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ELF *feito no Brasil*: expanding theoretical notions, reframing
educational policies

Abstract

ELF studies have long established itself as a solid field of inquiry much as a response to the pioneering work of scholars such as Jenkins (2000; 2007; 2009; 2015) and Seidlhofer (2001; 2005; 2011). Its ripple effect in the last decades is made present mainly among European scholars who have highly contributed to the consolidation of the area. By embracing the decolonial notion of epistemic pluralism (Sousa Santos, 2007; 2018), this paper wishes to turn knowledge production on ELF of the global South visible. In doing so, we present a brief state-of-the-art on recent ELF research in Brazil, followed by an analysis on how such theoretical framework echoes in the recently launched Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC) (Brasil 2017). As a country deeply forged under colonialism, coloniality traces are still strongly present in Brazil. By departing from decolonial studies (Castro Gómez 2007; Quijano 2007; Mignolo 2000; 2007; 2009a; 2009b; Walsh 2018), the expression *ELF feito no Brasil* (Duboc 2019) attempts to stress the expanding notion of ELF by contemporary Brazilian scholars who have put greater emphasis on the critical and political nature of English. Along with the increase in ELF studies in Brazil comes the need to analyze the place of ELF within the aforementioned BNCC, in particular, the very epistemological conflict that emerges from a standardized, top-down curriculum framed by a more fluid notion of language (Duboc 2019). In line with Bakhtinian thought, which acknowledges the dialogical and heteroglot nature of language, this paper advocates in favor of such epistemological conflicts, be them within the ELF research field or in ELF-based educational policies.

Keywords: ELF; *ELF feito no Brasil*; Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum; Decoloniality; Epistemologies of the South.

1. Introduction

‘We’d rather have the iceberg than the ship
although it meant the end of travel.
Será a América o iceberg do mundo?
Partimos marcha ao oeste acelerando o Titanic
Are you aware an iceberg takes repose with
you, and when it wakes may pasture on your
snow?
Quem sobreviverá ao choque com essa
montanha de gelo América?
Icebergs behoove the soul.’
“*Iceberg Bishop*” by Domingos Guimaraens
(2008)¹

Icerbergs and ships. Americas, the west, and the *Titanic*. Shock and the soul. Ah, the soul! Whose souls? Brazilian poet Guimaraens’ painstaking and pungent verses are worth to become the epigraph of this paper as it somehow echoes our very purposes, that is to say, the urgent need to understand English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) under decolonial lenses in the exercise of acknowledgement of a growing and solid knowledge production on the topic in the so-called global South, the place where we the authors send our voices from.

The poem that opens up the text is representative of a recent translanguaging poetry movement among the youngest generation of Brazilian post-globalization and post-dictatorship writers whose Portuguese mingles gently – or sometimes fiercely – with English. As Vilela (2012) explains, more than simply attesting the high influence of television, movie, and music industry in which English has long played the role of a lingua franca, the newly *linguaging* experiences among this new generation actually retrieves and reframes two important Brazilian cultural movements: the avant-garde modernist period in the early years of the 20th century and the *Tropicalia* in the late 1960s. While the former was marked by the avoidance of essentialisms and the welcoming of cultural mix and hybridity in the so-called “anthropophagic literature”, the latter was a successful attempt to create radical, aesthetic experiences out of Brazilian indigenous elements. The common ground between both cultural movements is their affirmative nature (rather than a defensive posture) in relation to intercultural

¹ Brazilian poet, writer, musician, and composer.

encounters under an ontological and epistemological orientation that seems in tune with the more recent debate on decoloniality (Mignolo and Escobar 2010). And it is exactly from such affirmative nature that a few lessons might be learned by those involved with ELF research in different parts of the world.

Guimaraens' poetry reframes American writer Elizabeth Bishop's² original verses by transforming her *Imaginary Iceberg* into a very real America. By wondering *Será a América o iceberg do mundo?* amid diachronically references ranging from the expeditions to the West in colonial times to the tragic British RMS Titanic, we might think of this New World called America in its continental size and all its richness being transformed into an end of those travels – and those ends sadly and cruelly did justify those means in the perspective of the colonizer – as it became highly disputed among former European nation-states, in particular, the titanic British Empire. In the last verses lies the poignantly reminder of the imminent shock between soulless America-iceberg and the one on the ship, willing to disembark to either assimilate, expel, or exterminate.

Along with this interpretation, which sees the iceberg as the American continent, we would like to share Vilela's interesting viewpoint as she claims that Guimaraens' last verses turn Bishop herself into the haunting iceberg. In other words, the young and prominent Brazilian poet abdicates his historical condition of subalternization and speaks back to the well-known American poet. As a matter of fact, Vilela's interpretation gains momentum when one considers that Bishop lived in Brazil for a decade and half, and, at a certain point in her life, seemed to have supported the Brazilian military dictatorship in the 1960s. Not for nothing, has controversy broken out as Bishop was chosen to be the honored author of the 2020 FLIP (*Festa Literária Internacional de Paraty*), the most important Brazilian literary festival. In these ultra-rightist days in Brazil, the timing for this could not be worse. *Icebergs do behoove a soul.*

By starting with contemporary Brazilian translanguaging poetry followed by slightly long comments of interpretive nature, the reader might question about the connections to be made between icebergs and ELF. In our viewpoint, the hermeneutics of our epigraph was made necessary as words

² Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979), 1956 *Pulitzer Prize* for Poetry, upon receiving a substantial traveling fellowship from Bryn Mawr College in 1951, set off to circumnavigate South America by boat, arriving in Brazil in November of that year. For what she experienced in the tropics, an expected two-week stay was turned into 15 years living in the country.

never exist in a vacuum. In this respect, Bakhtin (1981[1975], 292) claims that “discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse [*napravlenost*] toward the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life.”

