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Voice, orality and academic literacy in the light of indigenous presence in Brazilian universities

Maria Sílvia Cintra Martins
Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil

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Maria Sílvia Cintra Martins[1]

Abstract

When writing this paper, I had as a main objective to bring to light the importance of exercising language in a free, poetic and radical way, understanding such an exercise as absolutely necessary to challenge dominant discourses and practices. In this sense, writing in any of the discourse genres – and maybe mostly in the academic genre, where we have to struggle and fight inside the colonizer's territory - can be seen as an ability that needs a lot of exercise out of the combat arena and before entering it. Our language needs to be strong; it needs to acquire a force of language that only poetic and free exercise can provide. This paper presents results of ten-year research involving three indigenous students at the Federal University of São Carlos. In what concerns theory, it highlights the necessary interaction between Poetics, Ethics and Politics as the main issue we must take into consideration when decolonization is at stake. My research highlights that there is a role for orality as well as voice in the academy.

Keywords: academic literacy, Balatiponé, Decolonising, Guarani, indigenous, Poetics, Higher Education, orality, Xavante

Pausapé, ambúri yepé maã yamaité arama: ti aikué yepé tetama ntu upé yepé nheenga. Tiramé yepé nheenga ntu yepé tetama supé. Nheenga ramé muíri amu nheenga ita uiku. Yepe tetama uriku muiri nheenga nhaãsé yepé nheenga uiku amu nheenga kuara upe. Panhe kuri tetama nheenga itá umuyereu arama.[2]

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[1] Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil.

[2] These phrases have been written in Nheengatu – a Brazilian indigenous "língua franca" – by João Paulo Ribeiro, one of the subjects of my Research Project. They refer to the importance of Nheengatu language for communication among Brazilian indigenous people of different communities. In this sense, they do not imply the literal translation of the Abstract (written in English) into the Nheengatu language, because in this case, we are dealing with languages that circulate in very different contexts.

Introduction

I present the results of ten-year's research on academic literacy that considered indigenous attendance at Brazilian universities with a special focus on the Federal University of São Carlos. I based my research, in part, on the New Literacy Studies and, in a complementary way, on concepts drawn from Translation Studies and Cultural Studies (Lotman, 2005). The first phase of the research project was based on procedures and strategies present in the Academic Literacies Model (Lea & Street, 2006) of university writing development. For the second phase, however, I found it necessary to introduce elements from Translation Studies, particularly aiming at the construction of a Theory of Language intimately related to Poetics, Ethics and Politics. Such a proposal is based on a critical approach that, among other aspects, calls into question the concept of orality in the way it has been traditionally conceived (Meschonnic, 2011; Martins, 2022).

It is worth emphasizing the fact that though the French poet, linguist and translator, Henri Meschonnic, never made any explicit reference to Decolonizing theory, the core of his theoretical proposal has an essentially critical, libertarian appeal as it will become clearer in the arguments and examples presented below. Anyway, it is my contention that when we bring together, in intimate interaction, Poetics, Ethics and Politics – three elements usually studied in separate disciplinary areas – we certainly contribute to decolonizing universities and to destabilizing hegemonic thinking.

Defining research subjects and ambience

In Brazil, a country of around two hundred million people, we have the largest concentration of indigenous people in isolation in South America. According to the 2010 population census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the Brazilian indigenous population includes almost 900 thousand indigenous persons, which means 0.4% of our total population. There are 305 different ethnic groups and 274 languages. Among indigenous persons over the age of five, only 37.4% speak an indigenous language, while 76.9% speak Portuguese.

The Federal University of São Carlos is located in the southeast region of Brazil, far from Mato Grosso and the Amazon states, where the majority of indigenous people live in our country, if we take into account data drawn from the 2010 IBGE census. Some issues must be considered, however: 1) the fact that our last IBGE census dates from 2010, twelve years ago; 2) the fact that each year more people in Brazil declare themselves indigenous; 3) and the existence of intense racism and stigma experienced by indigenous people. In this sense, until the 2010 census, practically the only people living inside "aldeias" (indigenous reserves) were registered as indigenous whereas in reality, many people living on the peripheries of a metropolis such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are migrants with indigenous ascendence.

Our university is the only Brazilian university that offers places in departments to students that self-identify as indigenous, including the Departments of Engineering, and Physics and Medicine, just to give two examples. As a professor of the Department of Modern Languages, I have been engaging with indigenous undergraduates since 2008 when the first entrance exam aimed at self-identified candidates was established. Students used to come to our department searching for support concerning academic literacy. In 2010, for instance, I had contact with students belonging to the following ethnicities: Baniwa (Amazon), Bororo (Mato Grosso), Cambeba (Amazon), Manchinery (Acre) Pankararu and Xukuru (Pernambuco), Terena (Mato Grosso do Sul), Xavante (Mato Grosso) and Balatiponé (Mato Grosso). They came from distant places and faced great difficulties due to many factors including material conditions.

