

South-North Dialogue on Globalization Research: A Non-typical Brazilian Perspective

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I address the topic of South-North dialogue on globalization research as a representative of a country so wide, so varied and so multicultural that it escapes any representation. But from a discursive perspective, all we have is representation anyway — interpretation and subjective understandings of ourselves and others. It is from such a perspective, therefore, that I present a “non-typical”¹ Brazilian view on globalization and what I believe we can do to motivate a dialogue between the “Global North” and the “Global South”² on research on globalization. By dialogue I mean dialogical reflection that *engages* with difference and challenges its own principles.

I begin by describing my work context, the way I see it, with the assumption that we need to understand each other better in order to be able to really share our perspectives on globalization. At the same time, I will make explicit the theoretical gaze I use to understand this context. I will also refer to the questions posed to us as a collective agenda.³ But first, I offer a brief comment about the educational system in Brazil, the system in which I was educated and where I now exercise my agency and do my research.

I work in a public university as a teacher-educator at the undergraduate level, and as an applied linguist at the graduate level. I also work intensively with teachers in continuous education, as the director of a university centre for foreign language teachers, dedicated to promoting continuous teacher education. In this centre we invite teachers to participate in collaborative research, and also offer language and methodology courses through ongoing partnerships with the State Secretariat of Education and other agencies such as the British Council and the American Embassy. In our contact with these agencies, we have learned that there is always a hidden agenda of domination, an imposition of perspectives, and a devaluation of teachers as educators. Teachers are thought of as technicians who need only to be *trained* properly. Especially as far as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is concerned, teachers' primary need is thought to be *content* — a good command of language structures and vocabulary for communication, as if language was simply a set of grammar rules and lexicon to be neutrally transmitted and acquired (Jordão 2005). All other needs, such as how teachers see themselves as good or poor users of the foreign language they teach, the impact this view of themselves has on their relationship with their students and the language/culture they teach, how they conceive of this language and its social impact in Brazil, and how they see their students' and their own identities in relation to what they identify as the foreign-language culture or cultures, were considered minor or secondary needs. It is these needs that we are addressing in the projects we have developed together in Brazil for public school teachers.

By “public education” in Brazil, we mean a completely free-of-charge educational system: no taxes are paid for education, from primary to higher levels in Brazil. Contrary to what happens in many

countries, in Brazil public education is seen to be of better quality as far as higher education is concerned while private education is thought to be of a higher quality at the primary and secondary levels (known as "basic education"). Most of the students in public universities, therefore, come from the private educational system. Since there are not enough places for everybody in the public universities (preferred by most of the population not only because they offer the best courses, but also because they are free of charge), we have highly selective university entrance examinations that produce an industry of their own with special prep courses, high-security measures to avoid frauds, and strenuous competition among private high schools to have the highest number of students approved in public university examinations.

In my view, public schools in Brazil are mistakenly underrated, and public universities are undeserving of the high social status conferred to them. As the terms "basic" and "higher" suggest, the two educational levels are viewed from a hierarchical perspective in which higher education is responsible for "telling" teachers in basic education what to do, a relationship that reproduces the imperial structure of colonialism. That might be one of the reasons why new educational policies tend to be discredited in Brazil, and so difficult to implement. It is a country with great new ideas and laws but which are seldom applied fully in social practice. Intellectuals, university professors, and researchers conceive projects and come up with ideas for solving schools' problems without really listening to what the teachers, students, and parents have to say. Paulo Freire's insistence on the need for dialogue, for listening, and for negotiation has not been implemented so as to realize the radical implications of his concept of *dialogue* as a constant revision and transformation, in the contact with otherness and difference, of our assumptions and implications (Freire 1996). Instead, theory is expected to be *produced* at universities and *applied* by school teachers (Tynjälä, Välimaa, and Sarja 2003). This is a division along the same lines as those denounced by Appadurai in his article entitled "The Right to Research" (2006). It is as if school teachers are not able or interested in doing research, and thus the role of university professors is to produce theory, while "practice" is reserved for school teachers. This "theory X practice" divide repeats itself at the university level where private universities in Brazil seem to be growing in number as the population grows, and public institutions cannot accommodate everyone. The university private educational sector has therefore been educating (or perhaps I should say "training") most of the population with university degrees but the sector has invested little or nothing in research. Private institutions generally focus on "training," "updating," and qualifying their staff; research is left to the public universities and institutions as an *elitized*, abstract, and distant activity as far as people's everyday needs are concerned. This is of course, as Appadurai points out (2006, 173), even more true in the humanities and social sciences, as opposed to the natural sciences and technology. It calls attention to the urgent need for more collaborative research work involving basic education teachers on the one hand, and university professors and students on the other, so that we can be more aware of the myriad of contexts in which we exist; of the different ways to understand and deal with them through research; of the different ways to conceive of and to do research; and of the benefits that situated and collaborative learning, teaching, and researching can bring to all of us.