Regardless of any interpretive differences, Guimaraens’s poem is rich and full of potential for us, ELF researchers and practitioners, to critically question the icebergs within the field. Or, is it the ship that needs to be questioned? Metaphors apart, this paper wants to address some concerns from the perspective of decolonial studies. ELF studies have long established itself as a solid field of inquiry much as a response to the pioneering work of scholars such as Jenkins (2000; 2007; 2009) and Seidllhofer (2001; 2005; 2011). Its ripple effects in the last decades are made present mainly among European scholars who have highly and consistently contributed to the expansion and consolidation of the area. By embracing the decolonial notion of epistemic pluralism or the co-presence of different and competing epistemologies (Sousa Santos 2007; 2018), this paper, in a nutshell, wishes to turn knowledge production on ELF of the global South visible. As decoloniality denies essentialist views of culture, language, and knowledge by embracing heterogeneity, fluidity, hibridity – *an iceberg takes repose with you, and when it wakes may pasture on your snow* – it provides us with a set of lessons that might help us answer Guimaraens’ sharp question - *Quem sobreviverá ao choque com essa montanha de gelo América?*

As this article was collaboratively conceived and written by two Brazilian scholars, our decolonial lenses will be zooming in and out the ELF research carried out in Brazil along with a brief analysis on the place of ELF in recent public educational policies. With respect to ELF research, as coloniality traces are still strongly present in Brazil, the expression *ELF feito no Brasil* (Duboc 2019) attempts to stress the expanding notion of ELF by contemporary Brazilian scholars who have put greater emphasis on the critical and political nature of English and the process of learning and teaching the language in the Brazilian context. Concerning the analysis of educational policies, this paper seeks to analyze the place of ELF within the recently approved Brazilian Common Core Curriculum³ (Brasil 2017, henceforth BNCC), in particular, the very epistemological conflict that emerges from a standardized, top-down curriculum framed by a more fluid notion of language (Duboc 2019). In line

³ In Portuguese: *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC).

with Bakhtinian thought, which acknowledges the dialogical and heteroglot nature of language, the paper concludes by advocating in favor of such epistemological conflicts, be them within the ELF research field or in ELF-based educational policies.

2. ELF studies in need of decoloniality

As a society deeply forged under colonialism, coloniality⁴ traces are still strongly present in Brazilian language policies and practices, be them related to Portuguese, the main official language in the country, or to the field of foreign language teaching, in particular, English. As Espírito Santo and Santos (2018) explain, Brazilian language policies have historically contributed to the invention of a monolingual ideology that served the purposes of the colonial project, that is, the erasure of indigenous languages and the establishment of Portuguese as the national language under the premise “one language-one nation-one culture” as pre-condition for the creation of a supposedly homogenous nation-State. As literature has extensively shown (Blommaert 2010; Canagarajah 2017; Makoni and Pennycook 2007, to name a few), what lies behind the myth of monolingualism is a pernicious understanding of language, culture, and identity still ingrained in aspirations for purity, stability, and standardization that neglects the very complex, hybrid, and fluid nature of languages in meaning-making processes.

By addressing Sociolinguistics under more real-life, ethnographic lenses, Blommaert (2010) asserts that if once Sociolinguistics used to view code-switching as basically the study of “abnormal” forms of language, contemporary language studies from the late 1990s on have contributed to a paradigm shift in which “language had to be looked at not from an idea of purity and closeness but from an idea of impurity, if you wish, of blending, mixing dynamics, change, and so forth, as a default while the pure and standardized variety was assumed as an exceptional one” (Duboc and Fortes 2019, 8). In line with Blommaert (2010), Canagarajah (2017) has highly contributed to the discussion by advocating in favor of translingual practices that deny the monolingual myth. The call brought by these authors relates, at a broad sense, to a necessary disinvention of the so-called “named languages” (Makoni and Pennycook 2007).

⁴ According to Maldonado-Torres (2007, 243), “coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism. [...] Coloniality survives colonialism.” The concept emerged “not in the academia, but in the public sphere, in the field in which dependency theory, theology of liberation, and philosophy of liberation were coming, that is, social thought in Latin America” (Mignolo in interview to López-Calvo 2014, 177).

