

“IF WE DON’T NAME OURSELVES, WHO’S GONNA NAME US?”: HABLANDO DE TUDO UM POUCO CON OFELIA GARCÍA¹

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Resumo: No contexto da II Jornada Internacional de Linguística Aplicada Crítica com o tema “Perspectivas Decoloniais na Linguística Aplicada Crítica”, durante os dias 23, 24 e 25 de julho de 2019, na cidade de Brasília, quisemos aproveitar a oportunidade para falar com a professora Ofelia García, referente e precursora da educação bilíngue nos Estados Unidos da América e difusora do *translanguaging* como conceito teórico e ferramenta pedagógica. Durante uma hora conversamos sobre o conceito *translanguaging* e os diversos olhares que têm sido lançados sobre ele, sobre políticas linguísticas educacionais nos EUA, bem como sobre o percurso teórico de alguns conceitos da Sociolinguística e sua necessária atualização.

Palavras-chave: Translanguaging; Bilinguismo; Ensino de línguas.

Abstract: Under the theme of “Decolonial Perspectives in Critical Applied Linguistics”, the 2nd International Conference of Critical Applied Linguistics (II JILAC) was held in Brasilia-DF/Brazil from July 23 to 25, 2019. Known as a reference and pioneer in bilingual education in the United States, and as an advocate for translanguaging as a theoretical concept and pedagogical tool, Professor Ofelia García generously agreed to share her knowledge with us. Some of the topics we discussed included: (1) translanguaging; (2) educational language policy in the USA, and (3) selected concepts in Sociolinguistics, and their urgent need for change.

Keywords: Translanguaging; Bilingualism; Language teaching.

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Nesta entrevista, como a grande mestre que é, Ofelia fala com convicção e conhecimento sobre cada tema, e não hesita em compartilhar seus saberes nem expor suas limitações. Com grande generosidade, fez uma pausa para nos receber, numa sala da UnB, cercada do verde da paisagem do Cerrado. Este cenário compôs o fundo para o encontro que aconteceu entre línguas – Português, Inglês e Espanhol –, entre pesquisadores, entre repertórios, como não poderia ser diferente diante de seu legado. O resultado dessa entrevista é o que lerão a seguir.

Jhuliane: Translanguaging has had many influences and has been changing. Can you tell us how you see translanguaging now?

Ofelia: My concern always is that when any of us puts anything out there, people pick it up and adapt it to their situations. But what I am afraid of, most afraid of, is that the political act that was translanguaging in the beginning [is becoming lost]. [Translanguaging initially sought to] disrupt this way of looking at bilingual minoritized populations as having a language that is inferior and a language that is dominant, and as having to make sure that [children] followed the norm in both languages, [which] therefore excluded most of these children...so all of those disruptive elements, translanguaging has had, for me, from the very beginning. And it shifts in different situations and in different contexts. And people apply it to their contexts. But I think in doing so there are many people that have forgotten the political act, the disruptive act, that translanguaging holds, and that to me is a worry. I think that it's good that it's been taken up ... I just came from a session of Fernanda Liberali⁴ that was out of this world. The work

4 Professora do Programa pós-graduação em Linguística Aplicada e Estudos da Linguagem e do Departamento de Inglês da PUC-SP que participou da Roda de conversa "Políticas de educação de línguas no Brasil" no evento em questão (II JILAC).

that is being done here is excellent. I always think theory and practice have to have this symbiotic relationship; you cannot talk about theory or linguistic politics or glotopolítica on the one hand and not think of the practical solutions that you can propose. I have never, ever thought that it was possible to work at the macro level because I have tried, and I fail miserably because I cannot move systems, but I can move people, individuals, and I really believe that change, transformation, occurs one-on-one when people start collaborating. And I've seen that through my lifetime in many, many ways. So that is what translanguaging holds for me, that disruptive element, that element of social justice for minoritized populations, that element of disrupting how language has been structured in schools and institutions especially, and how that has played a very important role in the minoritization of populations. And to me that is key, and sometimes I think that when people pick [translanguaging] up, it loses that. And I know how we lose that, we lose that because we start working in institutions whose work is precisely to go against it, and little by little, the teachers themselves, who are desperate about getting the curriculum, start shifting the conversation, and you have to always bring it back. So I'm not blaming the people who pick it up, because I think we all have that problem, but it is a worry. Even with my own work, I can tell you there has been a lot of tension with the state, once they realized what it was that I was doing—not in the beginning, in the beginning they told me, "these 67 schools we do not know what to do with them, you do whatever you want." And then when they realized three years later that we had really transformed a lot of ideologies in the schools and a lot of the practices—that teachers were beginning to work differently—they became afraid. So, that's what I think about the development. However, I also think that, just as I believe I started in one

place with Fishman's⁵ theories, because he was my mentor, etc., and I moved because I had a different experience than he had—I had a different life, I was of a different generation—eventually that moved, too. And I think that young people have to bring this concept to bear in their different lives, in different ways. So I don't see translanguaging as a static concept; I'm happy that people adapt it. I think every situation, every social institution, has to think about how to do it, but I also think that the political disruptive purpose, the social purpose of translanguaging, cannot be lost.

