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Article

"Null-subjectivities", language and learning: We need to disturb meaningfulness*, **

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* Formulation inspired by a verse by the poet Manoel de Barros: "*Preciso de atrapalhar as significâncias*" (I need to disturb meaningfulness) (BARROS, 2016).

** The present paper is the output of a research study entitled "A Transidiomicidade na Educação Linguística de Jovens e Adultos: Por uma Prática Pedagógica Mestiça nas Aulas de Inglês" ("Transidiomaticity in Youth and Adult Language Education: In Favor of a Hybridized Pedagogic Practice in English Classes"), approved by CEP-CFCH/UFRJ, CAAE: 14413119.4.0000.5582, on June 24, 2019

ABSTRACT:

In the present paper, we argue that the right to exist as an epistemic being is a less explored dimension among aspects orienting human rights demands. We build on this idea discussing how a conceptualization of languages as discrete categories may affect students, especially those from marginalized groups. In exchanges with narratives produced by Filhos, a student in a college preparatory course for disadvantaged youths and adults, we reflect on the performative effects of modernist views of language, especially concerning the English language. Focusing on different instants of interaction we observe how Filhos reconstructs her academic trajectory of socialization (WORTHAM, 2015) and the orders of indexicality (BLOMMAERT, 2005) that organize it. The results point in the direction of ambivalent enactments, in which meanings concerning learning and communication are hierarchically organized in contradictory ways. Filhos enacts a subjectivity that is null in terms of legitimate knowledges and unable to perform in the world in the English language, while, at the same time, engaging in creative translingual practices. This fluctuation points to an important aspect of educational processes: "we need to disturb meaningfulness" and to have eyes for what might at first seem minute, or unimportant. Such an investigative focus implies an ethical-political commitment to a "pedagogy of mixtures," in direct rapport with the linguistic rights of those who occupy socially marginalized positions.

Keywords*: subjectivities, trajectory of socialization, pedagogy of mixtures; orders of indexicality*

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The exuberance of minute-knowledges

> Yes, I'll talk: it's important to learn every day. How I missed it, really did! I don't even know if this is for you, who's going to listen to it, but the importance of getting kids to study, drop everything, everything, to study. I often quarrel with my mom because she didn't encourage us to study. I don't know what she was thinking… She didn't get any study, she's sixty-five and never went to school. She learned to read with the Bible, you see? Because how she learned was by reading the Bible, getting to know the words. (…) Like I said, I am from Minas Gerais, I come from a community[1], and the mothers at the community, they want… like me, that my daughter, who was raised without a father… and [they] pay for something over there, and buy all sorts of expensive stuff, stuff they can't even afford, because they're living on the minimum wage, but no one got ahead much in school. Because I've got people in my family, 90% of my dad's family lives in Rocinha,[2] if you tell them, "go register at that [federal school], it's a good school;" "No way! Study all day long?" "But it's a good school!" I wish I could shout it out to the world, you know? And encourage the children to study because, like I told my daughter, "they'll take everything away from you, but your knowledge, no one can take away. It's really important! You won't get rich studying, but you'll have knowledge, see?" So that's it. (Interview with Filhos on Sept. 5, 2019)

[1] Used as a synonym for *favela*.

[2] Rocinha is a *favela* located in Zona Sul (the southeast region), the richest section of the city of Rio de Janeiro. It is thought to be the biggest *favela* in Brazil.

In the beginning of this study is the word of Filhos,[3] a black woman from Caratinga, Minas Gerais, a solo mother of a teenage girl. Her performance is enacted during an interview conducted when Filhos was a student in a college preparatory course targeting low-income youths and adults. At the time she was 40 years old, worked as a housekeeper around Santa Teresa neighborhood, in Rio de Janeiro, and resided in Curicica, in the western part of the city.

[3] Filhos means "children". It is the pseudonym chosen by the subject of this study to go by, motivated, as explained in the text above, by the importance of mothers – especially those from marginalized segments of society – investing in the education of their children.

Her narrative reconstructs a story of migration. When she was a child, her family moved to Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro – one of the biggest *favelas* in the country – on her father's promise of a better life for all in the big city. As she goes ahead in her narrative account of this turning point in her life, and in the life of her family, Filhos chokes as she recalls difficult moments she went through involving her father and her childhood full of hardship, where they often had to go hungry:

> So, my father, in fact, he lied to my mother. He said we were coming to live in a house of our own, because people live in the countryside and have these illusions about the big city. […] It turned out, we came to the big city to go hungry. My father found us a place to live in Rocinha in '86. And there begins a sad story, right? Because my mother had to leave her four children (unattended) to find work, and we… and we ended up having to scavenge for food in the trash and... [silence followed by tearing up]. (Interview with Filhos on Sept. 5, 2019.)

Despite having got through basic education, Filhos's schooling was interrupted for almost three years due to problems with her older brother who, at the time, was getting caught up in drug trafficking, an issue that came to bear on her safety and peace of mind when getting around town. While still a teenager, she had to look for work to help

out at home. She ended up going to night school and was afraid to come home late, due to constant surveillance by traffickers, and had a hard time concentrating on her studies. When she was 22, she completed her studies but said she only did it for the certificate. Knowledge acquired in school could not compete, in terms of attention span, with the knowledges and dramas of her lived experiences as a black woman living in the low-income periphery of a big city:

> So, I went back to school, but I didn't learn. I went to school, but didn't learn, you know? I didn't learn any Math, I didn't learn any Portuguese, *I learned nothing, and even less of English*. So then, I went back to school and when I graduated I was 22, but really, I only did it for the certificate. (Interview with Filhos on Sept. 5, 2019. Our emphasis.)

In these brief excerpts taken from her interview, Filhos's life history narratives (which include two *anonymous black* characters: her younger self and her mother) help us come to an understanding of the circularity of certain meanings and socio-historical practices. On the one hand, her narrative performance embodies, with great potency, the sorrows of the "anonymous black woman, living in the periphery of a big city, in the poorer suburbs, […] looking after her family almost on her own" (GONZALEZ, 1984, p. 231.) It reenacts that warning cry that Lélia Gonzalez and many other black activist women have let out in unison. On the other hand, she takes the blame for an error, so to speak, when she says that she learned "nothing" in school. Such a label disqualifies, or even cancels out, performatively, the vitality of Filhos's lived experiences and of all the knowledge emanating from them.

We were instigated by Filhos's narrative, and it guided us when deciding on the focus of the present study. We can explain. As researchers and teachers with a background in Language Studies, we were early on introduced to the 'lack of aptitude for learning' ideology, as described in "*Eles não aprendem português, quanto mais inglês*" ("*They don't learn Portuguese, let alone English*") (MOITA LOPES, 1996). A criticism of this maxim has always guided our research into educational practices in general, and in particular, into English language teaching-learning processes (cf., for instance, OLIVEIRA 2001, 2021; FABRÍCIO 2007; 2017). Filhos's positioning towards the notion of learning deficit indicates how insidiously this myth continues to go around. The discursive performance entailed by this belief moved us to delve deeper into the matter in order to understand the subjectifying effects that views of language often produce.