In this paper I will refer in more detail to three indigenous students: a Balatiponé undergraduate who attended our degree course at the Department of Modern Languages and who developed research aimed at the production of a didactic artefact; a Xavante undergraduate whose coursework in Pedagogy I supervised and who was interested in giving visibility to Xavante mythical narratives that had not previously been translated; a Guarani PhD student whose thesis I supervised and who was involved in the translation of Guarani indigenous chants into Portuguese. [3]

I will mention three interlinguistic translations: from Portuguese to Balatiponé that was part of the academic monograph of the Balatiponé undergraduate; from Xavante to Portuguese that was part of the academic monograph of the Xavante undergraduate; and from Guarani to Portuguese, as a part of the doctoral thesis of the third student. It is worthwhile pointing out that Portuguese is the main official language in Brazil, and Balatiponé, Xavante and Guarani are languages spoken by different Brazilian indigenous nations or communities.

It is also important to make it clear that, when referring here to translation, my approach is underpinned by Lawrence Venuti (1995) of foreignization (rather than domestication) and its relevance for the debate on decolonization. Defending foreignization implies recognizing the importance and the value of the language of the other country, community or individual. It implies a special effort and interest in understanding the other culture and its specificity, and in maintaining certain characteristic and unique cultural and linguistic traits no matter how strange or incomprehensible they may seem at a first contact.

Some data on indigenous ethnicities and voice from the first phase of the research

From 2008 to 2010, I supervised research involving a PhD student and six indigenous undergraduates belonging to three different Brazilian ethnicities: Balatiponé, Terena and

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[3] I do not use any pseudonyms here. There is no mention of negative aspects or characteristics that could compromise the research subjects' images.

Baniwa. The undergraduates initially complained that they had difficulties in writing essays, reviews and monographs. Centred on empowering and participative methodology (Cameron et al., 1992; Freire, 2005), at the beginning my main objectives were: a) understanding the challenges inherent in the process of recontextualizing texts of everyday discourse genres into academic discourse genres; b) enhancing indigenous undergraduate students' access to academic literacy practices together with their metaconsciousness on such a process.

The results pointed to the academic literacies model, and its critical features, as adequate for supporting the success of students from indigenous minority groups in their potential for transforming the university as a whole insofar as they became more conscious of the hegemonic role of academic literacy and collaborated to make visible its constraints. It was during this first phase of research that issues related to orality started to catch my attention as features characteristic of the spontaneous way of writing of indigenous students. I was also attentive to students' relationship to mythical narratives and chants.

What intrigued me during this phase was the fact that we had, on the one hand, the recognition of the importance of indigenous mythical narratives and chants, and the relevance of giving voice to minority groups. On the other hand, however, we paradoxically recognized the importance of motivating indigenous students to engage with academic language. There did not seem to be points of contact between these realities.

We had, in fact, been dealing with academic language in a way that, later, I could understand as instrumental. There was another way of focusing on languages, and it needed to be from an anthropological and poetic point of view. Language is not an instrument, it is not an external object ready for our use, an affirmation that may seem too obvious, but one that makes all the difference when dealing with academic writing, that cannot, simply and instrumentally, be seen as an external genre of discourse students would engage in, expecting them to simultaneously attribute their own voice to such a tool.

As we can read in Henry Meschonnic (1989, p. 321, my translation), "The problem of Poetics is not to criticize such a metaphor [i.e., voice], but to understand its origin, and how the passage is made from the subject-voice and the voice-subject into the writing/scripture of orality".

That is why we progressively attributed more and more importance to Poetics, in its intimate interaction with Ethics and Politics. Poetics, Ethics and Politics are parts of language, inherent in language, and language, in its turn, is inherent in human beings.

As mentioned above, language is not an instrument. Poetics is not something that may happen to language by chance or only to those special persons we recognize as poets: it belongs to language, to its functioning whenever we deal with language in a spontaneous, creative way – moreover, we do not need to be considered poets to deal poetically with language.

Following similar reasoning, Ethics and Politics are not external vectors to language. Even though we can deal poetically with language – as far as we struggle to free ourselves from different forms of social control – whenever we speak we act ethically and politically too, transforming ourselves and simultaneously contributing to social and historical change.

Why orality (and not just voice) and what it means when we refer to writing

In the second phase of research, we started to focus more on aspects inherent in the concept of "orality" as features of orality are normally considered undesirable in academic discourse genres, and they seem to be a hindrance for students coming from indigenous minority groups.