J: Do you think that it is possible to extend this notion of translanguaging not only to bilingual individuals, but also to human language itself, i.e., language as a repertoire?

O: I know that that is a difference... I think it was Canagarajah⁶ who told me, "stop talking about translanguaging," [or] maybe it was Makoni⁷, "let's just talk about languaging." And I have always resisted that. I've resisted it for two reasons: one is, my work was always from the very beginning with bilingual minoritized populations. And I know people co-opt things all the time; you come up with something and then it's for everybody, and sometimes when it's for everybody, it's not for us. So I have tried to protect that space, and I do want to differentiate practically, not conceptually. Let me give you an example. The New London group⁸, I was

5 Joshua Fishman foi um professor e linguista estadunidense especializado em Sociologia da linguagem, planejamento linguístico, educação bilíngue e multilinguismo, para citar alguns.

6 Suresh Canagarajah é atualmente professor do Departamento de Inglês da Penn State University. É também autor do livro *Translingual practice: global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*, publicado pela Routledge em 2013. <http://english.la.psu.edu/faculty-staff/asc16>

7 Sinfree Makoni é atualmente professor do Departamento de Linguística Aplicada da Penn State University.

8 NEW LONDON GROUP. A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures. In: COPE, B.; KALANTZIS, M. (Eds.). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 121 – 148.

just talking to Fernanda [Liberalli] about it, because she said that the practice that they do comes from it, and I said "no it doesn't! It comes from you." You have a different outlook, and the New London group ignored...they talked about multimodalities, they talked about situated practices, transformed... nothing about multilingual learners. It was supposed to be in English only. These spaces, these small spaces that you have where you give the power to the minoritized bilingual populations are few, and I don't want to give up that space. So, conceptually I think of translanguaging as something that we all do, whether you are so-called monolingual or you're bilingual, but practically I want to focus on this population. I've seen it so many times. I have a wonderful doctoral student who's going to do excellent work, she's here in Brazil a lot, Sara Vogel, who has a big grant, who has been doing work with technology also. So what does that affordance do for translanguaging among the kids? And once she started having really good results with that, they said, "why does it have to be for bilingual students, why can't it be for everybody?" And I said, you know, we finally do something and then it's supposed to be for everybody. No. I mean, everybody already has a lot. I want to make sure that there's attention to this population, so that's why I don't give up the *trans* in translanguaging. I also don't give it up because I think the *trans* is important. I am convinced that minoritized bodies do not fit within the definitions of main languages that we have been given. Now that doesn't mean that we can ignore them. These named languages have had very real and material effects on our lives, and they continue to have those effects. I want the students that we work with to be able to be successful in standardized English only exams. I can't change that. If you want to know about assessment, I can tell you a little bit about that, but not now, but...that I can't change.

J: Sometimes translanguaging has been read as code-switching, as if it were a transit between distinct languages. How do these two concepts differ?

O: That's a great question. But before I answer that question, I remembered [something else] I was going to say about the *trans*. The *trans* for me is very important because, [as] I was telling you, the named languages are important, but I don't believe that they represent what bilingual speakers have. Bilingual speakers who grow up in a bilingual community and who are in bilingual homes don't go from one language to the other, you just asked me about code-switching, with constraints of any kind... In the 1970s, 1980s— I'm not that old, 1980s, 1990s— all the literature was about code-switching, and it never made any sense to me. I mean, I taught it, because at least I was able to tell our students there's nothing wrong about this norm behavior, there are structural constraints, and then I went home and I would find millions of examples of things that were said in my house that the linguists have said there are structural constraints, so what are they talking about? I have no structural constraints. So the *trans* for me is important because I do believe that socio-politically there may be named languages, but cognitively, socio-cognitively, we have one repertoire from where we select features depending on the situation that we have. That child who comes in, maybe from Venezuela, may not yet speak Portuguese but has a full repertoire, he or she just has not acquired the features of what Portuguese may be, has not had the affordances, the opportunities, to bring those [features] into their repertoire. But eventually the only thing that can happen is that this repertoire becomes one system. I really believe in that, and therefore, to me the *trans* is important because otherwise we are always talking about one

language or the other, and that I think connects to your question on the *trans* and translanguaging as transit. I think that people, teachers especially, understand translanguaging very well when they're desperate and they want the children to make meaning and therefore they can use it as a scaffold; it takes effort, but that is done. And I want to say that for some teachers that's the only thing they can do, and I always start where people are; people are at different stages, and people have different understandings, and you cannot start here if you are confronted with a racist teacher, and there are many, you have to just do it one step at a time. I work with something that I once saw at a school, a poster of Martin Luther King saying, "you don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." So I always think, "what is the first step, to start this?" And the first step might be just using it as a scaffold, for them to understand, and in that sense translanguaging is a transit from one language to the other, but I think that it cannot stay there. Translanguaging has to be transformative. And I've gotten a lot of attack from people who have said... Jaspers⁹ for example, is after me because, "oh, this is not transformative at all," well, I mean, it doesn't start a revolution, but it does change the way in which children see themselves as whole, full, not damaged, which is what teachers assign to these children when they come into classrooms not speaking the norm. And that happens to children who are immigrants, refugees coming in, it happens to poor children, it happens to children in the *fronteras*. I spent some time in the *frontera* between Santana do Livramento and Rivera. I went with a family and I had my children with me, and we spent a lot of time in the park, everybody played together, they had a great time, and then the next morning you go to the Uruguayan schools and they would tell you, "oh, these kids have no