To regard oneself as devoid of knowledges and incapable of learning – be it learning a language deemed to be foreign or whatever – seems like a heartbreaking blow at the most basic notion of human dignity, as it takes away from Filhos the right to validate her own discursive practices and establish her authority as a source of knowledge. In the present study, we argue that the right to exist as an epistemic being is a dimension that

commands insufficient attention among concerns guiding human rights demands. In line with this perspective, the "nothing" in Filhos's speech amounts to a great deal. Far from the everyday meanings – of *emptiness*, *absence*, or of a condition of *Non-being* – it generates others, which can be detected in micro-situated discursive actions (MOITA LOPES, 2006; RAMPTON, 2006). After all, as in the musings of the poet from Mato Grosso do Sul, Manoel de Barros, "all that has no dimension is of great importance" (BARROS, 2016, p.42). Therefore, "to lose nothing is a form of impoverishment" (Ibid., p. 46). Following in this logic, we seek to understand how the semiotic projections of "*null-subjectivities*" constitute potent phenomena in their apparent insignificance.

According to the field notes gathered all along the research by one of the researchers – who at the time was acting as Filhos's English teacher – we were able to observe that the student would often recycle an understanding of both learning and language in a key of failure. In statements such as: "Nothing will come out of that, especially since your writing [assignment] is everything," regarding registering to take the National Middle Education Exam (ENEM), she would position herself as a familiar social type: of someone unable to learn or to communicate in writing. According to our field notes, this "stable" identity meaning was recurrent in Filhos's performances:

> Filhos anticipates her incapacity. She mentioned incapacity on the questionnaire, and I believe, at times, this was the general overtone in our conversation. She anticipates she won't be able to understand, so she doesn't even read it; she anticipates she won't do well on the ENEM exams, so she doesn't even give it a try. And it's ironic, as she herself recognizes the experience she's garnered along the preparatory course, of new horizons brought to her school learning process. However, even so, she anticipates a poor performance, by referencing to past experiences. (Field notes, Sept. 6, 2019)

Such actions proved recurrent in Filhos's discourses enacted during an interview, a questionnaire and conversations with one of the researchers on different occasions. They have brought us to the theoretical construct of *trajectory of socialization*, developed by Wortham (2005), to offer an understanding of Filhos's life history narratives, generated during interviews. According to the author, the concept refers to a series of interactional events a person engages in – which, being connected both intertextually and interdiscursively – have the ability to produce an effect of identity stability, and signal atypical variations in the flow of self-constitution. This is due to the fact that sociohistorically durable meanings, and meanings emerging from locally produced interactions, become interwoven in our performances. In the contexts of the investigation elaborated on in the present research, the indexicality of the sign "nothing" is negotiated in Filhos's biographical narratives engendered in interaction with one of the researchers. It is through this lens that we now turn to an analysis of excerpts of Filhos's interview.

"In minute things is where I see exuberance."[4]
The *nothings* interest us.

[4] BARROS (2016).

In 2019, Filhos was enrolled in a college preparatory course targeting young people and adults from low-income groups where one of the researchers worked as an English teacher. The course is the outcome of a university extension program aimed at residents from the *favelas*, black people, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and members of the working class. The target audience is comprised of students who had either dropped out of school, momentarily interrupting their formal learning, or were forced to start working right after completing basic education, and were thus unable to seek a college education. Classes – for different subjects - are held in the evenings, three times a week, at a school located in the southeast region of Rio de Janeiro. English classes are held every other week, and are comprised of two 50-minute periods. Since the objective of the program is to qualify students for text-based college entrance exams, lesson plans focus mainly on expanding reading strategies of different texts and textual genres in the English language.

A translingual pedagogy guides the curricular organization of the course. Lopes and Silva (2018) point out that, according to its principles, difference is validated as a legitimate resource in meaning-making processes. Considering the learner profile of the students in question, characterized by knowledge forged in their out-of-school lived experiences, the work carried out with the English language is oriented towards an opportunity for students to "make use of the entire potential of their repertoire both in meaning making and in producing meanings" (LIBERALI, 2020, p. 85). Thereby, teachers' concerns have less to do with students mastering grammar rules, or acquiring vocabulary from dictionaries, or even with learning by heart idiomatic expressions. Instead, in interaction with entextualizations in English, students are called to observe how a constellation of semiotic processes connects local and macrosocial meanings.

In this context, our study sought to reflect on the development of the English language module alongside a group of students. Despite being well-received by the student group, the project faced a few setbacks. One of the difficulties encountered was the extreme fluidity of the student group. Several of them often had to overcome exhaustion to reconcile studying with long working hours. In addition, there were other priorities involving family demands, especially as many students were the head of their families. Furthermore, several students reported difficulty in making it to school, where classes were held, coming either from their home or their workplace. Even peripheral costs involved in following the course which, albeit free of charge, could have financial impacts (such as costs of transportation, or of eating out), were an element to complicate things when it came to students not dropping out or not missing classes. So, despite the fifty places offered every semester being rapidly filled, at

the end of each period the group would consist of no more than a meager five to ten students per class.

When the research project was introduced to the class group, on August 8, 2019, only half of those enrolled were present. Of the 24 students invited to take part in the study, 19 agreed and, that same day, answered an open-ended questionnaire which would be instrumental in sorting out students for a further interview. Based on the answers given on the questionnaire, as well as on students' availability, four of them, including Filhos, were interviewed. They chose a place and time to meet, opting to do so at the school grounds (where the course was taking place) an hour or so before class. For the present research, we have focused on Filhos's discourse practices generated during class, on her answers to the questionnaire and on the interview, all taking place over a four-month period (July to October 2019).

Semi-structured interviews were carried out, and these were audio recorded. Participants were asked to consider their performance as students, both in the past, when they were in basic education levels, as well as at the time of data being generated. They were also asked to give an account of the different discourse practices they usually engaged in, and to evaluate what part the English language played in their lives. Participants were only interviewed once and, according to the fieldwork notes, this was due to a few reasons. It was hard for participants to make time in their daily lives that would not interfere with their normal routine and engagements (on occasions there were cancelations and postponements). The very transient nature of some participants in the course would also hinder making future appointments for interviews since, as mentioned earlier, some students stopped coming to class altogether and could no longer be reached, not even by e-mail or over messaging app.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that some of the students did seem ill at ease in that interactional event. On the one hand, the reconstruction of their biographical narratives meant some suffering for them. While, on the other hand, the very configuration of the interactional event may as well have added to this discomfort. Grada Kilomba (2019) speaks of the prerogatives of the so-called 'study up' research, in which researchers and participants alike share their similar intersubjective experiences. The asymmetric relationship between the researcher and the participants, with the former being positioned as a researcher/teacher and as a white middle-class woman, may well have contributed to the co-construction of an uncomfortable setting for interviewees, in which to elaborate their personal narratives or other discourse practices. Despite these limitations, our assessment is that the discursive performances generated in these single interviews, where subjects elaborated on their intersubjectivities, were enriching for the

reconstruction of perceptions – the researcher's as well as participants' – regarding English language learning experiences. They have allowed us to detect subjectivity performances in continuous becoming, in which *null-subjectivities,* hinging on the idea of lack, and *exuberant-subjectivities*, teeming with creative potential, are interwoven.