From a poetic point of view, however, "orality" is a characteristic of both verbal and written texts, indicating the presence of subjectivity and the subjectivation of language (Meschonnic, 2011). Orality also indicates the existence of a creative and protagonistic process of language appropriation for students coming from indigenous minority groups. In this sense, erasing orality from texts – as is very often the tendency in academic literacy orientations – implies impeding the emergence of personal subjectivity with genuine expressivity, that is, of indigenous students' presence in language in a protagonistic and creative way.

The importance of such a proposal implies, therefore, a defense of humanity through language – not only for what concerns indigenous students - opening the way for the anthropology of language as a complement to a sociology of language.

It is necessary to establish the difference between voice and orality, as although they imply distinct conceptualizations they may complement each other. There may be a risk of understanding that they are just the same, and when this happens we may lose some important linguistic issues that are at stake. The concept of orality, in fact, can help us better understand the linguistic implications of our general defense of the importance of voice. Also, it can bring up different pedagogical strategies for dealing with academic literacy within a protagonistic and creative mode.

Founded in the Bakhtinian tradition (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 88), voice is understood as "[...] my word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression". Thesen (2013, p. 112), referring to voice, calls attention to:

> [...] how the brought-along interests of students who have developed confidence on the periphery of the world system, or in domains other than the university – the workplace, industry etc.- translate (or not) into academic disciplines and publishing houses, and vice-versa.

She adds that "Students who move across disciplines, or universities, or languages, often sound strange in their writing" and says that "Voice also implies a level of consciousness about what one is doing" (Thesen, 2013, p. 110).

From a linguistic and also from a pedagogical point of view, as I stressed above, we need to understand, however, what exactly - in terms of word choice - should be done in the process of translation, Thesen (2014) presupposes, in order that students' writings would not sound strange. Or, put in other terms: why does certain writing sound strange? When searching for a linguistic and anthropological reason, I wondered whether writing may sound strange exactly when language is treated as an artefact, an external instrument, something resulting from excessive attention to reception, remembering that Thesen (2014) emphasizes that voice is related both to production and reception.

Orality, in its turn, and translation when considered from a poetic point of view, would not take readers into account primarily, but, instead, is something characteristic of poetry.

Conscious of the necessity to deal with orality through more in-depth strategies, and approaching orality from a poetic point of view, I started to suggest the importance of enhancing creative work with creative language (Franchi, 1992). This pointed to the pertinence of the experience with reading, writing and translating poetic texts in the transition between different literacy practices. I also defended the necessity of working with intralinguistic, inter-genre and also literary translation from a poetic and creative perspective whenever a search for critical literacy is at stake. We thus started dealing together with rational and emotional human dimensions (Martins, 2017). The fact is that, as I will point out in more detail, when working with translation from a poetic perspective we deal necessarily with metaconsciousness.

The research I present here brings to light the fact that it is through translation –understood as a creative process inherent in languages - rather than recontextualization procedures during which criticism takes place more profoundly. I also want to emphasize the fact that, though applied to indigenous minority groups in this article, research results confirm the experiential character of translation necessary for all criticism.

Anyway, and just to finish this point, it is important to emphasize that from a Bakhtinian philosophical and sociological perspective, voice has to do with conversational turns and contexts, that is, with taking a turn within a specific context and assuming the words as mine, imbued with my particular expressive style, with my tone. From a linguistic and poetic point of view, orality, on the other hand, has to do with word choice and syntactic orientation, with rhythm and language force. Exercising voice mainly means exercising courage and risk when assuming one's turn; exercising orality involves more profound expertise in terms of linguistic choices and possibilities.

Assuming orality and a poetic approach to language involves a more radical and affirmative position.

Some theoretical principles: translation as the basis of every language

When we mention translation, the first idea that comes to our minds is related to interlinguistic translation, that is, translation from one national language to another. I need to mention, however, another dimension of translation that is related to the intimate functioning of every and all languages and one which is not usually mentioned except in the specialized areas of Linguistics and Translation Studies. From this point of view, translation refers to the functional dimension that underlies languages in general and affords the possibilities of inter- and intralinguistic translations as well. It is, in fact, the poetic dimension of language in general that implies a humanistic, creative, ethical and anthropological form of considering languages in their genuine processual functioning – and not as a tool or a sort of commodity one has to acquire, that is, a sort of discourse that is socially considered as adequate or convenient to such and such an aim and that has become a ready-to-use commodity. In such a context, instead of a citizen the individual has become and has been treated as a consumer.

Of course, this cannot be in principle an inclusive proposal, unless we start thinking about Poetics, and poets, from another point of view. The issue at stake implies envisioning that we are mostly engaged and imprisoned in a kind of thinking and making use of language that rather drives us towards colonization and dehumanization, and I am not only referring to minority groups.

Challenging dominant discourses is, therefore, related to freeing ourselves from a colonized way of making use of language. Freeing ourselves from dichotomies in general: savage versus colonized; written versus oral; oppressors versus oppressed; signifier and signified and so on.