9 Cf. JASPERS, Jürgen. The transformative limits of translanguaging. *Language and Communication*, v. 58, p. 1-10, 2017.

language,” because they weren’t speaking Spanish, what they thought was Spanish. And you went to the Brazilian side and the same judgment was made about those children. There was nothing wrong with the children, there’s something wrong with the schools. So, I think that that is what people have to realize, that maybe by taking the first step, maybe by even doing that, they start understanding that this child is transformed through this practice because they start seeing what the connections are. I’m always very surprised at how teachers that do very little are themselves transformed, or their school is transformed, by starting at the very first step. I have some schools where they couldn’t do anything, and I said, alright, how about putting up a poster of “Welcome” in all the languages of the kids. And some schools have to go write them themselves because they couldn’t let the mothers in, others got the parents involved, but just having that sign changed a school, transformed the school, and then teachers started getting curious about the children. So I really believe that transformations sometimes have to start...I mean, sometimes you need big manifestation, big demonstrations in order to accomplish change, but sometimes these small steps build something that is larger. So, I don’t want translanguaging to be a scaffold, I want them to think, but even as they use it as a scaffold, how does it transform the way they see that child, because now this child can read something that they couldn’t read before when they were given the text in English only, in our case. So how does that transform their view of the child, how does that transform the fact that this child knows something that the teacher doesn’t know. All of those are steps that lead to transformation, even if you don’t start there, even if you don’t have the political/social mission to start with. Somehow it happens.

Alejandro: La siguiente pregunta tiene que ver con algo que aparece en el website del grupo¹⁰. Queremos saber el recorrido, si es que tiene una definición consolidada, del concepto de “emergent bilingual”.

O: ¿Por qué emergent bilingual?

A: ¿Por qué emergent bilingual?

J: Who would be that person?

A: ¿Quién es el emergent bilingual?

O: Pues te puedo contar la historia del naming, te cuento la historia. En los EE.UU. se hablaba de Limited English Proficient y cuando nos quejamos y nos quejamos porque claro, eran LEPs y entonces todo el mundo decía “pero es que parece que le están llamando ‘lepers’”¹¹ a los niños y cuando nos quejamos y nos quejamos, lo cambiaron a English Language Learner, lo cual quiere decir que todo cambió. Los programas de educación bilingüe en los ‘70 y pico ‘80 y pico, cuando yo empecé a enseñar eran programas con una misión sociopolítica, habían surgido de abajo, de protestas del pueblo ¿no? Y tenían toda esa misión sociopolítica. Eso duró muy poco, eso duró durante esa era de derechos civiles y durante ese renacimiento étnico que hubo en todo el mundo, y en seguida se aplastó. Vino Reagan en el ‘80 y poquito a poco... duró una década yo diría. Pero la educación bilingüe casi se silenció, hubo tres estados que la declararon ilegal ¿no? Y otros estados como Nueva York la siguieron, pero tenían, entonces, simplemente una función de transición

10CUNY-New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals (NYSIEB) é um projeto colaborativo do Instituto de Pesquisa para o Estudo da Linguagem na Sociedade Urbana (RISLUS) e o Programa de Doutorado em Educação Urbana financiado pelo Departamento de Educação do Estado de Nova York de 2011 até o presente. <https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/>

11 Figurativamente, “leprosos”, que sofrem o estigma social.

hacia el inglés, y la mayoría de los estudiantes empezaron a entrar no en esos programas de educación bilingüe, porque cada día había menos, sino en programas de inglés como segunda lengua. Y entonces el problema era que empezaron a haber muchos maestros de TESOL¹², y en esos programas de preparación el objetivo era nada más el inglés y todo era monolingüe. Y entonces yo empecé a pensar que “si seguimos llamándolos English Language Learners verdaderamente estos maestros se forman pensando que ellos no tienen nada que ver con el bilingüismo, que el bilingüismo es una cosa étnica, que es una cosa que hicimos, que es una cosa de minorías, que “lo que nosotros hacemos no es eso”. Entonces mi primer propósito de llamarles Emergente Bilinguals, yo creo que fui la primera, en un número de... me parece que fue en el *Modern Language Journal*¹³, pero fue en un simposio que hubo en TESOL en que había una sección de bilingüismo en que yo empecé a proponer “vamos a llamarles Emergent Bilinguals”. Así que mi primer propósito, porque esto también ha ido creciendo, mi primer propósito fue volver a nombrar el bilingüismo, una cosa que se había silenciado en los EE. UU. Hay que darse cuenta que en el 2002, cuando cambia la política educativa con *No Child Left Behind*¹⁴, los legisladores quitaron, tacharon, todas las palabras del bilingüismo, o sea, no se mencionaba, un silenciamiento total. Todas las oficinas, the Office of Bilingual Education became the Office of English Language Acquisition, todo era English Language Acquisition nada era Bilingual. Y claro, la profesión de educación bilingüe se vio muy atacada y se silenció un poquito, y yo pensé si “if we don’t name ourselves, who’s gonna name us,”