[5] BARROS (1996/2016).

"What I lack has a greater presence in me"[5]

In reply to one of the items on the research questionnaire – "How do you feel in situations in which English is present in your everyday life?" – many students answered with negative emotional performances, such as "very embarrassed," "very nervous," "intimidated," "lost," "insufficient," "frustrated," "sad," etc. Out of all the replies, one immediately called our attention: "I feel Incapacitated as I know nothing in English, only tiny words in whole sentences." That participant was Filhos. In her brief answer were two words of great significance, of great impact – "incapacitated" and "nothing" – used to qualify herself as well as her knowledge repertoire in English.

Filhos's harsh designation and predication (much like that of so many other students) recycle worn-out clichés of negative references and descriptions that have, for years, constituted those who were unable to follow in the linear, steady flow of schooling. Arroyo (2008), for instance, lists some such terms which, in the spoken or written words of academics, teachers and legislators, help solidify student identity claims associated with the idea of lack or failure. This sociologist highlights references and adjectives such as "oppressed, poor, landless, homeless, prospectless," as well as "flunking, discrepant, accelerable, illiterate, eligible for adult education, discriminated against, job seeking..." (Ibid., p. 223). In our view, such signs project an image of *null-subjectivities.*

In contrast to the perspective mentioned above, there are also studies underlining that the different literacy practices (especially those taking place out of school), that several of these students are engaged in, need to be acknowledged not for their lacking character, but for their symbolic richness (cf. ARROYO, 2008; PAIVA, 2018). It is, therefore, the significance and purpose of education, especially to these students with such a wealth of life-history narratives, that need to be reconsidered, as Paiva very aptly points out (2018, p.55): "going to school and learning to read and write like an experienced reader/writer, taking into account the diversity of individuals, their life experiences and trajectories." Feeling extremely skeptical regarding the stability of the *null-subjectivity* performed by Filhos when expressing her language resources in "English," we decided to find out more about some of the narratives which engender the attributes of nothingness and culpability among groups that are stigmatized for their "deviations" from standard normative performances in the language.

"They call us stupid saying we don't know how to speak right"[6]

[6] GONZALEZ (1984).

"I feel Incapacitated as I know nothing in English, only tiny words in entire sentences." In the reconstruction of her micro-situated lived experiences with language, Filhos helps us weigh the disastrous endurance of a linguistic habitus, which over the slow and lengthy course of modern western history, has oriented many social agents to imagine that the standard variety of a language establishes its authenticity. Her reflections echo innumerable studies on the performative effect of the ideal of purity subjacent to notions dating from modernity such as nation-states, languages and communities (BAUMAN; BRIGGS, 2003; CAVALCANTI; MAHER, 2018; HELLER; McELHINNY, 2017; MAKONI; PENNYCOOK, 2007; MOITA LOPES, 2013; KROSKRITY, 2000; among others). They underline the fact that the linguistic beliefs of some people recycle the perspective according to which languages are stable mental artifacts and speakers / writers of a language make up one homogeneous group. According to Blommaert (2006, p. 511-512) this has become "the most widespread view of language, both in popular and in scientific circles."

For centuries, the modern episteme has taught us to look at language and see in it a distinctly structured system of grammar rules that is both representational and impervious to the social sphere. In a provocative debate with positivistic linguistics, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2011, p.36), for example, point out that "the question of structural invariants (...) is essential to linguistics. It is what allows linguistics to claim a basis in pure scientificity, to be nothing but science ... safe from any supposedly external or pragmatic factor." Concerning the phenomenon of communication, criteria of clarity and exactitude play a paramount role in the explanatory games of several western linguistic assumptions. Fabricio and Moita Lopes (2019, p. 137) stress that, according to these conceptualizations, communicative effectiveness lies in the "sheer transportation of intentional meanings produced in the minds of autonomous individuals." Beliefs of this sort become interwoven with others, such as the notion that transgressions of the linguistic norm contaminate and soil language. An ideal of linguistic purity converts any violation into grime and debris. In this sense, creative mixtures of resources[7] observed in the effective usages of discourse practices are equated with grime, desecrating an ascetic scientificity with which part of the western linguistic imagination is committed.

[7] Alim (2016) and Lopes e Silva (2018), actually, call attention to the fact that, given the fluidity and semiotic hybridity so present in contemporary societies, many scholars favor the use of *linguistic resources* instead of *language* or even *language varieties*, due to the historic meanings the latter terms are still charged with, of rigidity and linguistic purity.

As mentioned earlier, the conceptualization of languages as discrete and homogeneous entities is far from hegemonic, having been the object of much dispute, especially at present, a time of highly complex, diverse and extremely mutable contexts. Criticism to the modernist episteme hinges on the fact that it is a theoretical framework in complete disaccord with contemporary developments, which impact how people relate to each other and how they enact their discursive performances. Practically everything – individuals, texts, products, knowledges –

travels through symbolic and/or physical spaces (BLOMMAERT, 2008; FABRÍCIO & MOITA LOPES, 2019; JACQUEMET, 2016; MOITA LOPES, 2008; RAMPTON, 2009), generating multiple recombinant variations. Increasingly, the idea of semiotic purity carries in itself a contradiction. Thus, the boundaries of these so-called discrete languages are constantly being crossed, to such an extent that cultural and multi-semiotic hybridizations configure, in fact, the norm, rather than an anomaly.

The perspective that language operates in a key of hybridizations and semiotic mobilities does not insinuate, however, that the blending of semiotic resources and language fragments takes place in an arena of harmonious forces, devoid of asymmetric power struggles. Actually, it is precisely the opposite. The semiotic field is a trench where social struggles are played out. And thus, difference (which is nothing but a socially stigmatized hybridization) is configured as having garnered less prestige due to a whole set of sociohistorical, cultural and economic circumstances, which the modernist episteme of language helps to enable. A good example of this can be found in Lélia Gonzalez. *Pretuguês*,[8] which materializes the Africanization of what is known as the Brazilian Portuguese language. *Pretuguês* is featured here and there in the oral language usage of many: "they find really cool the so-called Brazilian speak, which drops the final 'r' in infinitive verb forms, which contracts *você* [you] into *cê*, *está* [are/is] into *tá*, and so on. They don't realize they're speaking Pretuguês." (GONZALEZ, 1984, p. 238. Emphasis in the original). However, as the author explains, in black and poor mouths it is not long before the mixture becomes depreciated: "it's funny the way they take the piss when we say we support *Framengo*.[9] They call us stupid saying we don't know how to speak right" (Id. Ibid., p. 238. Emphasis in the original).