The very constructs with which contemporary language studies have wrestled – that is, purity, stability, and standardization - have long marked the EFL teaching in Brazil. Since the Imperial times (1822-1889), English classes in the early years of Brazilian Higher Education programs used to be in the hands of native speakers of English. Not any native speaker, but only those coming from England, whose pure and standard Received Pronunciation (RP) made any pedagogical expertise unnecessary. In our viewpoint, the movement was the starting point of a prejudicial native-speakerism ideology in subsequent ELT programs in Brazil (Campos 2019) which still sadly echoes in today’s discourses whenever one finds a Brazilian English language user willing to “sound like a native” in her/his constant attempts to try her/his tongue in the process of learning this “*l/anguish, anguish, a foreign anguish is english.*”⁵

Indeed, organization moves such as the “Statement on Nonnative Speakers of English and Hiring Practices” (TESOL 1992 as cited in Kumaravadivelu 2016) as well as the “Position Statement Against Discrimination of Nonnative Speakers of English in the Field of TESOL” (TESOL 2006 as cited in Kumaravadivelu 2016) did open a fruitful anti-imperialist discussion in attempts to unveil the damage behind Western-centered research development, curriculum design, and textbook industry. Nonetheless, as Kumaravadivelu (2016) states, such moves do not seem to suffice as they until today depart from a privileged locus which still keeps imperialisms of all kinds intact.

Influenced by decolonial studies, the author (Ibid.: 80-81) insists that the solution to dismantle hegemonic power has to come from the subalternized⁶ people themselves. Such endeavor lies in the exercise of jettisoning any traces of self-marginalization, followed by an awakening of our agency:

⁵ Taken from the famous poem *She Tries Her Tongue – Her Silence Softly Breaks* written by Tobago-born poet Marlene Norbese Philip. The book of the same title was originally published in Cuba as Philip won the prestigious “Casa de las Americas” prize for the manuscript version of the work in 1988. It was first published in North America in 1989.

⁶ We opt for the use of the term “subalternized” in place of “subaltern” as while the former stresses the passive role of those marginalized peoples in a deliberate subalternization process by the dominant countries, the latter might lead to a naturalization of such a condition.

In order to begin to effect this rupture, the subaltern community has to unfreeze and activate its latent agentive capacity, and strive to derive a set of concerted, coordinated, and collective actions based not on the logic of coloniality but on a *grammar of decoloniality*. [...] A grammar of decoloniality, if it is to be useful and useable, has to be formulated and implemented by local players who are knowledgeable about, and sensitive to, local conditions.

Local action. Here is the greatest tenet of decoloniality which aims at going beyond the rhetoric and defeating the supposedly inefficiency in a type of academic research that still keeps itself comfortably cloistered in strictly discursive, theory-based discussions. This is exactly from where we wish to depart in the exercise of thinking and doing ELF research otherwise.

Broadly speaking, decoloniality is a recent concept that emerged from an intellectual movement among Latin American scholars in the 1990's that came to be known as the Modernity/Coloniality School. Whereas postcolonial studies arise from diasporic movements from the Middle East and Asian scholars and aimed at problematizing subaltern lives as cultural products from the 19th and 20th centuries, decolonial studies is geographically located in Latin America and target earlier European incursions back in the 15th century, with a clear emphasis on the dark side of modernity/colonialism against indigenous and African-enslaved peoples.

According to Colombian philosopher Castro-Gómez (2007), Modern Europe proudly placed itself as the starting point with regards to civilizing processes and knowledge production, thus his reference to it as the “zero point hubris”. By taking itself as the knower and the observer of the world, Modern Europe assumed, with pride, an epistemic zero point position whose “unquestionable” sovereignty established its own norms and values, generating an abyssal line (Sousa Santos 2007) which has divided the world into two parts: the civilized, the superior, the literate, the white, and the human on one side; the barbarian, the inferior, the illiterate, the black, the subhuman on the other side. This goes hand in hand with what Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2007, 95) explains: “la colonialidad/modernidad eurocéntrica es una concepción de humanidad, según la cual la población del mundo se diferencia en inferiores y superiores, irracionales y racionales, primitivos y civilizados, tradicionales y modernos.”⁷

⁷ Eurocentric coloniality/modernity is a conception of humanity according to which the peoples of the world are divided into inferior and superior, irrational and rational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern.

The intrinsic relationship between modernity and coloniality is explained as the Modern project aimed at civilization, progress, and development would certainly succumb without the notion of “colonial difference”. In the words of Argentinian semiotician Mignolo (2009b, 109), “if coloniality is engendered by modernity, there cannot be modernity without coloniality; and there would be no coloniality without modernity. To end coloniality it is necessary to end the fictions of modernity.”

Under this prism, decoloniality, then, seeks to problematize the still-ingrained epistemes, constructs, and imaginaries which, despite the official and legal end of colonialism, still persist in the form of three types of coloniality, that is to say, coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being, synthesized by Puerto Rican philosopher Maldonado-Torres (2007, 130) as follows:

If the coloniality of power refers to the interrelation between modern forms of exploitation and domination, and the coloniality of knowledge has to do with the role of epistemology and its influence of knowledge production in the reproduction of colonial thought regimes, the coloniality of being refers, then, to the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language⁸.

Decoloniality, thus, implies a critical and genealogical exercise that acknowledges the material, economic influences – not only cultural ones as postcolonial, cultural studies would have wanted – in the construction of those colonial narratives. In doing so, decoloniality seeks to unveil the dark side of modernity/coloniality and, simultaneously, turn “invisible knowledge production” visible. In Sousa Santos’s terms (2007), this would consequently lead to the acknowledgement of a co-presence of epistemologies that commits itself to the necessary cognitive justice against the epistemicide historically engendered by Modern Europe.