12 Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

13 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/15404781>

14 “No child left behind” foi uma política aprovada pelo Congresso dos Estados Unidos, durante o governo de George W. Bush, visando ajudar os estudantes a obter melhores resultados. Ver <https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/policies/elementary-and-secondary-education-act-esea/no-child-left-behind-act-2001>

right? So, yo empecé con emergent bilingual y en aquella época el propósito era igualar un término que incluyera el bilingüismo a los English Language Learners y hacer los maestros de TESOL que eran la mayoría, siguen siendo la mayoría, conscientes de que ellos estaban implicados en el bilingüismo que estos estudiantes iban a ser bilingües, que al hacerlos hablantes de inglés iban a ser estudiantes bilingües. Yo desde el principio sabía, para mí, lo que quería decir la palabra “emergent” ¿no? Porque “emergent” para mí venía del concepto de “emergentism” de Francisco Varela¹⁵. Siempre para mí eso era muy importante, pero yo nunca definí en aquella época por qué era “emergent” porque lo importante era recalcar el bilingüismo, no recalcar el “emergent”. Poco a poco el cambio... por eso digo que todo tiene que ser un poco dinámico, para mí hoy día todos somos “emergent bilinguals”, no es simplemente la categoría de English Language Learner. Muchos lo usan todavía como English Language Learner y a mí me parece bien, porque otra vez están nombrando al bilingüismo, pero yo creo que conceptualmente tenemos que pensar que todos somos “emergent bilinguals” o “emergent multilinguals” depende de la situación en que estamos ¿no? Yo siempre digo bueno, es que yo tengo mucha proficiencia en inglés y en español en algunas cosas, en otras... me ponen a hablar de computadoras y yo no sé nada, cuando hablo con Sara Vogel yo no sé lo que me está diciendo, entonces saber que todos somos, todos tenemos posibilidades de emerger, que todo el conocimiento es fluido y que emerge de situaciones, de affordances en que uno está. Así que ese es el doble sentido, pero yo creo que las cosas tienen que entenderse históricamente. En ningún momento histórico eso tuvo un propósito importante. Yo inclusive le digo al team mío ahora que ya no es tan importante,

15 Francisco Javier Varela García foi um biólogo chileno, pesquisador no âmbito das neurociências e ciências cognitivas. Junto com seu professor Humberto Maturana, é conhecido por introduzir o conceito de autopoiesis na biologia.

porque al principio peleamos porque el Estado nos quita todo lo que dice “emergent bilingual” y le vuelve a poner English Language Learners. Pero ahora el estado, yo no sé cómo, empezó por “multilingual learners”, que está mucho mejor, pero el problema de “multilingual learners” es que no hay que hacer nada bilingüe tampoco, porque hay muchas aulas en Nueva York en que hay quince lenguas, entonces they’re all multilingual learners... pero todo se hace en inglés. Es lo mismo del multicultural, everything is multicultural, bueno pero, what are you doing? Y ese es el problema, decir everybody is multilingual, but, what are you doing?

J: Is grammar still important to learn, and how does it fit within language learning in terms of proficiency?

O: I think if you’re talking about the teaching of what we call in schools “grammar,” I mean not in the way that linguists use grammar, but what we call in schools grammar, I think it’s not that there isn’t a place for it, it’s that we always start there, and that is never going to get us anywhere. You can’t edit a page, this is what I always say, unless you have a text. And that text cannot be edited in the beginning, that text is in whatever resources you have, with whatever features you have, and you can edit a text that already exists, but you have to start with allowing the students to come up with an oral text or a written text with whatever resources they have. I think we know from research that, for example, the immersion programs in Canada... sometimes I don’t believe too much in results, but anyway I’ll tell you...in the immersion program in Canada, the students were very successful with all the receptive abilities; the anglophone students were able to understand French the same as the francophones and they were able to read in the