[8] A portmanteau/ hybridized word blending *preto* (black) and *português* (Portuguese).

[9] A popularly found form to designate Flamengo, a leading football club in Brazil, with the 'r' in place of the 'l', viewed as erroneous and re-interpreted by Gonzalez as the influence of Bantu languages.

The critique of how the modernist episteme defines language takes issue not only with a scientific method, or a template for approaching linguistic phenomena. It also reflects on the brutality involved in doing away with all that is deemed an anathema of language (variability, hybridity, chance occurrences, etc.). This metaphorical elaboration on remnants and remains disregards people and their respective lived social experiences: they are cast aside as generators of linguistic *debris*: not even being acknowledged as individuals who are entitled to rights. According to Bauman and Briggs (2003), when Modernity invested in language purification, it automatically instituted and naturalized social inequality. Language systems historically underwent a process of sanitation at the expense of hybrids produced by certain groups – notably subalternized social categories – which were then systematically disregarded or treated disparagingly. By means of institutional engagement (and above all, through formal educational practices), hybrids which were legitimized (and thus, promoted as the norm, with their history of hybridization duly erased) were synonymous with the linguistic expression of social groups of prestige, such as that of predominantly male members of

the bourgeoise and aristocracy (ELIAS, 1939/1996; STALLYBRASS & WHITE, 1986). If the norm was the standard of reference for human correctness and qualification, whoever strayed from it only confirmed their own deficient nature. Emphasis, therefore, was not placed on this way of thinking about language, but rather on the presumed cognitive inadequacy of certain groups, which would then be held responsible for their failure to speak or write in the designated correct language form:

> The poor, women, country people, and non-Europeans were deemed to have failed in advance, and their perceived inability to engage in the work of purification – and to identify themselves with the prestigious hybrids claimed by elite modern males – could be located deep within the self, turning it into a global moral, intellectual, and behavioral failure for which they themselves were to blame. (BAUMAN; BRIGGS, 2003, p.66)

Another underlying principle of the modernist linguistic episteme involves the belief that there is a necessary correlation among the notions of one people, one nation and one language. Consequently, many countries are customarily perceived as monolingual, homogeneous territories, naturally, at the expense of subalternized languages and of unsanctioned idiomatic and semiotic hybridizations (LOPES; SILVA, 2018; PINTO, 2013). If on a given territory systematic hesitancy to adhere to the variant of prestige of the so-called native language may mean proscription of the speaker and/or the writer to a status of idiomatic pariah in that language, having transit through languages traditionally thought of as belonging to other groups awards new merits of distinction.

Linguistic performances which become entwined with languages associated with the Global North are a clear example of the disparaging judgment that is cast on speakers/writers positioned in the margins. As the Martinican intellectual and political activist Frantz Fanon (2008, p.36) alerted us, "Yes, I must watch my diction because that's how they'll judge me. He can't even speak French properly, they'll say with the utmost contempt." Whereas the *Chicana* feminist Gloria Anzaldúa gave us her autobiographical accounts narrating her painful and violent experiences in interactional events in which her *Mestizo* English was lambasted, denouncing the off-putting effects of such experiences as to their intersubjective meanings.

The historic circulation of such knowledges affects the ways in which language users think of, perceive and assess ways of communicating. Filhos is by no means an exception. When interacting with the research questionnaire and in her interview with the teacher, she recycles the contrast between innate incompetence and innate competence. By belittling herself as a learner, she positions her interlocutor in a place of authority regarding knowledge. As stressed by Pierre Bourdieu (1991, p. 53), "all linguistic practices are measured against the legitimate practices, i.e. the practices of those who are dominant." In Filhos's case, our field notes show that the negative qualification applies to her use of

Portuguese as well as of English – a language which, in a contemporary world of intense semiotic fluxes, assumes its bricolated aspect even more significantly. Could these hybridized Englishes, insurging themselves against the ideal of a standard English, assume a role of potency of resistance to the modernist view of the English language and its idealized native speakers?

"My difference is always less"[10]

[10] BARROS (2016).

The plurality of Englishes in the world has been grabbing attention, with emphasis being placed on the increasing number of people speaking the language for international communication, as compared to those countries where English is considered, in traditional terms, the native language, and where it is a second language or an official language (GRADDOL, 2006). These considerations regarding the so-called global Englishes are seminal to an understanding of English as a repertoire that enables interlocution between interactants from different corners of the world. Jacquemet (2016) argues that the impacts of globalization on languages have led to an increase in multilingual speakers and in greater demand for people with plurilingual skills. In view of the central role of English in the globalized world, this is still the language that is predominantly involved in interactions where there is great mobility of semiotic resources.

If languages with great circulation in a variety of spaces – both physical and symbolic – are languages which play an active part in semiotic mixtures, in contemporaneity, English plays a recurring role in changes to several other languages although, equally noteworthy is the fact that it too is altered in the process. These alterations to English are valuable for the present study, which takes a special interest in mixtures involving English and the language resources of minority and marginalized groups. As Stallybrass and White (1986, p.23) so appropriately put it, "what is socially peripheral may be symbolically central." Thus, the response of resistance to hegemonic English – that of a single discourse, of monoculturalism – has been, ironically, English itself. Certainly not the same English, but a heterogeneous one, a decentralized one, one of local histories, of an agenda coming from the margin (bell hooks, 1994/2017; GRADDOL, 2006; MOITA LOPES, 2008). Mulico and Costa (2021, p.1276) emphasize the translocal outreach that social movements – especially those originating in the Global South – can have if, instead of resisting language they put up a "resistance *with* language" (emphasis in the original), since "in the globalized world, being able to communicate in English may mean the chance to promote activisms and to denounce human rights violations internationally."

bell hooks argues how, in the reconfiguration of English – the oppressor's language – by enslaved black African populations, the insurrection was already being announced in the way they deviated from the standard norm:

> For in the incorrect usage of words, in the incorrect placement of words, was a spirit of rebellion that claimed language as a site of resistance. Using English in a way that ruptured standard usage and meaning, so that white folks could often not understand black speech, made English into more than the oppressor's language. (hooks, 2017, p. 227)

It is not the case here to ignore that friction between English and other languages can occur in contexts of great unbalance of power. When this encounter is with more vulnerable languages in sociolinguistic terms (due to a limited number of speakers and/or due to their unwritten character) the outcome could even prove to be their disappearance. It is, however, important to recognize that discrete languages, bounded and immutable, are delusions of a modernist episteme, so much so that, as Jacquemet (2016) reminds us, unless speakers have been coerced, or wiped out, in the effort to adopt a new language, new hybrids will inevitably be formed, today with the prominence of English, yesterday and tomorrow perhaps with that of other languages.