In what concerns language, it is very important to overcome a worn-out way of referring to orality, which in part we inherited from ethnologists: indigenous people would be characterized as primitive and savage users of oral language, whereas civilized people (mainly from the West and the Northern Hemisphere) would be characterized as the most advanced human beings and users of written language. It is worth mentioning a not unimportant detail: users of written language.

It is crucial to think of orality as the force of language that can be manifested in the spoken as well as in the written modality of language, as a kind of thought that can make all the difference when fighting against prejudice, racism and hegemonic discourses in general, and against the hegemony of a special kind of dominant discourse: the academic discourse in its written modality which is averse to the presence of orality. This is because it is averse to the presence of body and emotion in language. It is an absolutely colonizing form of discourse in the way it aims to impede the participation of all of those who do not adhere to its modality, to its structure.

I call attention to the fact that I am not referring to what we call "meaning" or "content" of discourse: I rather refer to its form and its force. To the strength of language that is responsible for its sense, and not only for its meaning.

The word "sense" is particularly meaningful in English (as well as in the Portuguese term "sentido"), because it can also refer to the direction, that is, to the intention a word may carry: every genuine word is intentionally directed to and against someone, because of the force it carries. A force that is not the mere result of what we call – in very general terms – voice; it is the result of poetic, emotional and creative choices involving language, its words, and its possible (or apparently impossible) syntactic orientations.

In the research projects I coordinated I could find in the valorization of indigenous chants and narratives, and in their translation, a way of experiencing language in its more genuine polysemic functioning. The first objective was the translation of the chants and narratives into other languages, but underlying this practice was the conviction of the existence of criticism and metaconsciousness inside translation procedures. This is because by translating poetic texts, one can access a more polysemic form of language and, thus, exercise the human capacity and ability to the use of language, freeing indigenous students from institutionalized ties.

It is to be expected that the ability to deal with language as a freer exercise may construct a freer and more audacious way of dealing with language inside institutions, as is the case of the academy. Knowing this, we can really question many assumptions relating to academic literacy within the academy. Challenging them.

My initial question was thus related to three intuitions I had at the beginning of this work : 1) that features we normally recognize as belonging to orality are often recurrent in texts written by students from indigenous minority groups; b) that accessing academic hegemonic writing cannot be a result of erasing such features, but, instead, must be a result of challenging dominant discourses; c) that translation involves exercising language and must be mostly centred on rhythm, and not on a word-by-word procedure.

In short, I refer here to poetic translation as a free exercise with language, that necessitates:

     (a) searching for the many different possibilities of words in the virtuality of language;

     (b) experiencing the different possibilities of syntactic arrangements;

     (c) comparing different statements and feeling their language force and possible impact;

     (d) understanding and feeling more and more the poetic and creative possibilities of language;

     (e) understanding in what way poetics involves orality, ethics and politics.

The emphasis on translation in the sense I am dealing with here involves, thus, the emphasis on the necessity of exercising language in a freer way than we do normally in the academy.

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Decolonial
Subversions

An exercise of utmost importance when dealing with voice and with challenging dominant discourses.

A first experience: the construction of a Balatiponé didactic book

Luciano Kezo was twenty-two when he developed research resulting in the construction of a didactic book designed to furnish his people with more knowledge about their language and their culture. He was the first Brazilian indigenous undergraduate to receive support from a prominent scientific foundation with a project related to the construction of a didactic book aimed to be used in his *"aldeia"*. He is one of the only speakers of the Balatiponé language which is considered extinct by UNESCO.

Students coming from Kezo's Umutina community speak Portuguese fluently and they know very little about Balatiponé, which is the language of their ancestors. A fact that happens with any language is that it functions according to different activity circles or semiospheres (Lotman, 2005) which implies differences in syntax and vocabulary. Such a fact can be seen in indigenous communities, where the language exercised when narrating mythical stories is different from the language present in sacred chants.

Something similar to this also happens with Portuguese and English, which are expected to be used following different rules according to different contexts. Because of this fact, though being fluent speakers of Portuguese in their communities, when arriving at the university without the specific training necessary in the use of academic writing and speech – indigenous students can fail and be left behind.

The construction of a didactic book to revitalize Balatiponé language among Kezo's people contributed to his self-esteem and, in an indirect way, to his access to academic writing. It is necessary to emphasize that in cases similar to this one it is very important to form a collaborative partnership between the supervisor and the student in which both learn and exchange knowledge. In such cases, the professor needs to assume a horizontal position (Freire, 2005) in the co-construction of knowledge, understanding that both individuals master, each of them, knowledge which is different and equally important: that is why the project that was submitted to the funding institution was in part written by the undergraduate, and in part written by his supervisor. It is a fact that the project would not have been accepted if only the indigenous undergraduate had written it, because of the demand of a rigidly structured academic writing by such institutions, and also because at that phase in his academic literacy trajectory such a specialized form of writing was not within his domain.