same way, but the productive ability lacked. And we have to remember those immersion programs were for elite anglophones, and that same sort of elite model of immersion was carried out in the European schools, in the schools of the European Union, which have mostly elite functionaries but they also had the janitor and the cook and everybody else so it was mostly elite but had everybody. But they have been able to accomplish I think more than the Canadian programs because they also had a place for language learning, right, so, I think the idea always is...I always say we throw away the baby with the bathwater. I’m not saying don’t do it at all, but do it in context when it’s meaningful. We don’t need to learn all the meta language; after all, those are concepts that may be completely wrong, even though it’s been a tradition for a long, long time. So I think that it doesn’t have a role as a major part of language learning, but it satisfies people because it’s so linear, you know, you can learn this and you can learn that and you can learn that, which is the same problem with language tests of the standardized kind, because you can measure those features better. I tried to work for a long time with ETS, you know, which makes the standardized test. I was on their board until I finally said I can’t do this anymore, I feel like a disco rayado, todo el tiempo decía lo mismo and no one listened. So it’s very, very difficult for them because unless you do it that way, linearly, the psychometricians cannot get reliability properly, and if you think about it, well, how can you assess language, you assess language by getting people to perform language, and you assess whether it’s communicative appropriate or not, or what the success is—that, a standardized test cannot do, because the situations are so different. Technology is helping us; I think that, who knows, maybe in 20 years we’ll have different types of assessment, but that has not occurred yet. And I said technology is helping us, [but] I also think technology is a threat.

I know that all these testing companies are tracking every single movement, they have so much data on everything. I think adaptive exams are good, but I'm also afraid that they're tracking all that we're adapting to, so it's problematic assessment, but I think teachers have to do formative assessments that actually encourage the students. If you want to know what the child knows and knows how to do, you have to be able to allow him or her to use all their repertoire, you can't just say well do it in English. I've never understood that, *por qué se hace un examen de matemática en inglés y entonces dice "no, es que no sabe matemática", pero es que eso es absurdo, ¿no? Entonces es que la complejidad lingüística va mas allá de lo que puede el sistema lineal de la educación and of assessment. So that's the issue.*

J: How can translanguaging contribute to decolonize English language teaching?

O: So let me just say that I learned decolonial theory from Lynn Mario¹⁶. I tried to say that in the beginning because that's not where I started; I really started somewhere else, I started with very traditional sociolinguistics, which never made any sense to me. None of it ever made any sense to me, but that's what the scholars were saying, and I had a lot of respect for my teacher. To me, my work was disrupted when I read Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook's *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*, that was the disruption, because I thought to myself, well, okay, if there are no languages, if these named languages were invented, then what am I doing teaching bilingually, what am I doing, this doesn't make any sense anymore. So that's when, to me, that's when the disruption happened. I have followed the classical Latin American decolonial theorists, after I followed the post-colonial Indian theorists, because those

¹⁶ Professor Lynn Mario Trindade Menezes de Souza (USP).

are better known in the United States, and we're all a product of where we are, of our context, of our history, so I mean, in universities... not when I studied, when I studied nothing was taught, but afterwards trying to understand certain things that didn't make sense, post-colonial theorists came into [the conversation], you know, Spivak, all of those. And I came to decolonial theory after I started understanding post-colonial theory. And it was so refreshing to me because I've had an emotional connection to Latin America my whole life. My family lives in Puerto Rico so we go often, but also because it was my way of making sense of who I was, so I read, and so all of this came sort of later. Lynn Mario has been very influential for me to help me see... and by the way, he has a chapter in that book where he talks about indigenous literacies which I think, sort of again, broke the mold for me, so since then I've been sort of in contact with him, and he was the one who said, "well, your ideas have some contact with..." and "read this, and read that..." and that's how I started. So I want to say this, because I'm not an expert in decolonial theory: I think that translanguaging has many points of contact with decolonial theory, but I'm always amazed when I come to anywhere in Latin America... I mean I was just recently in Colombia, with teachers of English... I didn't want to go, I thought, "oh God, this is going to be like TESOL again," I didn't want to go, but then I thought, alright, it's Colombia, I want to go, alright, so I went. And I was taken aback because what I find when I'm here is that you all have a critical perspective we don't have in the North. The conversation that we've had at this conference, we would not be able to have in the North. José talks about *glotopolítica* but usually it's text-based. But the transdisciplinarity that occurs at a conference like this, like having Patricia Hill Collins¹⁷ alongside me, that is the kind

¹⁷ Patricia Hill Collins é atualmente professora emérita de Sociologia na University of Maryland. No evento, apresentou uma conferência sobre Interseccionalidade e foi seguida pela

of thing that I have never seen before. When I go to Applied Linguistics conferences in the United States, they're really about Applied Linguistics: how do you teach this, how do you do that. They're not about the kinds of things that you do. So I think you have it, you shouldn't be asking me for that. That's what I hope when I'm here, and when I say here I mean in Latin America, I always want to sort of push you all to have your own theories and perspectives and to put them out there, because the truth is that my generation had a very hard time finding your voices because they weren't out there, except for algunos argentinos, Mignolo, Dussel, except for those big names. The rest of the work doesn't get out, doesn't get translated. So, that's where English is a [incomprehensible] because yeah, it's a colonial language, it's a dominant language, but it also gives you access to some privilege which you need, but you need to take it up with a critical decolonial perspective, not simply this is an agency of neoliberalism; you have a voice and you have to take it up, and you have to take it up by not repeating what we say up there because it's a different context. And I think that's something that I really hope for youth, and that I've always encouraged in my students, I've always encouraged them to have a different voice than me. I'm hopeful that your voices will get out there, because you don't have to ask me that question, you know how to do it, you know how to do critical decolonial English language teaching here.