In everyday empiricism, we then witness English blending, becoming unstable and reconfiguring itself due to these hybridizations. Acute attention to the minuteness of everyday lived experiences serves to reject the reductionist view of an imperialist effect (even in linguistic terms) on the part of the United States. In times of intense hybridity, English "is then understood as a border language which is appropriated by people for their performances in social interactions (in order to live, to love, to learn, to work, to resist and, in short, to be human)" (MOITA LOPES, 2008, p. 333).

Some experiences illustrate particularly well the relationship between English learning processes and resistance practices. It is the case of Mariluce Mariá, activist from the community of *favelas* of Complexo do Alemão (RJ), whose discourse is emblematic of this reconfiguration of English by subalternized voices in order to advance local political agendas (ALAB, 2021). In her local histories she places emphasis on black women from the *favelas* who, much like Filhos did, had their lives characterized by having to interrupt the normal schooling cycle and by the violence experienced in their communities.

When invited to speak at Stanford University (California, USA), Mariluce's hybridized, improvised and "intuitive" English – in her own words – traveled and took with it to other spaces her determination to alert the world to deadly violence against residents of a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, perpetrated by the very State security forces. As a result, thanks to such discourses materializing through translingual resources, local histories of violence could gain in scale and scope and were greatly amplified. Her lecture, delivered at the American university, her discursive efforts in order to obtain information at Miami International Airport, and her interactions with foreigners in her community when running her travel agency in [Complexo do] Alemão, lay bare the blending she resorted to in the process of making communication with others possible.

The entire mixture of semiotic resources employed by Mariluce – language fragments, gestures, digital technology (such as translation services readily available via mobile), prior world knowledges, etc. – corroborates the validity of contemporary subjects *making do* with the resources at hand during meaning-making processes with alterities. Liberali (2020) underscores the transformative potential of translingual practices for language students as they offer them "the chance of a multimodal development enabling them to live out their agentive potential and their broad repertoire of unique experiences in multiple contexts" (Ibid., p. 81). Translingual processes engage us to think beyond bounded linguistic codes. They involve the agency of a whole range of multimodal apparatuses (gestures, intonation, various codes, etc.) in the diligence of communicating with others, that is, in the meaning-making effort when negotiating with others.

Considerations raised so far stress that constant boundary crossings and the establishment of networks of mutual influence in the economic, political and sociocultural realms, collaboratively generate linguistic actions that are increasingly more plural, translingual and transidiomatic (BLOMMAERT, 2005; 2008; 2009; 2010; CANAGARAJAH, 2007; JACQUEMET, 2005; 2016; MOITA LOPES, 2008). Hybridization is the rule, rather than the exception, although one cannot deny the strong hold the modernist episteme still has over contemporary assumptions regarding languages. Concerning specifically English, normative hybrids (normally featured in the American or British standards) still enjoy and benefit from an authoritative position worldwide, so that other mixtures of these languages are not generally considered valid. Blommaert (2009, p.564) is categorical when he underlines that "*Inequality, not uniformity, organizes the flows* and the particular nature of such flows across the 'globe'" (emphasis in the original). This way, hybridizations that do not conform to the established normative parameter are frequently stigmatized.

Corroborating a philosophical tradition according to which the idea of literal meanings is much too precarious a notion to account for the complexity involved in meaning-making processes, Blommaert (2009) posits that indexicality is key to meaning making given that any semiotic sign always summons us to look beyond its purely denotational dimension. In other words, processes of meaning assignment depend as much on the local context of sign enunciation as on the sociohistorical values that slowly become sedimented on a macro social scale. In view of that, it is this very sociolinguist who, by means of his theoretical-analytical construct of orders of indexicality, engages us to look at changes in the hierarchical value of semiotic resources, a process they undergo whenever they travel through different scale-levels.

The concept of orders of indexicality gives prominence to the stratification of indexical meanings associated with semiotic resources. This is because, as we travel through different contexts, the discourse

practices we give life to suffer constant reappraisal, depending on the centers of authority (norms, institutions, epistemes, etc.) they are oriented to. Lélia Gonzalez, when she addresses the *pretuguês* word *bunda* (ass) – a legacy from the Quimbundo language found in the Brazilian repertoire – manages to illustrate how an undervalued semiotic resource in the national mindset of "European ascendancy, highly civilized" (GONZALEZ, 1984, p. 238) is reappraised in a favorable light with a change of context. It becomes a resource that is representative of an idealized Brazilianess. As the author ironically observes, "all of a sudden *bunda* is idiom, it's language, it's meaning, it's object" (Ibid, p. 238). These different value attributions projected onto semiotic resources interactionally structure the inequalities between the participants. This is so as linguistic resources associated with the prestigious variants garner greater esteem in customary rationalizations concerning languages, in comparison to popular and hybridized resources. As there is always the ongoing work of identity construction in these semiotic hierarchical valorizations, social attributes such as success, ascendancy and importance become associated with intersubjectivities that make use of what sociohistorically counts as language, while others are disparaged due to their hybridized linguistic performances. In a dichotomous and essentialist framework, those who are successful in reproducing language purity will presumably enact what could be called *full-subjectivities*, in opposition to *null-subjectivities*, judged to be cognitively inferior.

Specifically regarding what was constituted as the English language, the fact that we witness its increasingly patchwork configuration in a world of intense fluxes, by no means indicates that hybridized Englishes have been lifted to a higher hierarchical position on a broader scale. As noted by Jacquemet (2005), a hierarchy is established even among hybrids themselves, so that as much as certain transidiomatic and translingual practices may pass as acceptable in contemporaneity, still, there are those that "are considered 'broken English' or gibberish." (p. 266, emphasis in the original). The same researcher, and others (such as BLOMMAERT 2005; 2009), have supplied us with practical examples of how a prestigious English variant in societies situated in the periphery of the global system loses its prestige when moved to the center. Mariluce Mariá's life accounts, in fact, are illustrative of such processes.

As Mariluce tells us, she felt invisible in some interactional events taking place on American soil. At Miami Airport, for instance, she alleges that her (patchwork) English – necessarily cut across by her performances as a black and Latin American woman – was not able to command the least bit of attention from other interlocutors who, in assistance, might have been able to direct her towards the exit. On her own, she resorted to her world knowledge and, thus, managed to find her way out. On these occasions, her linguistic identity was not considered and, as a result, neither was she, as an individual.

Filhos, contrary to Mariluce, never left Brazil. However, despite not having travelled great physical distances, she tells of local events in which English is configured as one of many multisemiotic resources at play in the meaning-making process.

"What about us?"[11]

[11] GONZALEZ (1984).