That is why, when we want to challenge dominant discourses, we also need to challenge the way discourses circulate in society. We need to open up ways to valorize alternative forms of knowledge which would not be opened if we remained inside the strict rules of the

status quo. It is also a fact, however, as I have been able to conclude after years of collaborative research, that very often I was timider than the circumstances demanded.

I transcribe below a small mythical narrative taken from Kezo's book.

It is worthwhile underlining some aspects: (1) Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese Empire from the year 1500 until our Independence at the beginning of the 19th century, that is the reason why Portuguese became our official language. (2) Kezo is one of the only speakers of the language of his people – he was able to learn Balatipone from his grandfather who, during the last years of his life, lived with his daughter, Kezo's mother. (3) In order to produce his book, Kezo had to rely on the Portuguese version of the myth, which had been orally repeated by his people in the Portuguese language, and then translated into Balatiponé. He intended to produce a didactic book to revitalize the Balatiponé language and make it known to his people. As his supervisor, I did not know a word of Balatiponé, but I was very familiar with methodologies related to the teaching and learning of languages, so that I could advise him on aspects related to contemporary methodologies of language teaching which are based on texts, and not on grammar and words alone.

Kezo is also an excellent drawer, possessing an artistic ability that is not uncommon among young people from indigenous communities.

O'rebutá barepô, urixá puwazo

Men and women originated from a leaf

> Hindondo nokuteynatono, Balatiponé kiawá moto. Unukukwarekwá ayxoré Haypukú amenú mototoré. Unukwarekwá meyukí, atabé ipualo inyazo, atokwá uri he xakaboe to moto he. Ipúxixinikí axipá. Bolotoximana, amameti mataré, jikixo rinimã pwe arikixi, ouá o ́hebutá balatiponé. Haypuku kuku aketo, samati balatiponé he amatara ouá ipoxixiniki há xipá.

> [At a distant time, there were no people on Earth, only a big man walked, his name was Haypukú, he was very sad, then he decided to pick some fruit and leaves from the trees, he gathered many of them and left them there. Then he went home. At night, he could hear people chatting. Feeling curious, he went out and saw that people were born from the things he had gathered. Haypukú was very glad and he invited them to his home].

Drawing 1: Men and women originated from a leaf [Drawer: Kezo, a twenty-two-year-old undergraduate from Umutina-Balatiponé community]. O'rebutá=origin   Barepô=man   Puwazo=leaf   urixá=woman Nokuteynatono=distant   Moto=Earth

A second experience: supervising the coursework of a Xavante undergraduate

I have had many different experiences as a professor and supervisor dealing with undergraduate and graduate indigenous students. One of them, a Xavante student, was very remarkable. In this case, what happened was very different from my experience with Kezo, because Muniz - who was forty-six - and all the community he came from could speak the Xavante language very well. On the other hand, he had more difficulty than Kezo dealing with Portuguese in any academic discourse genre. Such a difference points to the complex character of Brazilian indigenous people. There are a few isolated communities that, up to the present time, have avoided contact with non-indigenous society. Yet there are some people, like Muniz, who are very much immersed in their communities and at the same time also search for contact with non-indigenous people and who see access to universities, for instance, as something they can benefit from. As a consequence there are many who have lost contact with their ancestral languages. Mainly since Brazil's most recent Constitution (1988), indigenous communities have struggled to recover languages and the many other cultural traits they lost – very often brutally and violently due to the actions of colonizers.

First, Muniz told me orally many Xavante mythical narratives. He said that the narratives had never been written down. As they were long narratives, and as I sometimes had difficulty concentrating and listening to the stories without losing the many details they had, I asked him if we could conduct some interviews which I would record. After the interviews, I could understand that the experience of having his speech recorded was important for his self-esteem. He felt he was important for our society.

I then asked him to write the stories down which he did very enthusiastically. I was impressed with the amount he wrote week by week, so that we were already constructing an important part of his academic work. The volume and enthusiasm for his research did not mean, however, that he would be able to write academically. The problem resided in the theoretical chapter. As it was not a scientific research bid – as with Kezo – I could not write parts for him. It was his final graduation work.

I coordinated the LEETRA Research Group, in which Muniz and also João Paulo – a descendant of the Guarani people – participated, and João Paulo could give some support to Muniz who, as stated earlier, was fluent in Portuguese but had some challenges with academic discourse. João Paulo was able to show Muniz important terms and expressions that needed to be added to his text, as Muniz had mastery of his knowledge, but did not know some specialist terms appropriate to the academy, such as "collaborative research", or "field notes".

It is very common among indigenous students to make specific and emotional references to themselves in a way that is more typical of the narrative genres and that would be acceptable as literary chronicles in the so-called civilized world. Chronicles, and not reports, reviews or dissertations.