One might wonder which procedural mechanisms are made available in decolonial studies. Apart from a recipe-like manifesto and attempting to pay justice to the importance of praxis, decolonial scholars have addressed the following orientations if one wishes to embrace a decolonial project: i) fostering epistemic disobedience and de-linking, that is, the exercise of

⁸ From the original “si la colonialidad del poder se refiere a la interrelación entre formas modernas de explotación y dominación, y la colonialidad del saber tiene que ver con el rol de la epistemología y las tareas generales de la producción del conocimiento en la reproducción de regímenes de pensamiento coloniales, la colonialidad del ser se refiere, entonces, a la experiencia vivida de la colonización y su impacto en el lenguaje.”

making noise in the well-established Western modes of knowing towards our detachment from the ties of Western-based ideas; ii) thinking and doing otherwise, that is, developing constant and vigilant analysis of what is known and, mainly, who knows in attempts to change not only the content of the conversation but also and the terms of the conversation; iii) decolonizing between the cracks: brought by Ecuador-based intellectual Catherine Walsh (2018), the praxis of crack or fissure as a strategy to the decolonial project refers to disobeying, interrupting, and counter acting in ways to push the limits of laws and regulations; iv) *andar preguntando*: inspired by Mexican Maya-people Tojolabal cosmology, Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel (Montoya and Busso 2007) proposes the motto “keep questioning” in place of “keep preaching” as pre-condition towards a genuine horizontal dialogue in which multiple perspectives are ethically acknowledged.

In view of these four orientations, we ponder: What lessons can be learned by ELF scholars in their encounter with decolonial thinking? How might we address ELF issues in the light of such ideas?

As a way to be consistent with the last orientation, which advocates in favor of questions rather than answers, we would like to share some concerns in the form of questions that somehow resonate the three other orientations which might serve as the starting point for researchers who wish to approach ELF issues under decolonial lenses: i) What is known in relation to ELF studies being recently made outside mainstream European academic sites? ii) To what extent do ELF scholars from different parts around the world read each other? iii) To what extent do mainstream European ELF researchers involve themselves in truly horizontal and collaborative research work as a way to tackle the problem of the zero point hubris? iv) How much of ELF’s main literature circulating in the academic realm is representative of multiple and dissent voices ranging different loci of enunciation? v) Are global south ELF scholars aware of the colonial matrix of power in knowledge production? If so, to what extent do they truly wish to epistemically and politically de-link? vi) How many ELF scholars under the still-ingrained label “non-native speakers of English” have already had their English corrected in peer reviewing processes in accordance to standard English? vii) Do global south ELF researchers truly acknowledge the value of the cracks or fissures in attempting to dismantle gatekeeping mechanisms and knowledge control in mainstream academic centers and publishing houses? viii) How many times have ELF conferences been held in countries other than those located in

Europe?⁹ How many global south ELF scholars have been invited to be keynote speakers in ELF conferences?; ix) To what extent are global south ELF researchers truly committed to disposing of their historical self-marginalization with regards to their own command of English and research products? x) To what extent are global south ELF researchers engaged in disobeying, disrupting, and transforming the status of ELF research and practice?

Those are some of the questions as a result of our encounter with decolonial studies. The theoretical rupture with long-established ontological and epistemological assumptions is followed by an urgent call for action as current ELF research scope and range seem to be stretching far beyond mainstream European boundaries. The following section aims at describing what has been called “*ELF feito no Brasil*” (Duboc 2019) as a way to voice our own way to reframe ELF studies with two great inspiring concepts: the decolonial project and the critical pedagogy.

3. “*ELF feito no Brasil*”: decolonizing ELF research in Freire’s homeland

As for Expanding Circle countries from the global South where there has been an increasing interest and development in ELF research, Brazil certainly occupies a leading position. Due to its relevant position in the world economy, Brazil’s development has been strongly tied to global flows with English playing an important role in the country’s political and strategic goals (Gimenez, El Kadri and Calvo 2018a).

At an earlier stage, the diffusion of ELF studies in Brazil followed the same path as in other parts of the world, with the work of the field’s ‘founding mothers,’ Jenkins and Seidlhofer, reverberating findings, developments and reflections from what Jenkins (2015) came to label as Phases 1 (documentation, codification, form, etc.) and 2 (ELF users, diversity, fluidity, variability, ELF as social practice, etc.).

Broadly speaking, ELF was conceived of as a contact language used among non-mother tongue speakers (Jenkins, 2000) – a language with no native speakers, so to speak (Seidlhofer, 2001, 2005), and has undergone distinct evolutionary phases over the last decades. As mentioned above,

⁹ In this respect, it is worth to stress that the only ELF Conference held in South America was the one organized in Medellín, Colombia, at the Universidad de Antioquia, in July, 2019.

Jenkins (2015) argues that from a form-oriented phase aimed at documentation, codification, and corpus-compilation back in the 1980s, ELF research moved towards a function-oriented phase marked by concerns with communities of practice and variability in the early 2000s. With that in mind, Jenkins (2015) then claims for further reconceptualizations which could lead to a third ELF phase *vis-à-vis* the growing demands in contemporary multilingual societies.

As part of the inherent dynamics of any scientific area, ELF has gone through a great deal of criticism, which, in many ways, has contributed to its conceptual evolution. One of the most pungent criticisms was O'Regan's (2014) claim concerning the supposedly reification of a homogenous ELF and the insistence on a still highly descriptive way of doing research.