As stated previously, we chose to investigate the effects that modernist views of languages – particularly, of the English language – have on the subjectivity performances of Filhos, a student in a college preparatory course accessible to the wider public. We have already mentioned that, regarding her own assessment of her knowledge of English, Filhos reduces it to *nothing* and positions herself as *incapacitated* when it comes to communicative practices in which English is one of (many) resources at play. We have also made reference to a passage in her biographical narrative, in which, describing the time she went back to school, Filhos informed us that she learned *nothing*. A question that has led us to look more closely at Filhos's life history narratives is precisely this: why does she, a contemporary subject who is bound to come across bits of English here and there in the discourse practices she engages in, produce narratives that characterize her knowledge in the language as completely nonexistent? Perhaps analyzing the centers of authority that Filhos's narratives orient to would prove to be a productive interpretive route.

We start out with Filhos's experience at a commercial English language course when she was 18 years old. On the interview she recalls having attended the course (informed by an audiolingual approach) for less than a semester. Her dropping out, according to her account, was due to her "difficulty to memorize." It is a clue that points to a pedagogy of rote learning, based on assumptions that language learning is dependent on repetition and memorization of language structures. During Filhos's brief contact with this audiovisual language course while still a teenager, her identity as an English language learner was reduced to a *null-subjectivity*:

> He [the teacher] said, he was really hard, "wow, you don't know anything!" I even get it, sometimes, when my daughter was admitted to [state school] last year, she got depressed, right? She lost 2 kilos, and on account of, the real hard way of putting things. I was young then, right? I was 18, 19. But I quit the course on account of that. And I couldn't afford the course. I started studying at the [language school]. I stayed less than six months on account of that. I was really embarrassed by the kids speaking while I was stuck there [unable to speak]. (Filhos's interview on Sept. 5, 2019)

The account Filhos gives us, situated in a language school English classroom, seems to be a relevant clue to understand the reiterated self-depreciative assessments she makes of her linguistic performances. She reenacts an interactional event involving two characters: her younger self, and her English language teacher. Through direct reporting, we

are informed of her teacher's appraisal of her knowledge of English: he describes them as nonexistent ("wow, you don't know *anything*!"). In fact, Filhos acknowledges the violence of such an assessment when she predicates the teacher's speech: "He said, he was really *hard*."

Considering that our enunciations do not inaugurate meanings, but rather, revitalize, in micro-interactions, discourses that have become iterated in social history, we can infer that the English teacher's assessment is far from being of an individual order. Filhos herself recognizes the recursivity of this harsh assessment in meaning repertoires of similar subjectivities such as when she establishes a tangential relationship between her own narrative and her child's schooling histories ("She [the daughter] lost 2 kilos, and on account *of, the real hard way of putting things*." Our emphasis.) In these initial months of Filhos's socialization into academic practices at the English course, her oral performances[12] may indeed have strayed from the standard or prestigious variant of the English language. Therefore, to orders of indexicality whose authoritative center has a homogeneous perception of languages, Filhos's knowledge and discourse performances amount to nothing.

The teacher's curt remark – "you don't know anything!" – is a performative action that, combined with a broader macro and micro socio-discursive context, projects Filhos as a *null-subjectivity*. We observe a fleeting utterance which, ironically, has produced long-lasting subjectifying effects. With regard to this, Agha (2007, p. 3) underlines the great potential of temporal meaninglessness as, in his words, "things that last for seconds can have effects that last for years."[13]

In the narrative above, we can observe a reiteration through the habitus, in which the nexus macro-micro becomes patent at the same time that historically durable meanings of what it is to *truly* know a language are revitalized "in the most apparently insignificant aspects of the things, situations and practices of everyday life" (BOURDIEU, 1991, p. 51). Filhos and her teacher seem to reproduce in their micro-encounter a dominant belief concerning what really counts as English. As collateral effect, Filhos's identity construction as a failed English language learner slowly takes shape. Initially, it seems that alternative ways of perceiving languages and how they function, being absent from both the pupil's and the teacher's knowledge repertoires, operate a short-circuit which makes Filhos's alleged inaptitude for performing in the world in English definitive. However, the short-circuit is not linear in effect. It can move in different directions, even if stumbling over modernist epistemes.

In our trajectory so far, the center of authority Filhos and the teacher orient to describes semiotic hybrids as obstacles when acknowledging the occurrence of a language. But there are other paths that are interwoven. In her narratives featured in the interview, two examples are self-evident. The first one is described below, as she gives an account of the time when, getting around town, a tourist asked her for directions:

[12] In this as in other passages of the interview, we should observe Filhos's understanding of what it is to know a language: she equates knowing a language to knowing how to speak this language ("I was really embarrassed by the kids *speaking* while I was stuck there." Our emphasis.). We view this as yet another trace of the modernist episteme acting as a center of authority towards which Filhos is oriented as, according to structuralist linguistics, orality is (believed to be) the skill that takes ascendancy in language learning.

[13] It is equally important to point out the subjectifying effects of such an episteme on Filhos's teenage daughter as, according to the narrator, the girl's mental health did suffer.

> So someone came by and said, "Largo das Neves." So you think: "there..." So I say, "*sobe!* [get on!] *Vai subindo...* [Come on, get right on...]". I say in my Portuguese, "*sobe!* [get on!]", gesturing always like this [shows gesture], right? There are some who speak that way, that you can understand; there are some that, like, want to chat, then, you won't understand. I won't understand, but this one, this one who came and said, "das Neves." I mean, I know Largo das Neves, it's a short way from my workplace. So I went and said, "*vai subindo... sobe!* [Come on... get right on!]," and I make the gesture, but there are some who speak, and you can't understand. I can't understand English, so, I won't understand. (Interview with Filhos on Sept. 5, 2019)

As far as mutual intelligibility goes, the story Filhos re-enacts – of a tourist asking for direction around a neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro – seems to have turned out well. Communication took place thanks to a wealth of semiotic resources and knowledges which are in place, combining physical gestures, languages fragments (in-transit Portuguese and English), deictic references, and background knowledge regarding sociocultural conventions when asking for and giving directions. It is a process of meaning making that requires a common effort, on the part of the tourist – who perhaps has a limited Portuguese repertoire, being the one in need of information in an unknown land – as well as on the part of Filhos, who is willing to help. In sum, Filhos proved competent in a typically contemporary social – therefore, translingual – interaction since she was able to negotiate meaning in difference, in a collaborative communicative investment, as it should be in a world of varied semiotic resources (CANAGARAJAH, 2007).