A: Hay una pregunta que yo le formulé a José Del Valle¹⁸ hablando de cómo democratizar la enseñanza del lenguaje, cómo sería una actitud crítica al enseñar lenguas y él hizo la propuesta “yo creo que deberíamos incorporar desde el principio,

conferência da professora Ofelia García.

18 José del Valle é Professor de Culturas Latino Americana, Ibérica e dxs Latinxs no Graduate Center, CUNY. <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Doctoral-Programs/Latin-American,-Iberian,-and-Latino-Cultures/Profiles/Jose-del-Valle>

elementos de la sociolingüística, elementos de la teoría sociolingüística y que él agregaba, en el contexto de Nueva York, que esto tendría que ser en inglés, mientras estamos enseñando español también, porque el está en contra del dogma de utilizar solamente la lengua meta. Quería saber si tiene alguna reflexión sobre esto de incorporar elementos de la sociolingüística ya desde un principio.

O: Para mí depende de qué elementos sociolingüísticos vamos a introducir. A mí me parece que la criticalidad que te permite la lengua y la creatividad, que es otra cosa que no hacemos en las escuelas, que te permite todo esto, es esencial, y para mí esos son los dos elementos con que yo trabajaría desde pequeños, y tengo estudiantes que lo han hecho con niños pequeñitos. O sea, que desde el principio toda la enseñanza tenga esos dos focos, el hecho de que la lengua puede ser un arma de crítica, tener un ojo crítico ante los textos orales desde el principio y un texto creativo, una perspectiva creativa. Porque el problema de enseñar elementos sociolingüísticos es que entonces empezamos a enseñar cosas como dialecto. ¿Qué es para mí un dialecto? La verdad es que ya yo no hablo de eso, porque hay una variedad tan grande que, lo que estamos siempre tratando de formular la lengua como norma, entonces los dialectos se convierten en norma, entonces hay *black english* y... entonces, una vez, Makoni y Pennycook dicen en ese libro¹⁹ que no es que los criollos sean lenguas, es que todas las lenguas son como los criollos, es que hay que empezar a pensar que la cosa es mucho más complicada que los conceptos sociolingüísticos con los que hemos ido trabajando. Entonces yo le tendría un poquito de miedo a eso. Sin embargo, yo creo que, por ejemplo, todos los conceptos que Nelson Flores y Jonathan Rosa han 19 PENNYCOOK, A.; MAKONI, S. *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*. Eds. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters. 2006.

desarrollado, de raciolingüística²⁰ etc. yo creo que con eso sí se puede trabajar. El otro día alguien me preguntaba, yo tengo una serie de preguntas que nunca he hecho por escrito pero con que trabajo, preguntas que se le pueden hacer al estudiante, no es lo mismo a los pequeños que a los grandes, sobre los textos. ¿Quién habla en estos textos? ¿Qué dicen? ¿Cuales son las características de estos textos? ¿Son hombres, son mujeres estos personajes? Los textos que tenemos o los textos que nosotros producimos en este aula, ¿son iguales o son diferentes que los que producen ustedes o sus padres en su casa? Toda esa criticalidad, yo creo que se puede enseñar desde el principio. El otro día estaba en un aula en que estaban trabajando con un texto de una autora mexicana-americana que se llama Carmen Tafolla²¹ y eran niños pequeñitos, de cinco años, pero era un texto que tenía algo de translanguaging, algo como “la mosca dice ta ta”, y otra cosa en inglés etc. Entonces ella le preguntó “bueno, pero ¿por qué la mosca habla español y el toro habla inglés?” Una pregunta heavy ¿no? Y entonces los niños empezaron “no, porque el toro...” y bueno, “porque es que el toro tiene más poder, ¿pero ustedes van a dejar que el toro hable en inglés? ¿el toro no puede hablar en español? ¡Síiiii, el toro puede hablar en español! Bueno, entonces ¡vamos a escribir ahora un texto en español, en que el toro esté hablando en español!” Entonces ese es el tipo de cosa de lengua crítica que yo creo que se puede hacer en la enseñanza desde los pequeñitos hasta los mayores, escoger textos que tengan un contenido crítico, y de ahí ir sacando todas las otras perspectivas lingüísticas que yo creo que son importantes también. Yo tuve una estudiante, tengo un artículo escrito con ella sobre eso²². ¿Qué hacía? Ella enseñaba en una secundaria

20 ROSA, J.; FLORES, N. (2017). Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective. *Language in Society*, v. 46, n. 5, p. 621-647.