Anyway, because the Federal University of São Carlos works with special quotas for indigenous students, and because we belong to the Centre of Human Sciences – which is usually more tolerant and receptive to linguistic diversity than other academic centres - we were able to compose a differentiated assessment board and have Muniz's work approved even when it was structured in a form that is not commonly considered academic. It had a first chapter with a biographical characteristic, in which he described his people and explained his previous experiences as an Iprédu in his community; a second one where he reproduced in Portuguese nine myths of his people with illustrations drawn by himself; and a third chapter where he reported some collaborative fieldwork he developed when he went to a public school near our university and explained to six-year-old children certain aspects of his culture. While at the public school, he also produced some drawings on the classroom board and encouraged the children to draw. All of these fieldwork activities developed at the school were part of his research.

In the introduction to his work, he first explained the role of the Iprédu in his community: "In the community I live, I have the social role of Iprédu. The social role of Iprédu is of the observer of the social knowledges of my culture" (Muniz, 2019, my translation). Then he explains the importance of drawings and mentions visible and invisible dimensions to

which the drawings refer– in a way that may seem strange to those who have not been used to intercultural dialogues and whose beliefs are ethnocentrically and rationally centred.

The fact is that when supervising students like Muniz we come into contact with a vast world and worldview with many different knowledges in relation to which the dominant academic discourses reveal all their failure, their insufficiency, their smallness. Unless one cannot accept – because of prejudice, racism, ethnocentrism – that other forms of knowledge exist, in which a vast invisible world is seriously taken into account.

That is also why certain rules of academic literacy appear in their mediocrity, persist in their real function, and forming a racist barrier to impede many other knowledges to circulate.

I take the opportunity to observe that my text corrector found it strange and corrected the term "knowledges" suggesting I should write "bits of knowledge" or "pieces of knowledge". I resisted, however, because for Muniz – and also for us who want to learn more and more with many different peoples and communities – there is not only one knowledge composed of its different pieces. There are, in fact, many different knowledges and we can learn, change and grow humanistically when we recognize and listen to them, and accept that there is much to be known.

I transcribe below an excerpt of a mythological narrative Muniz first told me in Portuguese, and afterwards very proudly wrote down and illustrated. I asked him to send me the Xavante version especially for this publication:

UDZO (Fire)

Durei hã, a Uwe nõri, te re tsaihuri,wede nhiwahuna, dure wede póre, emariwa marî ãna ni´waima rotsarada tãma waihu u õwa, ni´wa marî te manhãrî waihuu õwa. Tahaparimhã Wahu ahöna te tsi utõrîmono, tahawaptsi ma óto podo itsitsihã 'UDZO' (FOGO/fire). Îmorirada udzohã are 'HU u nhib udzo' era (FOGO da Onça humana/fire of the human jaguar) Darada itsihu rehã, udzohã a ôiwede, emariwa a õiwede do ötsu u õwa, udzo date tiwi öri ore te 'TINHIHUDU' (NETO/grandson) ma roti.

Îwapripetse îwatsu u tõ, ni´waimahã ni´wa, Tete atsadanhãrî wamhã, niha aima re inhimbdzebre mono nahã, ãnê tedza îwatsu u, Êtêpo waróna.

[In the old days, they fed on rotten logs and mushrooms, because the people did not understand the experience to produce something interesting. After years passed, they began to discover how to use fire. The first fire that arose was the human jaguar: people had grandchildren, the fire was the jatobá trunk because the jatobá trunk takes time to burn out. Before stealing the fire, he said to his grandchildren:

Listen to me, don't tell anyone, if people ask you how I'm roasting meat, you say like this: It was the hot stone.]
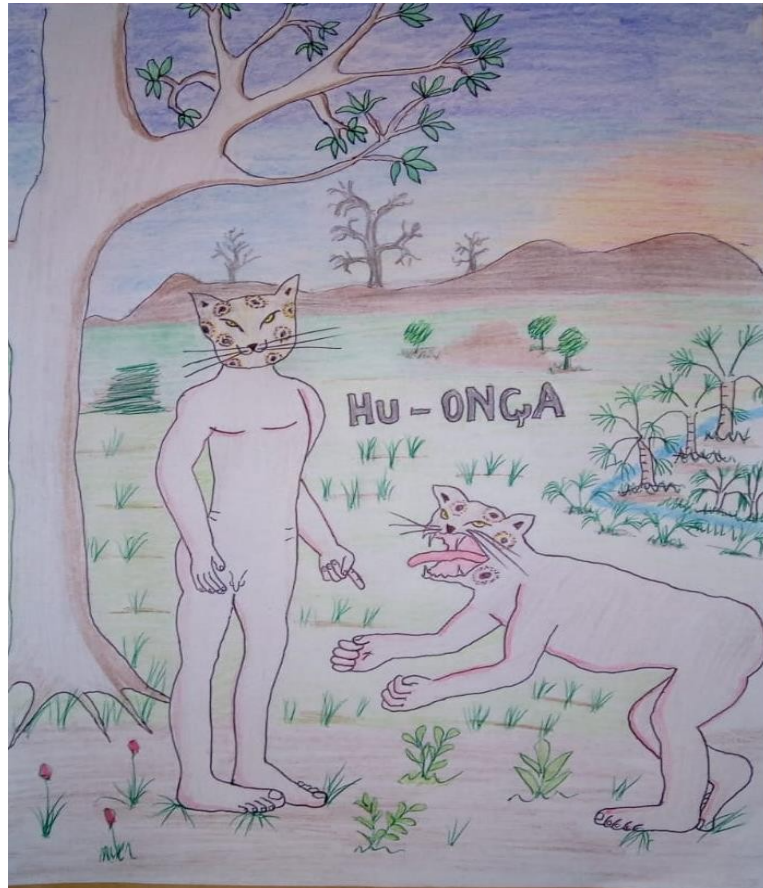
Drawing 2: The first fire that existed was a human jaguar [Drawer: Muniz, a forty-six- year-old Xavante undergraduate]