However, bridging this theory X practice gap is not an easy task. In our centre for continuous teacher education we have been working together with the State Secretariat in order to improve foreign language teaching in public schools. Part of my work with the State has been to meet teachers from different regions, to discuss their day-to-day realities teaching English as a foreign language, and to come up with possible ways to intervene. We have been doing this as collaboratively as possible within the constraints of each local context. Last year, I served as a consultant to the Secretariat of Education and was responsible for the elaboration of state-wide parameters for foreign language teaching. I was also a critical reader to the Federal Ministry of Education on national parameters for

foreign language teaching. Since then, I have written English as a foreign language teaching materials for public schools, and I have been acting as a consultant to different textbook publishers, advising them on how to write or adapt materials to the more recent national and state parameters.

I think that the main changes introduced by the latest (2006) foreign language teaching parameters in Brazil assume a perspective similar to the one we are trying to develop in our South-North dialogue. They assume a basic, fundamental principle without which "dialogic dialogue" cannot happen: the need to respect local contexts and the heterogeneity of the Brazilian population, and at the same time to adopt a critical literacy approach to foreign language teaching. To date, foreign language teaching in Brazil had been thought about from the communicative approach, as stated by textbooks and educational agencies (mostly imported from Europe and the United States). It is an approach in which conflicts and tensions must be avoided or resolved as soon as possible. Students must be prepared to communicate in everyday situations that are pacific and emptied of conflict. Respecting differences and *tolerating* diversity were the words of the day. Students should be taught to see the positive aspects of different cultures; to live alongside difference, *respecting* but not really engaging with it; to be in contact with different cultures but keep their own cultural values *intact*, and to learn to love their own country despite its drawbacks and limitations. The bookish contact with different cultures was restricted to carefully selected texts that would not create conflict, but show positive images of different cultures and teach living in harmony, avoiding conflict, *maintaining* one's own national values and identities, and at the same time being aware and respectful of (but safely distant from) difference. Students' learning was expected to take place in the conflict-free environment of the classroom, where they could feel secure and apart from the dangers and instabilities of "real life" or life outside the classroom.

In the critical literacy approach adopted by the more recent foreign language parameters, we try to expose students (and teachers) to a variety of perspectives and points of view about everyday cultural encounters that tend to be much less pacific and predictable than those usually brought to the classrooms. We try to deal with difference in a respectful but engaged way, that is, by establishing a Bakhtinian *dialogic* dialogue (Bakhtin 1982) with the Other. Within this approach, different perspectives are challenged and critically put to test: assumptions and implications are examined and discussed. There is an emphasis on heterogeneity, and no forced need to "resolve" conflicts. Instead, we aim at learning to deal with instability and provisionality, to take action to minimize whatever we perceive as unjust, but without ruling out different perspectives on justice and injustice, and without refusing to engage with alternative interpretations. We believe language learning is not "innocent": we do not simply learn a "code" that translates into another. We learn ways of knowing, ways of understanding, and ways of constructing our realities. When teaching a foreign language we have to deal more openly with social issues, with different perspectives and ways of understanding life that are made possible by different languages. Languages are therefore understood as discourses — as social, ideological practices for *building* meanings, rather than neutral "codes" to *express* thoughts and feelings.

My Research and Globalization Discourses

This discursive view of languages as loci for the construction of meanings is where my actions, beliefs, and research have to do with post-colonialism and globalization. We have come to accept a "globalized" American, Northern, or Western view of conflict, engagement, learning, knowledge — a view that sees life as "patriarchal presence" (Derrida 1978) and that sees the resolution of conflict as the only chance to fulfillment. This view seeks answers and clarity and straight, absolute, universal definitions of right or wrong; it is a view that sees action as observable behaviour rather than change

of attitude (agency). In my work, I suggest a different perspective — one that, as the Brazilian literary anti-hero Macunaíma would put it, takes things as they come, eats and digests them, keeping what is nourishing and eliminating what is pernicious (Andrade, 1937/2008). This plural perspective dessacralizes and carnivalizes the Other by experimenting with difference, by indulging in it, by actively engaging with it through a Bakhtinian "dialogic dialogue."

