary and secondary education curricula (Brazil, 1988).

As such, the question of how to teach English in indigenous settings in a way that values traditional cultures and knowledge in accordance with the specific, differentiated, and intercultural approach mandated by federal legislation must be addressed. The status of English as the language of globalization, along with its long history as an instrument of colonial imperialism, poses an ethical dilemma in the Brazilian indigenous educational context, given that its inclusion in indigenous school curricula presents an implicit risk of recreating and reinforcing neocolonial hierarchies of knowledge production that favor Western perspectives over traditional indigenous systems of knowledge.

In an effort to adapt English language teaching to the needs and demands of indigenous communities, contributions from the fields of postcolonial theory, English language teaching, and sociocultural approaches to language teaching will be connected to current Brazilian laws governing indigenous education. The aim is to investigate the possibilities for the teaching of a decolonized, local English that values traditional indigenous knowledge systems over neocolonial global influences which are often associated with English.

An argument will made for the dialogic development of English language curricula in collaboration with indigenous teachers as primary decision makers in the process, in an effort to provide indigenous students with opportunities to develop their voices and tell their stories from their own perspectives in English, the language of modern globalization.

Postcolonial Theory, Education, and English as the Language of Colonization

Postcolonial theory is an area of inquiry largely organized around the investigation of the effects of colonization on countries, cultures, and ethnic groups with histories of colonial influence. It is closely linked to the fields of postmodernism and post-structuralism, sharing with these theoretical areas the critique of modernism, Enlightenment discourse, and Western imperialism, but with a greater focus on political engagement within the academy.

According to Andreotti (2011), a major domain of postcolonial inquiry situates the critique of colonial relations within a "[…] discursive orientation, learning toward poststructuralism, focusing on contestation and complicity in the relationship between colonizers and colonized and on the possibility of imagining relationships beyond coercion, subjugation, and epistemic violences" (Andreotti, 2011, p. 17). With this approach in mind, it is possible to propose a "[…] constant and immanent problematization of knowledge production" and a practice of "[…] hyper-self-reflexivity as a strategy that acknowledges everyone's complicities and investments (of oppressors and oppressed) in coercive and repressive belief systems," thus enabling the transformation of the discourse and relationships of inequality in the production of knowledge, particularly in educational contexts with colonial and imperial histories (Andreotti, 2011, p. 18).

A prominent author whose work has contributed to this domain of postcolonial investigation is Gayatri Spivak. Her influential contribution to the field of postcolonial studies explores the nature of subalternity, understanding subaltern populations as those marginalized members of society who do not have a voice or access to imperialist or colonial discourses, including indigenous populations subjected to the influences of colonialism.

In Spivak's view, historical colonialism has transformed into modern globalization, which legitimizes Western cultural domination over Third World cultures under the guise of "development" and considers colonialism and its influences as something of the past, thus reproducing and reinforcing Western dominance and exploitation of the Third World within the globalized capitalist system (Andreotti, 2011, p. 38). The historical damage to the Third World as result of colonization is minimized in favor of a view of the civilized and developed First World as culturally superior. In Spivak's view, this epistemic violence often results in the desire of the Third World to *catch up* with the "civilized" West. Simultaneously, the reinforcement of First World superiority often puts actors such as international non-governmental and human rights organizations in the position to recreate and reproduce this ethnocentric hierarchy when engaging with subaltern populations under the guise of development efforts, further disadvantaging these populations (Andreotti, 2011, p. 39). Spivak's contributions should be taken into consideration when seeking to ethically engage with populations

with colonial histories. This is especially true in educational settings, as special care must be taken to avoid minimizing the agency of these populations any further.