In Brazil, ELF has also gotten its share of criticism. On these lands, and in line with O'Regan's argument, possibly due to a predominant EFL orientation in the ubiquitous ELT business, ELF was initially frowned upon by some Brazilian researchers and practitioners, as it had been conceived as a normative and homogenizing project (Duboc 2019). An example of this position comes, for instance, from Tagata (2017) who, echoing the restricted connotation of the term 'lingua franca', understood ELF as a communicative 'free trade' zone where neutral and de-cultured interactions take place in a sort of decaffeinated language (Siqueira 2018a).

Despite the conceptual and other controversies, especially related to ELF implications to the general ELT classroom and English teacher education, Brazilian scholars began to bring to surface ELF-oriented research work anchored in premises related to the phenomenon such as: ELF is a function of the English language, not a variety, ELF questions and challenges NS hegemonic norms, it legitimizes variation, it belongs to all those who use it in daily interactions, it is not inextricably linked to a national culture, it encompasses both native and non-native users from the most diverse linguacultural backgrounds.

Based on this, we can say that a more systematic Brazilian academic production in the area began to gain ground as of the year of 2005, although alternative terms like English as an International Language (EIL), English as a Global Language (EGL), World Englishes (WE) or English as a Multinational Language (EML) other than ELF were the ones en vogue. Authors like Calvo and El Kadri (2011) and Bordini and Gimenez (2014) mapped out the initial

works produced in Brazil analyzing theses and dissertations¹⁰ hosted in the database of the Brazilian Authority for Development of Personnel in Higher Education (CAPES), articles in local qualified journals, and related material in *Google Scholar*. From 2005 to 2012, 67 works (45 articles, 13 book chapters, 7 dissertations, and 3 theses) were identified in the investigation, being relevant to mention that in the absence of empirical research related to interactions involving Brazilians, teacher education in the country at the time had basically international literature as the main theoretical support (Bordini and Gimenez 2014).

A more recent investigation by Grano (2016 as cited in Gimenez, El Kadri and Calvo 2018a) reviewed the Brazilian production in the later period of 2012-2015 searching CAPES' *Database of Journals* and *Google Scholar*. Out of the analysis of the material surveyed, the author reached the conclusion that the works basically emphasized ELF as a reconceptualization of English and its teaching that covered issues of culture, phonology, intelligibility, and instructional materials. Despite all this, Gimenez, El Kadri and Calvo (2018b) in their chapter "ELF in Brazil – recent development and further directions" for the Routledge Handbook of English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, Baker, and Dewey 2018), argue that "while there is a plethora of recent publications addressing language policies in the English language in Brazil, only a few problematize what is meant by ELF in the classroom" (179). It is then that aiming to address such issue in order to fill up this gap, the authors, who had already put together the volume *English as a lingua franca: teaching and learning and teacher education*¹¹ in 2011, edited, as part of De Grutyer Mouton's DELF series, the book *English as a lingua franca in teacher education – A Brazilian perspective*, in 2018. All the chapters were written by Brazilian ELF scholars and researchers.

Compared to previous publications, this 2018 edited book brings together several works that conceive of ELF potentially inspired by the work of

¹⁰ The first MA dissertation in the country that overtly used the term ELF was El Kadri's (2010) work entitled "Attitudes towards English as a Lingua Franca in a pre-service teacher education course" (In Portuguese: *Atitudes sobre o estatuto do inglês como língua franca em um curso de formação inicial de professores*). The work showed that this early academic production centered around themes like teacher education (pre-service), teacher beliefs and attitudes, ELT curriculum, English and globalization, English as a global/international language, global spread of English, ELT and technology, ELF and identity, ELF and intelligibility, teaching materials, and English teaching under an ELF perspective (Bordini 2013).

¹¹ In Portuguese: *Inglês como língua franca: Ensino-Aprendizagem e Formação de professores*.

famous pedagogue Paulo Freire along with the contributions from decolonial studies, leading us to assert that ELF knowledge production in Brazil has considerably changed towards a more critical and political orientation in the past three years. And this is exactly the body of knowledge that has been referred here as ‘*ELF feito no Brasil*’ (Duboc, 2019), as they not only distance themselves from previous mainstream ELF discussions, but also and mostly resist against mainstream European ELF research.

With respect to Freire, a significant number of ELF investigations, both at MA and PhD levels, has been oriented towards two main aspects proposed by the patron of the Brazilian education, that is, his Critical Pedagogy (Freire 2014[1968]) and his notion of education as a political practice (Freire 2001[1992]). Critical Pedagogy (CP) is a pedagogical practice that questions the universal truths and the notion of reality as a given. By acknowledging that reality is socially constructed, CP aims at unveiling vested interests and ideologies within discourses. As for the notion of politicized education, this departs from Freire’s well-known statement (Freire 1983, II) which attests that “reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world.” For Freire, once awareness-raising is built among the oppressed – what he called “*conscientização*” – empowerment and social transformation are made possible.