The lenses we adopt to look at critical literacy in Brazil are different from those being used by the big names in critical literacy (all from the "Global North": Gee, Luke, Freebody, Giroux). When I say "we in Brazil," I mean, myself and a small group of Brazilian scholars who get published (and perhaps also thousands of anonymous teachers and citizens all over the country) who look at critical literacy as a means to cater for local understandings of the multiple contexts that interact in our professional activities and as a discursive approach to our constructions of reality. We do not start from a pre-defined agenda, a pre-conceived view of the paths to be followed or the aims to be achieved. We want to negotiate our frameworks, to enlarge our alternatives by examining other possible paths than the ones we have known so far. We want to allow people to engage with their own truths and those of others, and to decide which provisional truths they want or can adopt at specific moments in their lives. We want people to be as "free" as possible to promote such engagement, without feeling paralysed by the complexity of difference or by the right people have to *be* and *think* differently.

For me, therefore, one of the most pressing research questions related to globalization concerns the different local ways of appropriation and transformation of the representational systems that come with colonial discourse. This relates to how meanings are constructed in language. This discursive view of knowledge and education can be extended to the process of globalization and to building South-North dialogue on globalization research. As participants in this dialogue, although coming from different countries, we are part of similar interpretive communities. As scholars we share a lot of assumptions about knowledge and academic excellence, for example. We use similar discourses to construct and legitimize meanings in similar ways. To build South-North dialogue, I think we should insist on being open to real engagement with difference, hoping there is in fact difference among us and our ways of understanding research and knowledge. We must try to promote different ways of knowing among ourselves, and not simply come to the dialogue expecting other scholars to "agree" with us or think the way we do. The joy of working together in difference implies an openness to negotiate and be challenged, to help others change, and to change ourselves too. If we do want to open up to difference, we must know that we need to be not only open to an *awareness* of diverse views, but that we also need to be ready to face the consequences that real interaction with difference can bring. We need to be open to having our perspectives challenged by the other ways of knowing we might encounter in difference. Just how far we want to go down the rabbit hole is for us to negotiate.

Appadurai's view on research can be, however, a good way for us to start discussing our assumptions and decide which ones we wish to maintain and which others we are ready to let go. In order to explain his idea of the need for "grassroots globalization," Appadurai brings forward what I call a "discursive view" of knowledge production, in which research is seen as a "practice of imagination" (Appadurai 2000, 8) and therefore as a "construction," locally produced in language, but conceived of and projected as a global practice. He shows research as being produced by people, and therefore as producing subjective interpretations of the world. Scholarly research, because of the legitimacy it has attained in our contemporary society, not only produces knowledge perceived as truth about the world, but it also foregrounds certain ways of knowing that are hierarchically positioned as superior. These are seen to be more truthful or closer to reality, to describing things "as they are" than other ways of knowing, such as those of religion or intuition. In other words, the

acceptance of knowledge as “true” depends on how “powerful” certain interpretations and ways of constructing them are thought to be. The construction of knowledges, including the ones authorized by science, sets Foucault’s power/knowledge at play, regardless of the contexts in which it is being formed: what varies is the intensity of the relations established between powers and knowledges.

Another scholar worth considering in relation to how knowledge is produced and legitimized is the Chilean biologist and educator Humberto Maturana (2001). He is concerned with the nature of knowledge and the social role of different ways of knowing. For him, we live in constant movement between *objectivity without parenthesis* (that kind of interpretive attitude that positions and values different ways of knowing according to their degree of proximity to a supposedly fixed, external, and permanent reality) and *objectivity in parenthesis* (an attitude that sees reality as inseparable from its observer, and therefore cannot distinguish between observer and observed, between interpretation and reality).