Spivak's most influential work, *Can the subaltern speak?* (1988), best characterizes this conflict between Third and First Worlds interests, particularly regarding the representation of Third World subaltern populations. Taking as an example the British decision in colonial India to outlaw the practice of *sati*, the ritual suicide of widows upon the death of their husbands, Spivak demonstrates how the voice of the subaltern woman practicing *sati* was never heard in this decision--- neither by the benevolent British colonizing power, who in outlawing the practice acted as "white men saving brown women from brown men" (thus reinforcing the position of the colonizer as superior to the colonized culture), nor by other members of Hindu culture, according to whom the widows may have "wanted to die" (Spivak, 1988). Spivak extends this example of the subaltern's lack of voice in the representation of Third World cultures to her work critiquing the Western production of knowledge about subaltern populations in colonial contexts, particularly in the case of researchers and academics engaging with these populations. From a position of privilege as Westerners with material and cultural advantages, these scholars end up exoticizing the Third World in their efforts to describe and represent it. In viewing the Third World as a source of data and maintaining the Western academy as the repository of the knowledge produced from that data, imperial power relations are reproduced, thus erasing the voice of the subaltern in the process (Andreotti, 2011, p. 43). Applied to the Brazilian indigenous educational context, Spivak's perspective highlights the need for the valorization and prioritization of local knowledges and perspectives over Western knowledge when conducting research with these populations.

In much of her work, Spivak focuses on education and its possibilities for social and political transformation in colonial and imperial power relations. She advocates for a pedagogical approach which aims at creating an ethical engagement with the subaltern Other and transforming the epistemological representation of subaltern populations. One aspect of this approach involves a deconstruction of hegemonic discourse by *negotiating from within*, thus dialoguing with the logic of imperialism in order to destabilize, question, and rearticulate the dominant ideology and favor the subaltern voice (Andreotti, 2011, p. 47).

Additionally, she advocates for those engaged in research with subaltern populations to acknowledge and recognize their own complicities in the process of knowledge production about these populations, thus *unlearning their privilege*, and seeking to learn from the subaltern instead. She refers to this concept as *learning to learn from below*, which involves "[...] a suspension of the belief that one is indispensable, better or culturally superior; it is refraining from thinking that the Third World is in trouble and that one has the solutions; it is resisting the temptation of projecting oneself or one's world onto the Other" (Spivak, 2002 apud Andreotti, 2011, p. 50). This process involves recognizing that

the historical background of one's gender, class, and nationality creates privilege, and that this privilege conditions and limits one's knowledge and ability to understand the perspectives of the Other.

Only by acknowledging the influence of the privilege inherent in one's position can one begin to construct an ethical relationship with the subaltern, especially when seeking to 'right the wrongs' of colonialism in the educational setting: "This is because the task of the educator is to learn from below, the lines of conflict resolution undoubtedly available, however dormant, within the disenfranchised cultural system; giving up convictions of triumphalist superiority" (Spivak, 2004, p. 551). Thus, when engaging with subaltern communities, Spivak's conception of an ethical transformative pedagogy is characterized by the need to unlearn one's own privileges and prejudices in an effort to learn from the perspective of the subaltern, and to understand and prioritize local systems of knowledge and ways of knowing.

When considering the topic of English teaching for Brazilian indigenous populations, Spivak's perspectives on ways of ethically engaging the subaltern through education prove particularly useful, especially given the history of English as the language of colonial imperialism. Viewing English as "[...] a major language in which colonialism has been written" (Pennycook, 2008, p. 9), Alastair Pennycook argues that:

> ELT theories and practices that emanate from the former colonial powers still carry the traces of those colonial histories, both because of the long history of direct connections between ELT and colonialism and because such theories and practices derive from broader European cultures and ideologies that themselves are products of colonialism (Pennycook, 2008, p. 19).

Also, the global reach of English is rooted in its role as a tool of colonization intent on spreading British language and culture, and on developing "[...] a workforce able to participate in colonial capitalism" (Pennycook, 2008, p. 20). According to Pennycook (2008), this economic aspect of the language remains true today as it is still seen as a key factor to achieving success in international business and education.

The field of English language teaching (ELT) has evolved alongside the growth of colonial empires, since as colonial influence increased, so did the the need for teaching English in the colonies. The methods used to teach the language were derived from Western culture and systems of knowledge, so that through the teaching of English, the cultural imperialism of colonizing powers was further reinforced and maintained.