As a dynamic and emergent field, ELF studies in Brazil have become an important arena of criticality in different instances, fomented by scholars and other stakeholders who conceive language pedagogy as an eminently political enterprise, especially at this moment when ultraconservative forces have declared war on Education in the country, including open attacks to Paulo Freire’s renowned legacy. As Guilherme (2002, 33) reminds us, the brilliancy of his work is in the fact that he “moved, physically and intellectually, across class, cultural and national borders which made his theories very contemporary, flexible, and usable in *any educational setting*” (our emphasis).

Bearing this in mind, and aligned with the premises of the decolonial thinking and the so-called epistemologies of the South (Sousa Santos 2007), which brings criticality and locality to the center of the debate as it calls for an epistemic disobedience and de-linking in relation to Western-centered views, we envision that “*ELF feito no Brasil*” holds a great potential to go beyond ELF’s third phase of development which is characterized by a reconceptualization of ELF as a multilingual practice (Jenkins 2015).

We believe that “*ELF feito no Brasil*” actually reframes the third phase as many of our ELF studies have departed from the premise of monolingualism

as a myth, followed by an urgent need for disinventing the so-called “named languages”. And this has nothing to do with a technical removal of “E” in ELF studies in place of an illogical notion of ELF as a multilingual franca for this notion seems to still echo a monolingual mindset, made evident when Jenkins (2015, 78) states that “in ELF communication, monolingual speakers are disadvantaged relative to multilingual speakers, and need to learn other languages so as to be able to participate fully in ELF”. As a matter of fact, Duboc (2019) sees this reconceptualization proposed by Jenkins (2015) as a discursive maneuver to update the studies in the light of the recent theorizations on language, mobility, and translingualism. For her, it is not clear whether this envisioned expansion will succeed or not in international research production, “once it is certainly tributary of an ontological and epistemological rupture” (Duboc 2019, 12). Back to Bakhtinian thought – in particular, his concept of heteroglossia¹² – until contemporary discussions (Blommaert 2010; Canagarajah 2017; Makoni and Pennycook 2007), language studies have given special attention to the fluidity and heterogeneity in language repertoire building. In this sense, no one is monolingual.

In many ways, although there is still great influence of initial orientations in the academic production in Brazil concerning ELF, especially Phase 2, this prominent criticism in recent ELF Brazilian studies is a consequence of a constant dialogue with areas like Critical Applied Linguistics and Critical Literacy¹³, Critical Pedagogy, and, more recently, Decoloniality studies. This dialogue has brought to surface and consolidated an indigenous scholarship, at both theoretical and practical levels, founded on other ontological and epistemological grounds, which has addressed issues like the intrinsic relationship between language, politics, and power, themes involving subject, identity, culture, subaltern cosmopolitanism, colonialism, colonality, imperialism, translanguaging/translingual practices, transnational literacies, among others. As Duboc (2019) argues, what is peculiar about this whole movement in “*ELF feito no Brasil*” is the fact that it opens a very important

¹² In his critical comparison between poetry and novel, Bakhtin (1981[1975]) defies the privileges of poetry by acknowledging the richness in novels with regards to language uses. He, then, shows the reader how a novel is able to evidence the dialogical and multiple nature of language, in which divergent forces operate: while some wish to preserve the canon, others seek to distance themselves from normativity. Language, so to speak, is always heterogeneous, marked by multiple (*hetero*) voices (*glossia*).

¹³ The distinction between Critical Literacy and Critical Pedagogy has been extensively discussed by contemporary Brazilian scholars. See, for example, the works of Duboc, and Ferraz (2018); Jordão (2013); Menezes de Souza (2011); Monte Mór (2015).

stream of dialogue with the epistemologies of the South, hence our proposal to bridge ELF and decoloniality. As a token of illustration, for example, we have the work by Jordão, and Marques (2018) which heavily criticizes the supposed neutrality attributed to ELF interactions, as if those interactions were immune to the political and ideological implications of the phenomenon. Based on this, it is advocated by the authors a continuous exercise of decolonization of ELF both in ELT and English teacher education.

Referring once again to the poem that opens the paper, if ELF and its intricacies are to be taken as the iceberg that lies ahead, “*ELF feito no Brasil*” seems to be getting ready not to deviate from it or simply break it apart (we are not the ship), but to explore it the best way in order to make visible all the possibilities that are especially down deep below the waterline. By exploring better ways towards thinking and doing ELF otherwise, we actually face the challenge of preventing ourselves from getting to the traps of purity since, in the very process of reframing the terms, epistemological conflicts might occur, as illustrated in the subsequent section.

4. ELF in Brazilian educational policies: from local curricula towards the Common Core

Drawing from Duboc’s publication on the matter (Duboc 2019), this section presents how ELF has emerged in recent Brazilian educational policies under very conflicting views and how such conflict might, indeed, be fruitful. In doing so, Bakhtinian thought seems to be very insightful, in particular, the notion of refraction, heteroglossia, and dialogism in language.

Changing the terms of the conversation, as Mignolo (2007) proposes, is not an easy task as the process of reframing those terms comes along with well-established conventional constructs. In place of disapproving of any clash in the encounter between the new and the old, we seek support in Derrida (1978[1967], 250) when the post-structuralist philosopher states that:

We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to (...) history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.

The very evolution in ELF studies seems to attest these tensions and ambiguities between contesting views, as the emergence of new theoretical assumptions inevitably mingle with old ones until they establish themselves

as novel ways of addressing a common issue. Contamination, so to speak, is inescapable. And here lies another contribution by the French-Algerian post-structuralist philosopher: to what extent would contamination be a negative phenomenon?