From the discursive perspectives of Appadurai and Maturana, then, we can look at globalization, with the Argentine scholar Walter Dignolo (2001), as a process of production and legitimization of world views, of certain interpretations and idealized identities and subjectivities, and of specific forms of knowledge and ways of knowing which, constructed as local objectivities (without parenthesis), have been projected as global and tend to determine the ways we see the world. Such a view of globalization, therefore, demands a focus on discourse — on the relation between language, knowledge, and power, and on the nature of language, knowledge, and power. These are big topics that need to be addressed if we really mean to work together and open up to difference and multiple ways of knowing.

Some of the issues I see that could benefit strongly from collaboration among scholars from different countries (who do not necessarily have different perspectives or different ways of knowing) are:

- * the status of different discourses (academic, popular, religious, educational) in our societies
- * how and if we want to contribute to legitimizing these discourses as valid ways of knowing
- * if the separation and different status attributed to each of them should be reinforced or bridged
- * how we approach and deal with the different ways of knowing that are not considered “academic” or “scientific”

Many other questions, I believe, could benefit greatly from more systematic collaboration with scholars from elsewhere. In my specific area, for example, getting to know different modes of resistance, interpolation, and transformation (Ashcroft 2002) of the “imperial culture” that come with the teaching and learning of English in different national and regional contexts, could definitely help to transform the strategies of representation at play in our contexts. And perhaps it could likewise promote and help to legitimize new forms of “grassroots representation” that allow us to value differences and work together without trying to silence any particular ways of knowing. The dialogue with and from different perspectives — not only of academics, but also of people in other sectors of society — could be challenging, productive, and innovative. In other words, I am suggesting that in building South-North dialogue on globalization research we reserve room for the perspectives of other community members and not just scholars or researchers. We need to think about ways in which social activists, teachers, parents, and politicians can participate more actively in our decision-making processes.

Since I am taking a discursive perspective here, I would like to point out what I see as one of the main difficulties for scholars in the “Global South” to be heard in the “Global North”: the use of the English language. As I have mentioned, language from a discursive perspective is a locus of signification

where meanings are constructed rather than simply transmitted. Therefore, with the dominance of the English language in academic journals, a whole way of constructing science comes along that is perceived as "the scientific way" and therefore the "preferred" or "best way" of knowing. We have to be careful with our unquestioned assumptions. For example, there has been a lot of discussion about literacy in education, so much so that only a few isolated people dare to question its importance in education. Therefore, if literacy is equated with rationality and intellectual ability, and if English is embraced as the international language of science, media, and technology, then there is the danger that people who are literate in English are considered to be more rational and intellectually able than those who are not (Norton 2007).

This is one of the principal obstacles encountered by globalization studies researchers in my country when it comes to carrying out their research and making it available to other scholars and to interested persons of the general public. In the "Global South," we face the attempts of powerful, legitimized institutions and organizations to push our "minority" languages out of the picture and silence their ways of understanding the world, their ways of constructing such understandings, and of making them possible by the very languages that they use. Restricting scholarly research and exchange to one "international language" and its "proper uses" — as well as to the international discourses that come with it — may be to restrict our ways of knowing to those that this language establishes as possible within its own meaning-making systems. Are we comfortable with that? If we are not, what can we do about it?

I am not comfortable with that, and I do not think there is a pre-given, universal solution to the problem. But this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that there is nothing we can do about it, or that the issue is so complex that it cannot be tackled. Ignoring the problem is not the only alternative we have. We can take action: our position as we establish a South-North dialogue is a position of power and we can try to set new standards for academic production that will accept forms of representation other than those traditionally conveyed in academic English discourses. One concrete manifestation of such action could be the funding of local journals and research groups that produce materials not only or exclusively in English, but also in the local, national, or regional languages, so that they become available to those who do not speak English.

I do not mean to imply that we need to do away with English and use only local languages, or an artificially constructed language like Esperanto, for example, as if it were possible or desirable to have a "neutral" language for international communication. In my view, there is no such thing as "neutrality," and I do think the "Global North" needs to be given a chance to listen to the "Global South" — and given the world as it seems to be today, that chance can only happen if the "Global South" uses English. What I mean to say is that in creating South-North dialogue we can be more understanding of what is at stake in the existence, and legitimizing, of the various local ways of knowing, producing, and sharing academic knowledge, by allowing these localized perspectives to be constructed *also* and *differently within* the English language. We need to accept, in the use of the English language and the discourses that it brings with it, the local characteristics of other ways to relate to texts and to conceive of knowledge, science, and the academy. We need to learn to value them as expressions of local interventions in, and appropriations of, colonial discourse. One possible way to do that would be to establish with texts, especially those written in English by Global Southern voices, a relationship that Ashcroft (2001) has called "situated accomplishment," where reader, writer, and text are seen as *negotiating* meanings (rather than extracting them from texts), recognizing that it is in the reciprocity of experiences of readers and writers with texts that meanings are constructed. Therefore, communication is not made "impossible" or "hindered" by the use of a foreign language, since it is the *context* of reading and the attitudes of readers to texts that make meanings possible. In