Throughout his investigations of the linked histories of British colonization in colonial contexts such as China and India and the subsequent developments in the field of English language teaching, Pennycook analyses the discourses of the Self and the Other associated with the dominance of English and the fact that it continues to reproduce colonialism around the world. In order to confront these colonial discourses, he advocates for a postcolonial approach to undo the power of these discourses:

> The power of English and the adherence of discourses render the task of postcolonial writing a difficult but crucial one. Postcolonial writing needs to work in concert, in many different forms, to articulate both counterdiscursive arguments and alternative realities... We need to work in and against English to find cultural alternatives to the cultural constructs of colonialism; we desperately need to find something different (Pennycook, 2008, p. 217-218).

This call to work from *within* English in search of alternatives to the constructs of colonialism echoes Spivak's argument for the deconstruction and subsequent destabilization of hegemonic discourses by *negotiating from within* It is only by working towards the articulation of alternative or subaltern voices and histories in English itself, the language of colonial imperialism, that we can begin to combat the power of the discourses that reproduce the effects of colonialism today. Spivak shows us that the deconstruction of hegemonic discourses can be a mechanism to counter colonialist approaches:

> Deconstruction does not say there is no subject, there is no truth, there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. It is not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced. That`s why deconstruction doesn`t say logocentrism is a pathology, or metaphysical enclosures are something you can escape. Deconstruction, if one wants a formula, is, among other things, a persistent critique of what one cannot not want (Spivak, 1996, p. 27-28).

In response to the ethical need to work against reproducing the effects of colonialism through ELT, the next section will outline some of the current perspectives on both English as a global lingua franca and the decolonization of English teaching that may contribute ideas on how to approach this enterprise in new ways in the Brazilian indigenous educational context.

English as a Global Lingua Franca and the Decolonization of ELT

The proliferation of English in diverse communicative contexts across the globe is a well-documented phenomenon, and considering its role as the main language of academia, international business, politics, and diplomacy, as well as its position as the most widely taught foreign language in the world, it is safe to state that English has become the world's global lingua franca.

Canagarajah (2014) acknowledges and outlines some of the ways in which the English taught around the world has transformed into a lingua franca; English has become more and more widespread due to increased opportunities for communication through technology and travel, particularly in interactions between non-native interlocutors

in which no native speakers are present. Observing that these speakers "[...] are developing local uses of English and are also increasingly interacting with other multilingual communities", Canagarajah highlights recent findings showing that these individuals do not use native speaker varieties when interacting with each other (Canagarajah, 2014, p. 767).

Thus, the globalization of English and its increased usage in non-native contexts suggest a shift away from a monolingual, native speaker model as the ideal form of language use to be addressed by teachers. This weakening of the native speaker as the ideal interlocutor suggests a weakening in the Western influence that the language may have in the classroom as well. Thus, this shift in ELT away from the colonial concept of the native speaker allows more room for English to be taught with a focus on local knowledge and cultures as pedagogical content.

Expanding on this move away from native speakerism, Kumaravadivelu (2003) advocates for the decolonization of English language teaching, defining it as a "[...] fairly complex process of taking control of the principles and practices of planning, learning, and teaching English" (p. 540). In an effort to overcome the effects of cultural imperialism associated with globalization and the subsequent need for English, he calls for a "decentering of Western interests" in the field of ELT and a "restoring of agency to professionals in the periphery communities" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 540).

With a focus on language teaching methodology as the means for the decolonization of ELT, Kumaravadivelu (2003, p. 541) classifies the notion of method as a "colonial construct of marginality", which "[...] valorizes everything associated with the colonial Self and marginalizes everything with the subaltern Other", thus maintaining the hierarchy of the native speaker, as Self, that is, as superior to the non-native Other. Arguing against this continued dominance within the field of ELT methodology of native speaking teachers as the dominant authorities on the language, Kumaravadivelu (2016) advocates the use of a "grammar of decoloniality", defined as "[...] a framework for strategic plans drawn by subalterns deriving from their own lived experiences" (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p. 79). One particularly relevant element of the decolonial framework posited by the author includes "[...] designing context-specific instructional strategies that take into account the local historical, political, social, cultural, and educational exigencies" as well as "[...] preparing teaching materials that are not only suited to the goals and objectives of learning and teaching in a specific context, but also responsive to the instructional strategies designed by local professionals" (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p. 81). Thus, the decolonization of ELT is possible when the local knowledge, cultures, and educational needs present in each teaching context are prioritized over the Western influences inherent in using native speaker English as an idealized model for the use of the language.