If ELF theorizations along the way do show different understandings and misunderstandings – which, as a matter of fact, explains the mushrooming of publications among well-known ELF scholars that vehemently explain what ELF is and what ELF is not in desperate attempts to tame the ELF sign – similar tensions are to be found when ELF meets the curriculum and the classroom. For the purposes of this paper, very broadly, we will be discussing how these tensions operate in the so-called BNCC, Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum (Brasil 2017).

Launched in 2017, the competence-based BNCC is the first *Common Core Curriculum* ever established in Brazil¹⁴. Each curricular component starts with considerations on its specificities, followed by the determination of a set specific competences to be achieved by the students. The “common core” nature is strongly marked by the pre-established contents and abilities to be taught each year as they are displayed in well-organized tables¹⁵.

With regards to the English curricular component, the introduction dedicates special attention to the social and political status of English as a way to distance itself from instrumental, structuralist, utilitarian orientations to language. The text mentions the changing nature of English *vis-à-vis* globalization and its deterritorialization, addressing the need to move beyond the buzz around nativespeakerism and think the teaching of English otherwise, that is, no longer dictated by notions such as correction, accuracy, and proficiency.

As a matter of fact, when one reads the introduction as part of the BNCC English curricular component, one cannot deny that its theoretical principles positively echo what has been discussed in contemporary ELT theories worldwide. Considering that the teaching of EFL in regular Brazilian

¹⁴ Before BNCC, Brazilian educational systems were regulated by several important curricular guidelines under the principles established in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution and, in particular, by the Law of Basic Tenets and Guidelines of National Education (LDB, Brasil 1996).

¹⁵ The BNCC is available at <http://basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br>. Retrieved: 30 Jan 2020.

education has long been taken as a fallacious project¹⁶ – attested in common sense beliefs such as “I barely know Portuguese let alone English,” “Nobody learns English at schools,” “If you want to learn real English, either study abroad or take a course at a specialized language school,” “the only thing one can learn at schools is the verb *To Be*” – having a national curriculum framed under an ELF perspective represents an important threshold for two main reasons: firstly, since ELF embraces notions such as fluidity and hybridity in meaning making processes, having an ELF-framed curriculum might help Brazilian learners to better cope with their self-esteem in the process of learning this “*l/anguish, anguish, a foreign anguish is english*” (Phillip 1989); secondly, we believe that the presence of ELF within the BNCC might leverage the interest in ELF studies and, consequently, ELF research nationwide.

According to Duboc (2019), if on the one hand, the presence of ELF within the BNCC brings the aforementioned positive aspects, on the other, a critical analysis over the document’s underlying principles shows an epistemological conflict. Such a conflict is evident when one considers the co-presence of, on one side, a standardized, top-down curriculum, and, on the other, a fluid and hybrid notion of language. In fact, as Duboc (ibid.) reassures, in spite of all the efforts in turning the introductory text updated and relevant, what lies behind the BNCC English curricular component is, in fact, a still linear and normative way of teaching English when one reaches the language content tables neatly displayed for each school year. Below is an example taken by Gimenez, and Siqueira (forthcoming) related to the grammar content to be taught for 8th graders in which the authors identify a mismatch between the reference to pre-established standard English contents and the document attempts to introduce the notion of *intelligibility*:

8th grade

Grammar	
Verbs to indicate the future	(EFo8LI14) Use verbal forms of the future to describe plans and expectations and to do forecasts.
Comparatives and superlatives	(EFo8LI15) Use, intelligibly , the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives to compare qualities and quantities.

¹⁶ Several Brazilian scholars have discussed this matter. See, for example, Assis-Peterson and Cox 2013; Duboc 2018; Duboc, Garcia and Rodrigues 2018; Siqueira and Dos Anjos 2012; Siqueira 2018b, among others.

Quantifiers	(EFo8LI16) Use, intelligibly, correctly , ‘some’, ‘any’, ‘many’, ‘much’.
Relative pronouns	(EFo8LI17) Employ, intelligibly , relative pronouns (who, which, that, whose) to construct subordinate clauses.

Source: Edited translated sections of BNCC (Brasil 2017: 248-262) in Gimenez, and Siqueira (forthcoming)

It is true that some of the language contents and abilities are more open and flexible than others. Nonetheless, the contradictions are evident in cases such as the one mentioned by Duboc (2019, 18)

As stated in the introduction, fluid notions such as the concept of intelligibility – as opposed to the idea of proficiency – appear, contradictorily, alongside the concept of correction as displayed in some of the skills within the axis “Linguistic Knowledge”. If we take into consideration that English as a lingua franca is to emerge -from communicative situations within the instructional setting, as defended in the introductory text, language contents (*some, any, many, much*) (...) could not be previously determined if one denies the notion of ELF as a system or variation.¹⁷

In view of that, we then wonder: how do we deal with such epistemological conflict? At first, one could read the conflict negatively, pointing the finger at the document’s authors for a somehow “nonsensical eclecticism”. Nonetheless, Duboc (2019) advocates in favor of a welcoming attitude towards such a conflict as out of this emerges the English teacher’s agentive capacity in transforming and potentially rethinking mainstream ELT orientations. In practical terms, if English school teachers pay justice to the introductory part of the official document – and if they have the chance to learn about the recent ELF theorizations, especially those addressed by what we would call the “*ELF feito no Brasil*” movement – they could put into practice new ways of teaching English that would favor a decolonial perspective in the English classroom. However, if they stick to the rest of the document, in which some language contents are linearly and objectively