In the narrated event, we observe that it was not a question of an oral performance in the standard norm of the linguistic code ensuring that the foreigner was able to reach his destination, but rather the multisemiosis of this interactional, locally situated event, which depended – and how! – on a range of Filhos's knowledges. However, differently from Mariluce, who resorted to translingual practices in order to act in the world, (cf. the previous section), Filhos does not value this hybridization of resources. Her performance is ambivalent. On the one hand, she recognizes she is (and can be) successful in interactional practices in which language resources in English are (also) in transit: "There are some who speak that way, that you can understand". Perhaps there lies the key to understand "he was really hard" as disapproval of the teacher. This frame aligns Filhos's position to that of hooks (2017) in her transgressive approach to language in "that we do not necessarily need to hear and know what is stated in its entirety, that we do not need to *master* or conquer the narrative as a whole, that we may know in fragments" (p. 232, emphasis in the original). Thus, interacting in a diverse world is to "learn from spaces of silence as well as spaces of speech" (p. 232). Subverting the prevailing nexus, in contemporaneity, it is not Filhos who needs to make her English into a cohesive image of the standard norm; it is those who are used exclusively to hegemonic standard English who will now

need to negotiate meaning in discourse practices that are increasingly patchworked, multisemiotic and gapped.

On the other hand, by declaring herself in the here and now, as in a hypothetical future, unable to perform in this language ("I don't know English, so I won't understand"), she disqualifies her communicative performance. Such a contradiction may perhaps be attributed to the very interactional setting which generated these narratives. There is also a chance that Filhos projects onto the interviewer-teacher stable identity claims that position her as a middle-class, white woman of epistemic authority. Based (as well) on her prior experience with the language-school teacher, Filhos might sense that the interviewer-teacher, similarly, would not regard her discursive actions as legitimate. After all, the coda in her life history narrative ("I don't know English, so I won't understand"), which also sustains the 'lack of aptitude for learning' ideology, is animated by a black, marginalized woman, within a context of research, faced with her English language teacher, whom Filhos might judge to be oriented to a view of linguistic purity of bounded languages. We do not deny, however that, in the case of other situated interactional practices, Filhos's oral repertoire of English language resources might eventually hinder mutual intelligibility. Her ambivalent performance, alternating between a null-subjectivity and a creative-subjectivity, indicates that performing in discourse involves a complex system of multisemiotic actions, in which the use of a code is but one aspect of the interactional scene.

The next fragment we bring up for consideration shows, once again, Filhos's appraisal of her own knowledges as insignificant, as much too precarious to allow her to leave the country. When, during the interview, the researcher recontextualizes Filhos's response to one of the items in the questionnaire, she in turn explains why she considers she knows "nothing of English":

> Well, because... a word is... like, a color: "blue." Uh... "hot dog!" But what about a whole sentence...? You see...? Now, with your tip, that's better, this tip of looking for ... what you know, go by elimination... this process of elimination. Now I pay closer attention to that. (...) But I can't travel there, yet, go abroad, this thing of elimination... because I want to learn a little a complete sentence. (Interview with Filhos on Sept. 5, 2019)

In this fragment, Filhos re-entextualizes discourse practices of the English language teachers in the college preparatory course. By indirectly referencing the teachers' speech – "Now, with your tip, that's better, this tip of looking for ... what you know"– Filhos reinterprets a pedagogic strategy based on the importance of contextualization processes when interacting with texts, in which, due to the limitations of the denotational dimension, our world knowledge takes on even greater relevance in meaning negotiation processes. Nevertheless, despite asserting that she now subscribes to this view of how languages function ("Now I pay

closer attention to that"), in the context of meaning-negotiation games, her knowledge continues being deemed by her as powerless, as the adversative clause makes explicit: "But I can't travel there, yet, go abroad, this thing of elimination...".

We see, once again, the ascendancy structuralist views of language have over Filhos's beliefs, reducing it to a series of correlations established within a language system. In other words, by validating and revitalizing modernist epistemes, Filhos indicates her belief that in order to be able to act in the world in English, she must first learn to articulate smaller structures – as she mentions, "blue" and "hot dog" – into higher-level units, forming, only then, "a complete sentence." She renews here a strong belief in the ascendancy of the code, disregarding other aspects and signs which are engaged in the process of meaning making. Put differently, Filhos judges that before her language repertoire has moved up the scale to include clauses, she will remain both physically and mentally stuck, unable to leave her local life and make it to faraway places.

Once again we confirm that perceptions of language as detached from broader sociopolitical contexts – in which economic, cultural and identity issues are intertwined – reinforce the fallacy that a complete mastery of the standard variety would guarantee physical as well as social mobility of subjects (LOPES; SILVA; 2018; LOVE-NICHOLS, 2018). Let us focus, for instance on the deictic *"lá"* ("there"), which Filhos employs above. It has very precise spatial coordinates, since it refers to the American theme park, Disney World, which Filhos has been longing to visit for a long while (as mentioned in other interview fragments and in the field notes), and that, finally, would justify her learning the language:

> I want to learn English. I want to visit Disney [World], so, I have to know some [English]. [...] It's a childhood dream of mine, because I worked at a travel agency and I watched several people going to Disney, taking their children. So I have this dream of visiting Disney. (Interview with Filhos on Sept. 5, 2019)

Filhos wants to experience the "Disney magic" and believes the linguistic code – which she does not yet master – constitutes a passport. As appropriately pointed out by Love-Nichols (2018), linguistic ideologies that focus exclusively on language form, disregarding interactants' identity performances and the sociohistorical meanings across interactional events, in fact, do seem to configure a fantasy world, in which discrimination is magically done away with by invoking words and clauses in standard English. It would suffice then for marginalized social groups to adapt themselves to the hegemonic varieties. However, one needs only to read or listen to statements by Paulo Guedes (President Bolsonaro's Minister for the Economy) given out five months after the interview with Filhos – in which he defends a devalued Brazilian currency for many reasons, including, to avoid "housemaids going to Disney (World), a real extravaganza" (VENTURA, 2020) – and we would

have more than enough evidence to denounce the deception present in the notion that mastery of a standard variety alone would be enough to guarantee mobility in the sociolinguistic scales for all. While Filhos – the black housemaid who personifies the object of Guedes's contempt – awaits to adapt her English to this imaginary, unattainable ideal, purist language descriptions and elitist government policies produce the same effect: blaming subalternized social categories and their hybridized language performances for their own social shortcomings and non-achievements.

We verify, therefore, that Filhos smashes to *nothing* her knowledges and her own discursive performance in situated interactions in which the linguistic code of the English language is but one of many resources at play in the communication process. It's the affliction she herself enacts in her performances as a learner, though it's true she doesn't do it alone as, in the chosen narratives, we were able to observe that the regular school, the English language course and her former English teacher acted in conjunction to delegitimize her translingual language uses. For those who orient towards conceptualizations in which language is understood as fragmented semiotic resources that are variable and marked by contradictions, it may be hard to imagine that subjects in current urban spaces, may, in fact, have their knowledge in the English language reduced to a nullity. Nevertheless, looking through the lens of epistemes claiming purified, discrete languages, the narrator, the institutions of learning she passed through, and the teacher-character in her story revitalize a violence which sociohistorically disregards mixtures, whether by Filhos or other marginalized intersubjectivities. The setbacks in these power games will also depend on changes to our epistemes and our teaching practices.