In response to the shifting paradigms of English language teaching under the influence of globalization, Canagarajah (2005) acknowl-

edges that "[...] local knowledge from the many postcolonial communities can offer valid contributions to pedagogical practice", as well as the notion that it is local practitioners, rather than researchers, who should be "[...] generating changes from the ground up" in knowledge formation (Canagarajah, 2005, p. xxvii). The author reinforces Kumaravadivelu's critique of methodology, stating that:

> We now hold that there is no 'best method' that assures successful learning; we even doubt the validity of the concept of methods, as pedagogical practices are eclectical, contextual, and contingent. This reorientation can empower local teachers to focus on the learning strategies that work for their own students in the light of the purposes and objectives that define their own teaching" (Canagarajah, 2005, p. xxviii).

Given the contributions of these two scholars, it can be seen that today, in the age of globalization, it is becoming more and more possible to conceptualize the teaching of English in local contexts as free from the idealized model of native speaker English and colonial, Westernized concepts of language teaching methodology, in favor of the day-to-day realities of those local contexts, as well as the localized expertise of professionals working in those settings.

In the Brazilian indigenous educational context, the prioritization of local knowledge, methods, and the expertise of indigenous teachers when considering the development of English language teaching pedagogy and materials is not only ideal but mandated by federal legislation; a brief overview of Brazilian legislation and public policies regarding both indigenous education and the teaching of English as a foreign language is provided below.

Brazilian Intercultural Indigenous Education and English

The history of indigenous education in Brazil from colonial times up until the 1960s was strongly influenced by a variety of missionary groups, whose goals included the evangelization, assimilation and integration of indigenous peoples into mainstream society, exclusively through Portuguese instruction (Muniz, 2017). In the 1960s and 70s, indigenous education policies began to allow for the use of indigenous languages in schools, but still with the intention that indigenous populations would eventually become monolingual Portuguese speakers.

The Brazilian Federal Constitution approved and implemented in 1988 was one of the most significant pieces of legislation regarding indigenous rights and education in Brazil. It represents a shift from an assimilationist approach to one aimed at protecting and respecting indigenous cultures and languages (Muniz, 2017). Indigenous communities are guaranteed "[...] the use of their maternal languages and own processes of learning" (Brazil, 1988, art. 210), as well as the "full exercise of cultural rights" and "the protection and valorization of cul-

tural manifestations" (Brazil, 1988, art. 215). With the ratification of the document, the indigenous population was given not only constitutional protection of their cultures and languages, but also the right to a differentiated form of education specific to their traditional realities.

Intended as a pedagogical guide for indigenous educators, Brazil's Ministry of Education released in 1998 the National Curricular Reference for Indigenous Schools (RCNEI) as a complementary reference to other federal laws governing indigenous education. The document defines *interculturality*, one of the most salient and discussed dimensions of this specialized form of Brazilian indigenous education, in the following terms:

> Cultural and linguistic diversity should be recognized and maintained; situations of communication between different sociocultural, linguistic, and historical experiences should be promoted; and understanding and respect between human beings of different ethnic identities should be stimulated, while at the same time recognizing that these same relations have historically occurred in contexts of social and political inequality. (Brazil, 1998, p. 24, translation by the authors).

The RCNEI further describes interculturality as allowing for "[…] a dialogue between students and other knowledge originating from other diverse human cultures" and, in its pedagogical orientations, identifies the challenge of creating such a dialogue when clear social and political inequalities exist between the indigenous culture and the majority culture (Brazil, 1998, p. 60).