A third experience: supervising a descendant of the Guarani people

João Paulo Ribeiro does not identify as an indigenous person though he often reports he is a descendant of the Guarani people. As a consequence and different from the two cases mentioned before, he did not benefit from quotas in order to enter the university. He had a Masters' degree related to the translation of the Brazilian Novel "Vidas Secas"[Barren Lives] into Nheengatu language. Nheengatu is an indigenous "língua franca", that is, an indigenous language derived from Tupi that was hegemonic in Brazil when the European colonizers arrived and that is used nowadays mainly in Amazonia by indigenous people belonging to different ethnicities. When he did his Master's degree - and as he frequently made reference to his Guarani grandmother - I advised him that he could develop a PhD Project related to Guarani, and not to Nheengatu, though in fact, he knew more about Nheengatu than about Guarani.

In support, I had accompanied a course Ribeiro offered on Nheengatu language so that I knew something about the general functioning of Nheengatu, its lexicon and its grammar.

But I did not know Guarani. João Paulo knew some Guarani vocabulary and used to say that its grammar was similar to that of Nheengatu language.

The Guarani people have a founding chant called "Ayvu Rapyta" which was compiled by Paraguayan anthropologist León Cadogan who, in 1959, first published a bilingual written version in Guarani/Spanish. The chant narrates the founding of the human language by the ancestor Ñamandu. As a supervisor, I called Ribeiro's attention to the literary or poetic dimension of indigenous chants, a fact that was not assimilated in Cadogan's translation into Spanish. As an anthropologist, Cadogan had a form of reading and translating very much attached to interpretation, to Hermeneutics, which may be partially adequate for anthropological purposes, but which implies the loss of the poetic aspect. From Venuti's perspective, we can say that Cadogan made use of a domestication procedure in his translation of the Guarani chant.

In this sense, as happened in the two other cases I mentioned, with Ribeiro a partnership needed to be constructed in which he dominated more and more through the Guarani language and its specificities while I shaped his use of poetic language – something for which he quickly manifested much ability.

As a matter of fact, Ribeiro had a very free way of speaking the Portuguese language which was connected to a free way of thinking – and which often provoked his colleagues to ask him for explanations. They really felt Ribeiro thought deeply about many different subjects, a fact that called their attention but simultaneously left them in the need of further clarification.

In a certain sense, supervising him involved more subtleties than supervising Kezo or Muniz. Up to a certain point, a conventional assessment board could understand and accept his form of writing without restrictions. There was, however, a certain hybridity, as at the same time as he was able to furnish all the references that are common in academic writing he constructed phrases in an unconventional way for academic taste.

It is worth mentioning that before coming to São Carlos and starting his Masters at the Federal University, he worked as a postman in São Paulo – the greatest metropolis of South America - and had already completed a diploma at the University of São Paulo. He lived for some time in a community on the periphery of São Paulo and was familiar with rap music and rhythm. This fact deserves mention because a characteristic of rap music is its boldness, and I became aware of a certain boldness in Ribeiro's work. He resisted a servile status at the university, in the sense that he was very proud of his origins and his ancestry, so much so that he would not give up his ancestry in favour of academic discourse.

I present below an excerpt of the student's translation of the first chapter of the Guarani chant "Ayvu Rapyta", 'Maino i reko ypy kue', and below that the Portuguese translation 'Beija-Flor sendo' I also propose here a possibility for the translation of the Portuguese version into English, 'Hummingbird being', following Ribeiro's literary proposal:

Maino i reko ypy kue

Ñande Ru Pa-pa Tenonde

guete rã ombo-jera

pytũ yma gui.