21 Sua obra pode ser consultada em <http://carmen Tafolla.com/>

22 GARCÍA, O.; LEIVA, C. Theorizing and Enacting

en que todos eran recién llegados, todos hablaban español. Y ella hacía una cosa que la llamaba “Hip-hop Mondays”. Enseñaba inglés, ella era bilingüe, pero era una maestra de inglés. Entonces en los “Hip-hop Mondays” ella escogía videos hip-hop que tuvieran un contenido sociopolítico, porque estos estudiantes eran inmigrantes, siempre con un tema de inmigrantes, de raza, y entonces con esos textos es que ella trabajaba la lengua, y por supuesto, allí había muchísimo translanguaging porque los estudiantes necesitaban hablar, y no podían hablar en inglés. Entonces hablaban en español, algunos metían alguna palabra en inglés. Una clase que recuerdo lo primero fue un hip-hop de “El Chivo of Kinto sol”. “El Chivo of Kinto sol” tiene un rap que dice “el racismo no termina, basta ya de promesas, solo cuenta mi trabajo ta, ta, ta...”²³ Entonces ella les enseña el video, les pone el texto, los pone en grupo para hablar, los pone a traducir en la otra lengua. Unos pueden hacerlo todo en inglés, otros tienen una palabra en inglés, otros tienen tres, pero se hacen así juntos. Y después hizo Eminem “Mosh”²⁴ que era lo contrario, el video era en inglés y tenían que hacer la traducción al español, otra vez utilizando todos los recursos que tuvieran. Así que ese tipo de criticalidad se puede hacer si uno escoge textos, y yo creo que eso sí se puede hacer. Y otra vez, yo siempre digo, depende de la estructura del programa. Nosotros el año pasado... porque yo decidí el translanguaging empezó por la educación bilingüe pero, como siempre pasa, los de ESL se lo cogieron muy en serio y los de educación bilingüe le empezaron a coger miedo. El miedo era la falta de protección hacia el español que era la lengua minorizada, y hay cosas con la cual uno no puede luchar. Las estructuras son una

Translanguaging for Social Justice. BLACKLEDGE, A.; CREESÉ, A. (Eds.) *Heteroglossia as Practice and Pedagogy*. 2013

23 “Sí se puede” de El Chivo del Kinto sol. Disponible em <https://youtu.be/TuvT6BmEjJQ>

24 “Mosh” de Eminem. Disponible em <https://youtu.be/9wRLd5l7WYE>

parte en inglés, una parte en español, generalmente casi siempre un día en inglés, un día en español. En esa escuela hacían la lectura un día en inglés, y ese día hablaban en inglés, escribían en inglés, y los niños no podían hablar español. Al otro día hacían lectura en español, o sea... no había manera. Entonces claro, para hacer eso tienes que tener textos que no son críticos, que no son complejos, una cosa bien simple para que se pueda hacer todo en esa lengua. Entonces nosotros, sin querer quitar esa estructura, porque ya estoy muy vieja y ya no me meto con el sistema, dijimos ¿por qué no hacemos tres veces a la semana un *book club* en el que lo que hacen durante ese tiempo, por ejemplo, es el día de inglés y lo están leyendo en inglés, pero que durante el *book club* puedan hablar del texto en cualquier lengua? Y entonces escogimos libros que tenían relevancia con sus vidas, por ejemplo hay un texto que se lee en cuarto grado que se llama “Me llamo María Isabel”²⁵ que es una niña que llega al aula y la maestra le dice “Mary” y ella dice “es que yo no me llamo Mary, me llamo María Isabel” y la maestra sigue con Mary, Mary, Mary... claro, si lo hubieran hecho en inglés solamente, o en español solamente, estos niños no hubieran podido tener una conversación crítica, pero como el *Book Club* era para eso, las conversaciones eran amazing, amazing, “¿pero por qué es que le dicen Mary?” “¿Para qué si su nombre es María Isabel?” “A mí me pasa lo mismo, yo tengo una hermana que le dicen tal cosa, y se llama otra cosa ¿por qué?” Toda esa criticalidad que trae la lengua, y entonces, bueno, yo creo que eso sí es importante. Yo tendría un poquito de miedo, porque los conceptos sociolingüísticos tendrían que escogerse con mucho cuidado.

A: Y ya que trajiste a la frontera a caso, tenemos en Brasil una extensa frontera y casi

25 ADA, A. F.; THOPMSON, K. D. (ilustradora) *Me Llamo Maria Isabel (My Name Is Maria Isabel)*. Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996.

toda habla español, y tenemos varios portuñoles, salvajes o instituidos, y yo quería saber si todavía tiene sentido hablar de “lenguas en contacto”. Yo creo que lo de las personas en contacto se entiende muy bien, pero lo de “lenguas en contacto” para mí eso estalló hace mucho tiempo.