Furthermore, the history of English as the language of colonialism, and the possible harm that the teaching of the language represents in subaltern contexts makes this type of dialogue vitally important to preventing the imposition of Western knowledge systems onto Brazilian indigenous students. Instead of subjecting indigenous students to Westernized neocolonial discourse through the teaching of native speaker English and culture, a more positive goal would be to focus on ways of helping indigenous students to tell their own story to the world, using English as a tool to *negotiate from within* the language and to resist discourses of the colonizing Self and subaltern Other.

This challenge brings to light the role that indigenous teachers play as both educators and members of their communities. According to the References for Indigenous Teacher Education (Brazil, 2002, p. 21), indigenous teachers play a "[…] complex role by understanding and navigating relations between the majority society and their own society". As they are "[…] privileged interlocutors, 'between worlds', or between cultures, having to access and understand concepts, ideas, and categories that come not only from their own cultural backgrounds" (Brazil, 2002, p. 21), it stands to reason that it is the indigenous teachers who should inform English language teaching methodology and curricula, since their work directly involves the replication of local knowledge and culture in their educational settings. Additionally, they are the ones

best acquainted with the specific educational practices already in place in their local teaching contexts, as well as the needs of their students.

However, as English is a foreign language for Brazilian indigenous schools, and typically the third language in the curriculum after indigenous languages and Portuguese, the development of ELT methodology and curricula is a task that cannot be undertaken by indigenous teachers alone, as many of them may have little knowledge and experience with the language. Thus, the task of incorporating English into Brazilian indigenous educational settings, in a way that ensures the prioritization of local knowledge, requires collaboration with non-indigenous ELT specialists, who can support the indigenous teachers during the process.

In the next section, contributions from the field of sociocultural theory and language teaching will be provided to explore ways in which ELT specialists and researchers can support and collaborate with indigenous teachers, so that they can function as the primary decision makers in the process of developing English language teaching methods and materials.

Sociocultural Theory and the Funds of Knowledge Approach

The current field of sociocultural theory originating from L. S. Vygotsky's work attributes human learning to interactions with the social and material aspects of daily life. The sociocultural approach to second language development can be understood as "[…] a theory that proposes that humans attain the capacity to voluntarily control or regulate their memory, attention, perception, planning, learning, and development, as they appropriate mediating artifacts, including language, as they are brought into culturally specified and organized activities" (Lantolf, 2005, p. 335).

In this conception of language learning, learners consciously work towards acquiring the second language within the context of communal activities governed by the local culture at hand. A Vygostkian concept of culture helps to further guide the development of sociocultural approaches to English language teaching in the sense that culture encompasses:

> Everyday rituals of interpersonal communication, family structure, institutional and group identities, creation and use of material artifacts and technologies, approaches to problem solving, literacy and numeracy practices, and most fundamentally, the lexicalization and grammaticalization patterns specific to language (Thorne; Tasker, 2011, p. 490).

In this view, language and culture are intrinsically connected, simultaneously shaping and shaped by people's daily activities as well as the linguistic and communicative practices that are situated within

those activities. By taking this view of language as culture and applying it to the intercultural approach prescribed by Brazilian indigenous education policy, it is possible to consider the use of established traditional knowledge and communicative practices inherent in indigenous culture as a point of departure for the teaching of English in the indigenous context.

The sociocultural approach to language teaching may be useful to meeting the needs of Brazilian indigenous communities to preserve and valorize their traditional culture and knowledge. Hence, aspects of the indigenous students' and teachers' own cultural landscape could be used as the main source for the cultural and language content to be taught in English. In this way, local knowledge can be reclaimed, emphasized, and maintained, even as the students learn a new language. As local practitioners acquainted with instructional strategies and practices in their educational contexts, indigenous teachers are also the authorities on their traditional languages and cultures. These factors indicate that indigenous teachers should be the primary decision makers in the process of defining ELT content and methodology for their indigenous educational contexts, since they function as cultural mediators between their students and the dominant society.

An approach that may prove useful within this concept of sociocultural action is that of "funds of knowledge", which is defined as "[...] the historically developed, significant sociocultural practices, skills, abilities, beliefs and bodies of knowledge that embody the households of learners in the immediate school community" (Hall, 2002, p. 79). This approach combines Vygotsky's perspectives on learning with ethnographic approaches to understanding the sociocultural worlds of learners in an effort to develop curricula and instruction that are culturally meaningful to students (Hall, 2002).