Yvára pypyte

apyka apu'a i,

pytũ yma mbyte

re oguero-jera.

Beija-Flor sendo

Nande Ru último pai-

principia teu corpo

embogerá

de há muito tempo noite.

Yvára, entre o pé

redonduzindo assento

entre há muito tempo

noite guerogerá.

Hummingbird being

Nande Ru last father-

beginning your body will

embogera

from long ago night.

Yvára, enter the foot

retracting seat

enter long ago night guerogerá]

It is noticeable that Ribeiro inserted some Guarani words in his Portuguese translation ('ombo- gerá", "oguero-gerá"), giving the Portuguese language creole features; sometimes he followed Guarani syntax in his translation into Portuguese; he also created new words,

like "pai-principia"/father-beginning. Anyway, the fact is that it is mainly contemporary poetry that permits such obvious deviations from standardised forms of the language: but academic literacy is not as flexible.

Conclusions:

A very important issue relates to the fact that many Brazilian indigenous people appreciate and cultivate the traits of confidence and boldness present in their culture and inherited from their ancestors. Another aspect is their ease and skill for the creolization of language. Though characterized as 'violent' and 'savage' by the conquerors, from their own point of view it was the indigenous people who had to pacify the whites. The many conversations I had with Kezo and Muniz always transmitted the impression of friendly people, so that the "indeterminate trajectories" they eventually traced or their tactics always seemed rather spontaneous than planned in advance and with very defined purposes.

In the case of Ribeiro, however, who grew up in the outskirts of São Paulo – and not in an "aldeia", and though he was also a very peaceful person, it seemed he was also more strategic and more aware of the traps, tricks and the minefield that he would have to cross on entering the university. A professor of the assessment board asked him the question, if it was on purpose that he constructed a hybrid text, but he answered negatively. I wonder if hybridity was part of his language and his thought, but above all, he was not shy or ashamed of his social position.

The three indigenous students managed to succeed in the academy without giving up orality as the force that can only persist in our language and our thoughts when we do not replace one language in all of its force with another that will always function as a foreign language, that is, with a language that would never be ours.

Once again, it is necessary to emphasize that I am referring to rhythmic and lexical-syntactic aspects of language, that is, to what we call discourse in the sense of the way phrases are structured and flow, and not necessarily to their ideological components. Such a choice means that our attention is not so much centred on what is said, but rather on how things are said. Challenging dominant discourses from this point of view implies structuring language in a creative and freer way, forming phrases that are not constructed with molds and preestablished patterns.

Certainly, the academic researcher runs a series of risks when performing language in a way that is not usually accepted in the academic circuit, and that is counter to the genres produced at universities (reports, monographs, reviews, thesis) and the papers sent to specialized journals. That is why I understand we must maintain as far as we can the most spontaneous, fluent and oral language if we feel it is our genuine language, and make adaptations here and there to get through the narrow gate of the academy. This is something Ribeiro did effectively.

I defend, thus, that it is mainly the structure of a language that may or may not work as a prison – and not its ideological components per se.

Two final remarks must be presented:

1) Though the main hindrances for indigenous graduates and undergraduates were, as I have remarked, related to academic writing, the excerpts I presented above belong to their work with the translation of mythical narratives and chants, and not to the theoretical part of their academic production. This occurred since I wanted to show to readers the richness of their knowledge and their cultural abilities, which can only benefit the academy if we really practice an interculturally tolerant and plurilingual dialogue. Furthermore, I believe, as a linguist, that we need to mobilize and unleash the skills related to language with an agile methodology free of impediments, and not imposing a model of language that must be followed. This approach can cause the stigma and more difficulties of expression. Apart from the fact that it involves an unethical posture.

2) When referring to the hindrances present in the academy, I do not intend to accuse professors and editors of being insensitive, rude or cruel. They do the work they understand they should do – and of course, they may change their position with time.

In this sense, I point out that the conventional academic tendency towards the erasure of orality may be seen as a form of control, that is, a form of shaping literacy practices in a negative and pernicious way, thus preventing subjects from being transformed and transforming society. I thus defend that multilingualism per se is not a guarantee for decolonial praxis in Higher Education, as we can also conclude with Ritchie's words, in this volume, when she affirms that "translanguaging is insufficient on its own as decolonial pedagogy" (p.57). The main issue is not related only to the presence of a variety of languages at the university. The issue is also related to the various discourse genres and discourse practices they normally pertain to, for instance, the genres of religious chants and mythological narratives. Languages, in general, cannot be reduced to vocabulary and grammar, but must be seen, considered and valued inside the genuine processes of which they are part.

After all, only then, feeling valued and recognized in our languages and our cultures, can any of us traverse other territories in ways that transports and translates into other languages and discourse genres, drawing on the rhythm and force which announces, positively, our genuine presence.

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