O: Pues bueno, ¡empieza a escribir tú sobre personas en contacto! Yo creo que eso es importante. Yo creo que tienes toda la razón, nosotros estamos utilizando conceptos coined en 1954 el libro de Weinreich es de 1954²⁶. Yo ayer lo dije, cuando yo empecé a estudiar de bilingüismo estaba nada más que Weinreich y Einar Haugen esos eran los dos que hablaban de bilingüismo. Bueno, en el año 1954 eso fue un avance, porque hasta entonces ni siquiera se mencionaba, como si no existiera, entonces yo creo que eso es importante. Pero también hay que saber que toda esa literatura de lenguas en contacto, a la que ha contribuido mi marido²⁷, he contribuido yo, todos somos implícitos en eso, era una literatura inspirada simplemente por el monolingüismo, era “las lenguas están en contacto y cuando están en contacto hay interferencias”, “hay fenómenos que no podemos explicar con el monolingüismo” hay préstamos, hay calcos, eso es lo que hacíamos, eso es lo que hice yo, hay code-switching, que yo siempre digo que el code-switching es precisamente la explicación al translanguaging, de que como veían que se hacía una cosa diferente “vamos a ponerle code-switching”. El hecho de que hay code-switching es evidencia de que uno está translanguaging, así que creo que las lenguas en contacto están vistas desde la perspectiva de la lengua que yo creo que en aquella época eso valía mucho y que tal vez era la única manera de trabajar. Yo creo que hoy día ese concepto uno puede build on it, es decir no destruirlo sino build on it, extend it. Y yo creo que

26 Weinreich, U. *Languages in contact: findings and problems*. New York: Linguistic Circle of New York, 1953.

27 Ricardo Otheguy, también professor da CUNY. Cf. <https://ricardootheguy.ws.gc.cuny.edu/>

el hablar de personas en contacto y cómo entonces se comunican sin minorizar esos fenómenos, que ese es el problema, cuando tú hablas desde la perspectiva del contacto, entonces siempre estás describiendo los errores, y esos errores a veces son errores que llevan cuatro generaciones, y tú dices ¿cómo van a ser errores todavía? Y todavía yo voy a conferencias en que los lingüistas están hablando de lenguas en contacto de poblaciones que han estado en contacto durante cuatro generaciones y están describiendo los errores ¿cómo van a ser errores, entiendes? Ese es el problema. Y el otro contexto que ha cambiado, y que ustedes no se dan cuenta porque son muy jóvenes, es el hecho de ser viejo que lo hace a uno reflexionar, es por qué no veíamos las cosas en el pasado. Pero ¿por qué? Porque no había tecnología. Uno podía ignorar, ahora se ignora Latinoamérica también desde allá, pero uno podía ignorar al mundo asiático, africano, porque era otra cosa completamente. Todo eso está pensado desde una perspectiva europea, también, del contacto entre lenguas europeas. Nunca se pensó en el niño africano que crece con siete maneras de hablar, porque no le vamos a decir lenguas, porque es que ellos mismos dicen “No”. No hay enseñado, ese es el problema de la escuela, porque para mí la escuela es importante porque allí es donde forma la ideología, y se forma la ideología lingüística desde el principio. Por eso yo creo que sí es bueno hablar de esa ideología lingüística, pero el problema es cómo llegamos a ella. Yo creo que no podemos llegar a ella desde la Lingüística tradicional o la Sociolingüística tradicional, yo creo que tenemos que llegar a ella desde, otra vez, el hablante. Creo que así se podría explicar, y creo que la práctica y la teoría tienen que juntarse, las voces no pueden estar separadas completamente. Eso es todo.

A: No nos queda más que agradecerte

O: No, gracias. A mí me gusta mucho siempre hablar con gente joven porque siempre aprendo y además me da esperanza. Me da esperanza de que van a cambiar las cosas, ¡y es que hay que cambiarlas! Porque es que... tanto tiempo describiendo cosas que lo que hizo fue hacer daño. Yo pienso mucho en la Pedagogía de las lenguas, porque si uno piensa, si uno está viendo instrucción lingüística, enseñanza de “lenguas extranjeras” en la práctica hay muchísimo translanguaging, o sea, no se puede hacer sin eso. Pero si tú les preguntas a los maestros, primero te dicen que no, que ellos solamente lo hacen en nada más que en tal lengua, y si tú consultas los libros, dicen que no se puede hacer. Entonces hay que empezar a describir estas otras maneras de ver el conocimiento y cómo se construye el conocimiento, porque yo creo que si no se hace también académicamente, entonces no tiene valor, y eso es un problema. Que yo hace diez años tuve a Angel Lin²⁸, que es una sociolingüista de Hong-Kong diciéndome “Ofelia, esto que tú estás diciendo llevamos haciéndolo cien años en Hong Kong”. Pero es que nadie te lo dice, los libros no lo dicen, nosotros no lo decimos, estamos con la puerta cerrada, porque it’s not supposed to happen, y si happens, let’s describe it, ¿por qué vamos a seguir diciendo lo mismo y lo mismo? Yo creo que esa es la visión que tiene que haber: la visión desde el uso de la gente, no desde la teoría que no tiene nada que ver con cómo se usa la lengua.

A, J: Muchas gracias

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28 GARCÍA, O.; LIN, A. (2018). English and Multilingualism. In SEARGEANT, P., HEWINGS, A.; PIHLAJA, S. (eds.). Routledge handbook of English language studies. New York: Routledge, 2018, p.77-92. Sobre ela visitar https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Angel_Lin