The funds of knowledge approach is based on the notion that classroom teachers should lead the design process of instructional programs, as teacher involvement is necessary to effect long-term results in the implementation of new curricula and methods. Focused on the direct participation of teachers,

> The funds of knowledge approach begins with the engagement of teachers in the ethnographic study of the origin, use, and distribution of the communicative activities and events, and ways of thinking about, believing in and valuing these activities that are significant to their students' home and community lives (Hall, 2002, p. 79).

This approach consists of three main components: a community component, in which teachers engage in ethnographic study of "[...] the origin, use and distribution of funds of knowledge among households", an after-school study groups component, in which teachers and researchers collaborate "[...] to discuss research findings, and to plan, develop, and support innovations in instruction", and a school component, in which teachers carry out studies of their classrooms "[...] to

examine existing methods of instruction and implement innovations" based on the information gathered in the other components of the process (Gonzalez et al., 1995, p. 446).

One aspect of this approach particularly appropriate for adaptation to the Brazilian indigenous educational context is its teacher-led nature. It acknowledges that teachers are the primary authorities in their classroom contexts, especially regarding instructional procedures, and as such they should oversee the design of curricula and instruction, albeit in collaboration with educational researchers.

According to this approach, teachers are invited to engage with their students' communities as qualitative researchers and are trained to use ethnographic methods to critically analyze the sociocultural worlds of their students. Therefore, in their role as community members as well as individuals engaged in the preservation of traditional knowledge and culture through education, indigenous teachers are equal collaborators in the development process, acquiring research skills that will continue to serve them throughout their careers.

One positive outcome of this approach is the transformation in teachers' self- perceptions: "As the teachers' field research has evolved in such a way as to provide ownership of the process, they have been able to construct themselves as agents of change" (Gonzalez et al., 1995, p. 467).

Another feature of the approach that makes it ideal for application in the Brazilian indigenous educational context is the equal collaboration between teachers and researchers in the design of curricula and instruction.

The after-school study groups component is the locus of collaboration, in which teachers and researchers engage in joint inquiry, analyzing the ethnographic data collected in their communities, and dialoging about their experiences. Teachers and researchers "[…] each manipulate their own sphere of expertise" such that the "researchers enter the teacher study groups as leaners", and "[…] reciprocity as a theoretical construct has formed the based for the exchange" (Gonzalez et al., 1995, p. 448).

With the researcher taking the position of learner in their collaboration with teachers, Spivak's concept of *learning to learn from below* may be realized through the dialogue led by the teachers as contextual experts. In the specific case of defining English content and instruction for Brazilian indigenous schools, this approach opens up a space for the subaltern voice of the indigenous teachers to be heard.

Some Last Considerations

The Brazilian indigenous educational context presents a unique ethical challenge for researchers who have the task of developing ELT curricula and methods that do not threaten or minimize subaltern indigenous cultures.

A postcolonial approach to education informed by the work of Spivak provides insights into the construction of an ethical approach that seeks to subvert the imperialist discourse typically associated with the English language. It advocates for strategies such as *negotiating from within* the colonizing history of English and *learning to learn from below*, i.e., learning from subaltern populations in the investigation of ELT in indigenous contexts.

Considering the fact that the use of English as a global *lingua franca* has caused a shift in recent years away from native English speakers as the ideal model for the language and culture to be taught, it has become possible to implement strategies for the decolonized teaching of English, such as a refocusing on local contexts, knowledge, and cultures as the basis for the development of curricula and methodology for ELT.

Moreover, sociocultural theory can provide ways of conceptualizing how indigenous students' social and material lives can inform the development process, and the funds of knowledge approach provides a framework for accomplishing this objective through the collaboration between indigenous teachers and researchers.

In this way, indigenous teachers can be empowered as the primary decision makers in the development of ELT curricula and instructions in their roles as experts on the local knowledge and practices in their indigenous contexts, and thus the possibility that subaltern indigenous learners of English can be heard becomes more tangible.