Ashcroft's words, "it is the situation, the '*event*' of this reciprocal happening which '*tells*', which '*refers*', which '*informs*' (2001, 61)." In other words, I am talking about the development of *intercultural competence*, the ability to open up to other ways of knowing and to their construction in different meaning-making systems.

However, the use of English is not the only problem we have, of course. Apart from that, there are pressing material needs, related to the extremely low funding dedicated to research and academic production in general, especially in the human sciences. We lack financial resources to access recent publications; to allow more participation in national and international congresses; to produce and distribute printed materials such as posters, leaflets, and handbooks for public school teachers; to attract public school teachers to collaborative work with scholars from the "Global North" and the "Global South," and to attract scholars to collaborative work with teachers; or to hire project assistants; and to design and maintain websites and portals to share our research in English and in our local languages. Our everyday work load is huge, and there is hardly any time left over for reading and research after course planning and teaching. Despite such constraints, we have been producing a vast amount of research and theory on many areas, including globalization. Perhaps we could start taking actions to tackle those problems as well, and thus help to improve the *conditions* for research in the "Global South," not only its *dissemination*.

To this end, there are other immediate actions that those of us who are interested in building South-North dialogue on globalization research can take. One of them is to help find, or to offer, financial help to research centres that have a social concern and/or impact (like those dealing with education, for example). This help can be in the form of funding subscriptions to electronic journals in the area; updating local libraries; and procuring equipment such as data projectors and computers for video-conferencing, printers, or even furniture like shelves, tables, and chairs. Surprising as it may seem, even paper and ink are difficult to get in many research centres. Another concrete action is to grant participants in a South-North dialogue, or their local centres, money to support participation in international congresses and the presentation of papers concerning our local actions related to research on globalization. Yet another action is to help these centres in their attempts to organize local and international congresses like the one on Literacies and Languages that is being planned for 2009 in Brazil.

In summary, my own research addresses conditions of learning and teaching in a developing, multicultural nation with a colonial history, where education, although fully open to all, is available at different levels to different people with different objectives. In this society, and in many others, I believe knowledge has been taken as synonymous with *scientific* knowledge as produced and stated in and by the "Global North"; such knowledge has been valued as increasingly important for participation in the state and the global economy, but it is not available to all. While I cannot speak for Brazil, education, critical literacy, and transformation of global English and its ways of knowing are pressing questions for me and for those I work with in my national community.

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Notes

1. This is an intentionally "non-idiomatic" use of the English language, in an attempt to introduce new possibilities of meaning in the English language. One of the points I am making in this text is that we need to open up to new possibilities of meaning-making, and this is an initial invitation to do just that.
2. The categories "Global North" and "Global South" are used loosely here to refer to the usual terms in the globalization literature; however, they will be kept in quotation marks so that we do not forget how arbitrary and heterogeneous the groups are to which they refer.
3. These questions are: "How has my own research addressed or focused upon globalization?; In thinking about my own research and that of other colleagues that I know in my country, what are the most pressing research questions related to globalization?; Which of these questions would benefit the most from more systematic collaboration with colleagues outside my country in perhaps larger projects?; When scholars and activists speak of globalization in my country, what do they usually mean by the term?; What are the principal obstacles faced by globalization studies researchers in my country when it comes to carrying out their research and making it available to other scholars and to interested persons of the general public?; Might any of these obstacles be addressed by greater cross-national research collaboration?; When it comes to my country, is Appadurai's (2000) analysis of differences in research approaches and research ethics across the world relevant and helpful, or

not?"

This is a pre-print version of **South-North Dialogue on Globalization Research: A Non-typical Brazilian Perspective** by **Clarissa Menezes Jordão** generated from the *Globalization and Autonomy Online Compendium*. The electronic original is available at http://www.globalautonomy.ca/global1/position.jsp?index=SN_Jordao_Brazil.xml.