¹⁷ Original in Portuguese: A apropriação discursiva mais fluida prometida na introdução – como o conceito de inteligibilidade em oposição à ideia de proficiência – aparece, contraditoriamente, ao lado do conceito de correção em algumas habilidades do eixo Conhecimentos Linguísticos. Ora, se levado a cabo o status do inglês em sua condição como língua franca nas situações comunicativas no espaço escolar como quer o texto introdutório, conteúdos linguísticos dispostos no quadro (como *some, any, many, much*) (...) não poderiam ser delimitados previamente sob uma compreensão do ILF que o distancia de sistema ou variação.

displayed in tables and charts, then, they might end up teaching English in conventional ways. In other words, teachers will basically remain “safe” within the limits of traditional EFL practices and orientations. As Gimenez, and Siqueira (forthcoming) would remind us, there is indeed reason to celebrate the explicit introduction of ELF in the BNCC, nevertheless, there is still a long way to translate it into a core curriculum.

Bearing this in mind, which factor, then, determines the path an English teacher might take? Following a Bakhtinian view of language, what determines the path – either one of transformation or one of preservation – is the meaning attributed to ELF as, for Bakhtin (1981[1975]), meanings are never out there, residing silently in words, but rather, rise out of the encounter between subject and sign, that is, the English teacher-subject and the ELF sign (Duboc, *ibid.*). By privileging enunciation to the detriment of a reified word – Bakhtin (1997[1979]) postulates his concept of dialogic sign, that is, meanings are never fixed nor neutral; rather, they rely on the subject and the way they relate themselves to reality. This implies that instead of reflecting a given reality, meanings are likely to refract in multiple and dynamic ways.

This is the lively movement of languages and meaning making processes. “ELF *feito no Brasil*,” we contend, is an example of such move, as it has surely refracted some of consolidated ELF theorizations. As for the meanings of ELF within the BNCC and the way implementation will occur at schools, this would demand local ethnographic fieldwork in order to investigate whether English teachers are epistemically disobeying the status quo in attempts to teach English otherwise.

5. Concluding remarks

As the title of the paper clearly denotes, our goal with the discussions posed here was to propose a real and necessary expansion of the ELF concept under the perspective of critical pedagogy and decolonial studies anchored in the development and consolidation of the so-called epistemologies of the South in foreign language teaching and learning. Considering Jenkins’ (2015) reflections on the phases ELF has gone through so far, especially when she argues for ELF research to respond to the condition of English as a multilingua franca, mainly due to the current intense global mobility, we set to introduce a critical movement we have named “ELF *feito no Brasil*”, in an

attempt to grant visibility to local research work and theoretical elaborations within the prism of epistemic pluralism.

As we all know, ELT grounds and practices have dogmatically emanated from the global North, consolidating premises and orientations that, along the years, have remained practically unrivaled. With the advent of ELF research and the deeper involvement of scholars from the global South, fully aware of the necessity to embrace alternative epistemologies that could account for the different sociolinguistic landscapes in which English would penetrate and interact with, new ways of critically and politically interpreting the phenomenon and its political and pedagogical consequences have begun to emerge.

In other words, under the innovative and libertarian nature of ELF, in the case of Brazil, overtly alluding to the work of Paulo Freire, scholars have for some time already been working towards a project which seeks to consolidate a decolonial way of “doing ELF” at all levels. For sure, this may take some time to be incorporated by practitioners, still so much EFL-oriented, but having ELF been considered in the recently launched National Common Core Curriculum, although in a conflicting way, opens up important avenues to create important autochthonous forums of discussion and knowledge production that will certainly echo throughout all the ELT settings in the country and, expectedly, abroad.

All in all, this text is about expanding and reframing. As the poem that opens it indicates, navigating today’s ‘brave open sea’ of English is indeed a matter of ships and icebergs. Who or what is the ship? Who or what is the iceberg? Or, as it commonly happens in these endeavors, sometimes we are the ship, sometimes the iceberg. From a decolonial perspective, we have a clear idea that ELT, still firmly enrooted in EFL grounds, has in many ways become an iceberg not to be destroyed, but re-carved and greatly reshaped. EIL, World Englishes, and more recently, global North ELF, have indeed pioneered an important political research agenda towards such a move. “*ELF feito no Brasil*”, and potentially, others from the global South, acknowledges such a previous deed, but it envisions to go beyond, creating the conditions to investigate, teach, and learn English under more real-life and meaningful lenses, in an effort to, among other things, disobey epistemically, de-link from mainstream Eurocentric perspectives and combat the abyssal line of knowledge production by turning our global south voices visible/audible between the cracks or fissures of ELF research field. For us, the future of ELF research and practice lies exactly in this possibility of expanding and

reframing if one wishes to think ELF otherwise. So, who is the ship?; Who is the iceberg? *Quem sobreviverá ao choque?* We will keep ourselves relentlessly questioning. In critical terms. In political terms. As Freire would have wanted us.

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