Received on April 3, 2018
Approved on November 9, 2018

References

ANDREOTTI, Vanessa. **Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011.

BRAZIL. Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil. **Diário Oficial da União**, Brasília, 1988. Available at: <http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicaocompilado.htm>. Last visited: 21st Jan 2018.

BRAZIL. **Referencial Curricular Nacional para as Escolas Indígenas**. Brasília, 1998. Available at: <http://www.dominiopublico.gov.br/pesquisa/DetalheObraForm.do?select_action=&co_obra=26700>. Last visited: 21st Jan 2018.

BRAZIL. **Referenciais para a Formação de Professores Indígenas**. Brasília, 2002. Available at: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/seb/arquivos/pdf/Livro.pdf>. Last visited: 21st Jan 2018.

CANAGARAJAH, Athelstan Suresh. Introduction. In: CANAGARAJAH, Athelstan Suresh. **Reclaiming the Local in Language Policy and Practice**. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005.

CANAGARAJAH, Athelstan Suresh. In Search of a New Paradigm for Teaching English as an International Language. **TESOL**, online, v. 5, n. 4, p. 767-785, 2014. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/tesj.166>. Last visited: 21st Jan 2018.

GONZALEZ, Norma et al. Funds of Knowledge for Teaching in Latino Households. **Urban Education**, online, v. 29, n. 4, p. 443-70, 1995. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0042085995029004005>. Last visited: 21st Jan 2018.

HALL, Joan Kelly. **Teaching and Researching**: Language and Culture. London: Routledge, 2011.

KUMARAVADIVELU, Bala. Forum: Critical Language Pedagogy – A Postmethod Perspective on English Language Teaching. **World Englishes**, online, v. 22, n. 4, p. 539-569, 2003. Available at: <http://bkumaravadivelu.com/articles%20in%20pdfs/2003%20Kumaravadivelu%20Postmethod%20Perspective.pdf>. Last visited: 21st Jan. 2018.

KUMARAVADIVELU, Bala. The Decolonial Option in English Teaching: can the subaltern act? **TESOL Quarterly**, online, v. 50, n. 1, 66-85, 2016. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/tesq.202>. Last visited: 21st Jan 2018.

LANTOLF, James. Sociocultural and Second Language Learning Research: an exegesis. In: HINKEL, Eli. **Handbook of Second Language Research**. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. 2005. P. 335-354.

MUNIZ, Simara de Sousa. **Educação Escolar Indígena no Estado do Tocantins**: uma trajetória histórica do curso do capacitação ao curso de formação do magistério indígena. 2017. 144 f. Dissertação (Mestrado) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras: Ensino de Língua e Literatura, Universidade Federal do Tocantins, Araguaína, TO, 2017.

PENNYCOOK, Alastair. **English and the Discourses of Colonialism** (The politics of language). London, New York: Routledge, 1998.

SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In: NELSON, Cary; GROSSBERG, Lawrence (Org.). **Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture**. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. P. 271-312.

SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. Righting Wrongs. **The South Atlantic Quarterly**, New York, v. 103, n. 2, 523-581, 2004.

SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. **The Spivak Reader**. New York; London: Routledge, 1996.

THORNE, Steven; TASKER, Thomas. Sociocultural and Cultural-Historical Theories of Language Development. In: SIMPSON, James (Org.). **The Routledge handbook of applied Linguistics**. New York: Routledge, p. 487-500, 2011.

Walace Rodrigues é doutor em Humanidades pela Universiteit Leiden (Países Baixos), professor adjunto da Universidade Federal do Tocantins (UFT) e professor do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ensino de Língua e Literatura (PPGL-UFT).
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9082-5203
E-mail: walace@uft.edu.br

Francisco Edviges Albuquerque é doutor em Letras pela Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) e professor Adjunto da Universidade Federal do Tocantins (UFT).
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0004-1887
E-mail: fedviges@uft.edu.br

Michol Miller é mestranda do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ensino de Língua e Literatura da Universidade Federal do Tocantins (PPGL-UFT) e graduada em Letras Espanhol.
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2464-0585
E-mail: michol.m.miller@gmail.com