Disturbing meaningfulness: in favor of a praxis of mixtures

Several researchers in the fields of language studies and social sciences have for years been alerting to possible negative effects that certain conceptualizations of language may have on marginalized social groups. Lasting assumptions about languages, reducing them to a systemic aspect or a referential function, as well as the understanding that they constitute a pure materialization of national heritage, disregard Filhos as a social subject capable of employing and understanding linguistic resources in the English language. As a result of that, her linguistic performances throughout her trajectories of socialization into academic practices were, in reiterated manner, reduced to *nothing*. In this process, seeing that discursive performances intersect with identity performances, her own intersubjectivities are permeated by such reductions. As Anzaldúa said so well, "so, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity. I am my language." (ANZALDÚA, 2009, p. 312).

The performative effects of such circularity frequently position Filhos as a *Non-being* in the world. The knowledges and histories that

constitute her – enriched by her intersectionalized out-of-school lived experiences as a black woman from the periphery, and which are amalgamated in her multisemiotic practices – are completely invalidated. As discussed above, the detrimental effects of Filhos's sedimented identity as one unable to perform in English and who, as a learner, is devoid of knowledge, are confronted by her as she judges critically the language-school teacher's negative assessment of her performances as a learner. In its fleeting and subtle character, this moment is nevertheless exuberant in meaningfulness. Despite the discourses and beliefs systems at stake, which act as mesmerizing forces, captivating not only Filhos but all of us, she also acts in a less hypnotic fashion, enacting creative translingual performances. In this sense, she points to the possibility of a more fluid transit through linguistic ideologies which oppose *full-subjectivities*, associated with the idea of complete linguistic-intellectual-socioeconomic success; and *null-subjectivities*, related to the idea of a lack of knowledges and of cognitive inaptitude.

Wortham (2005) argues that recurrent communicative practices play an important part in processes of socialization into academic life. However, the author also warns us that the erratic trajectories learners describe as they move along in a chain of discursive events are extremely important in order to understand how social identities emerge – a process that is neither simple nor decisive. Filhos's brief passage through the English language classes at the college preparatory course – classes that are guided by a translingual pedagogy – suggests micro-disturbances in Filhos's set of beliefs concerning what knowing a language involves. She goes to the point of animating discourses valorizing the constitutive knowledges of social subjects in communicative processes. It is still uncertain whether these brief moments of inflection will prove hardy enough to defeat Filhos's self-deprecating performances as a *null-subjectivity.* Nevertheless, Filhos's ambivalent enactments observed here indicate agency and creative potency as, in their apparent minuteness, they disturb the "cultural imperialism and epistemicide" present in "the historic trajectory of Western modernity" (SANTOS 1997, p. 29).

All that has been said and written about the violence that certain linguistic descriptions inflict on some human lives to us seems insufficient. Everyday discourse practices of historically subalternized groups – which are still being treated with contempt and await much needed revision by certain epistemes – make it abundantly clear that, in fact, we are not saying enough about the great potential of meaninglessness. Therefore, "we need to disturb meaningfulness," and to have eyes for what at first glance may seem minor, for therein may lie alternative lived experiences. Such practices imply an ethical-political commitment to the rights of those who occupy marginalized positions in society. And for that, we align ourselves with Santos (Ibid.) when he advocates "*a 'mestiza' conception of human rights*," in which acknowledgement of alterities – and by extension, of their discursive hybrids – ensures that

these social groups may "have the right to be different whenever equality jeopardizes their identity" (p.30). However, it is not enough to call out all the damage done by certain linguistic descriptions (and the pedagogic practices stemming from them) to specific socio-discursive groups. We need to redefine our thinking-speaking-acting in pedagogic practices and regarding which priorities are to be focused on in our research work. We need to observe agency, for where there is power, there in resistance to power (FOUCAULT, 2005).

Descriptions don't just describe. If we believe that through the written or spoken word we are merely putting into code the beings and artifacts of the so-called world, we are falling short of the constitutive potential of our discourse practices. However, instead of simply regretting our reductionist use of words – believing they serve only a referential purpose – we need, above all else, to value the knowledges we are helping to destroy by effect of our metadiscursive regimes. As Makoni and Pennycook (2007, p. 32) do well to warn us, "any language description implies an intervention into people's lives, and the intervention might have unexpected adverse effects on exactly those same people whose interests we think we are promoting or safeguarding." Whether in the sphere of expert systems, or in that of common sense, the denotational function of language and the view of languages as stable artifacts, as contextless individual mental objects, prevail. Unfortunately, the detrimental effects such linguistic rationalizations have over identity constitution within stigmatized groups also prevail, though not inevitably, as underlying forces of resistance, no matter how subtle, are equally at work.

We must move ahead toward actions which will aid us in subverting the orders that, for now, are still in place. If epistemologies that conceive languages and pedagogic practices as a blending of semiotic resources become recognized as centers of authority, new orders of indexicality can be configured. "Shifting how we think about language and how we use it necessarily alters how we know what we know [and how we learn]", stresses bell hooks (1994/2017, p.231). Moving in that direction means imploding the very territorializing idea of languages and re-evaluating the knowledge regimes validated in schools.

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"Subjetividades-nada", linguagem e aprendizagem: precisamos de atrapalhar as significâncias

RESUMO

Neste trabalho, argumentamos que a possibilidade de existir como ser epistêmico é uma dimensão pouco explorada em pautas reivindicatórias de direitos humanos. Desenvolvemos essa ideia discutindo como uma compreensão das línguas como categorias puras pode afetar estudantes, sobretudo em grupos marginalizados. Em diálogo com narrativas produzidas por Filhos, uma aluna de um curso pré-universitário voltado para jovens e adultos de classes populares, refletimos sobre os efeitos perfomativos de visões modernistas das línguas, especialmente da língua inglesa. Focalizando diferentes momentos interacionais, analisamos como Filhos reconstrói sua trajetória de socialização acadêmica (WORTHAM, 2015) e as ordens de indexicalidade (BLOMMAERT, 2005) que a organizam. Os resultados apontam para encenações ambivalentes, nas quais sentidos de aprendizagem e comunicação são hierarquizados de modo contraditório. Filhos tanto performa uma subjetividade nula de saberes legítimos e incapaz de agir no mundo em língua inglesa quanto se engaja em práticas translíngues criativas. Essa oscilação indica um aspecto importante em processos educacionais: "é preciso de atrapalhar as significâncias" e de ter olhos para o que pode ser apressadamente considerado menor, ou sem importância. Tal foco investigativo implica um compromisso ético-político com "uma pedagogia das misturas", conversando diretamente com os direitos linguísticos daqueles/as que socialmente ocupam lugares marginalizados.

Palavras-chave*: subjetividades; trajetória de socialização; pedagogia das misturas; ordens de indexicalidade.*

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