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Disinventing and Reconstituting the Concept of Communication in Language Education

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In this article we draw on the praxiological framework of disinvention and reconstitution of language(s) to problematize the concept of communication in language education. Considering the fact that the concept of language as an instrument of communication was a metadiscursive regime used to (re)invent language as an isolated and unproblematic element, we argue for an idea of communication that embraces the complexity of language practices, communicative interactions, and the world at large. The critical (re)views shared throughout the text point to a complex perspective of communicative language classes, which requires an understanding of language and communication as complex social practices and as spaces with great potential to promote epistemic decoloniality.

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*Whatever happens to the least of us
has an effect on all of us.*
Waris Dirie, 1998

INTRODUCTION

From our viewpoint, uncertainty has been one of the most remarkable characteristics of this new millennium. The perception that we have lived times more uncertain than others (Carlson & Apple, 2003) entails the recognition that the truths produced by colonial modernity (Quijano, 2007) can no longer be sustained in face of the contingent meanings that characterize the contemporary social world (Bauman, 1999; Bauman & Mauro, 2016; Fabrício, 2006). Despite the conflicts they might provoke, the uncertainties of our times make room for the articulation of innovative discourses and for the emergence of alternative forms of organization of institutions and cultural communities (Carlson & Apple, 2003). Thus, it can be affirmed that uncertainty makes contemporaneity a time "to break silences, to cross borders, and to rethink the way our institutions are organized and the interests and purposes to which they have served" (Carlson & Apple, 2003, p. 11).

However, the biggest challenge put forward by this reality is: how to deal with uncertainty in a cultural atmosphere that has prepared and insists on preparing us to live, (re)produce and rely on certainties? Like Baumgarten (2006), we consider that the

perspective of complexity might help us better comprehend and deal with the uncertainties of contemporary life. But what is, in fact, (the perspective of) complexity? What can be considered complex? If the world and life are complex, can there be anything that is not, or that is more or less, complex?

To begin with, it is necessary to highlight that the perspective of complexity emerged in opposition to the mechanistic understanding of the world, anchored in concepts such as *rationalism*, *monocausality* and *certainty*, and in the reductionism of the elements that constitute reality. On the other hand, the perspective of complexity, as stated by Torres (2009) in reference to Munné (1995), argues that reason cannot by itself sustain the real, that there are several causes for all phenomena in life, that the world is uncertain and chaotic, and that all the elements that constitute reality are connected. In Morin's (2009, p. 21-22) words, complexity involves

> a way of thinking that understands relations, interrelations, mutual implications, multidimensional phenomena, realities that are simultaneously solidary and conflictive (as democracy itself, the system which lives with antagonisms and which simultaneously regulate them), that respects diversity and unity at the same time, an organized thinking that conceives the reciprocal relation amongst all parts.

As we can notice, the main characteristic of complex thinking is the multiple connections amongst the components that structure reality, that is, in the analysis of a particular component, "the relations between that component and the others and the global constituted by all of them must be examined" (Torres, 2009, p. 195). In comprehending that a human being affects and is affected by ideas and actions performed by all human beings, as our epigraph beautifully implies, the perspective of complexity is therefore defined by relations and processes (Torres, 2009). In such a view of the world, there are neither exceptions nor levels of complexity: everything that constitutes reality is equally complex.

Regarding the field of language studies, this view leads us to perceive language as a complex and dynamic element (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) that must be analyzed in relation to others, such as history, culture, identities, and power relations. Moreover, it invites us to understand that languages "are emergent from the dynamic processes of change that operate in all languages at all times" (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 112). This conceptualization stands against concepts that disregard the complexity of language practices. One of those concepts is that which conceives language as an instrument of communication, that is, language as a means to send and receive messages (Jakobson, 1967/2010). Although this concept has been influential in the area of language studies more broadly, we believe that the consequences of this conceptualization have been most acute in the field of language education. In fact, the communicative teaching approach that prevails in this field is based on a merely functional concept of language (Pennycook, 1998), ignoring language's intimate relation to other components of reality. Like Pennycook (1998, p. 27), we understand that this concept lacks the recognition that "language is a system of ideas that plays a central role in how we conceive the world and ourselves." Besides, it lacks the recognition that it is through language that "people construct and deconstruct life in daily interaction and that, for this reason, it is an educational and political waste [to conceive it] as a space for communication deprived of any social relevance" (Moita Lopes, 2012, p. 12). From a complexity perspective, as Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 198) put it, "the language classroom highlights connections across levels of human and social organization, from individual minds up to the socio-political context of language learning."

Our critique of the concept of language as an instrument of communication is rooted in the praxiological framework of disinvention and reconstitution of languages (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005). According to this framework, *language* is not something natural that simply exists as an autonomous system disconnected from other social components, but an invention legitimized by some equally invented metadiscursive regimes whose main objective was to eradicate linguistic diversity from the world. For Makoni and Pennycook (2005), as part of a Christian and colonial project, the invention of *language* has influenced the way *languages* are comprehended, used and taught in different contexts around the globe. Hence, they affirm that it is crucial to disinvent and reconstitute the metadiscursive regimes that invented languages as fixed and natural entities, a process that requires the conscientization of the historical background of the invention of languages and the construction of ways to understand language practices in their relation to other dynamic elements that make them possible.

In a recent work, Pennycook and Makoni (2020) update their discussion by emphasizing the colonial roots of the invention of languages and its present-day efforts to homogenize different communities. This new discussion is anchored in the idea that linguistics is intimately connected to colonialism and coloniality, which may lead its current practices not only to repeat colonial discourses, but also to reinforce contemporary neo-liberal repertoires. The authors' viewpoint is that language research was and still is, at least to some extent, shaped by nationalist ideas which have a significant impact on how speakers of different languages are globally framed. In this context, a project of disinvention would require the mobilization of both northern (colonial) and southern (decolonial) voices "to engage with the dominant modes of thought and investigate how they came about and why they are flawed" (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020, p. 58). It is a project that closely relates to Walsh's (2009) idea of *critical interculturality*, which upholds the collaboration among different voices to produce alternatives to Western rationality and to promote decolonial moves in our pedagogical activities. In the author's words, it is "a project that points to re-existence and life itself, to *another* imaginary and *another* agency of *living-together* – of living *with* – and of society" (Walsh, 2009, p. 22, emphasis in original).

Consistent with this framework, our main objective in this article is to problematize the concept of language as an instrument of communication in language education. As a means to achieve it, we propose the disinvention and reconstitution of the concept of communication in other bases, which take into account the complexity that characterizes the contemporary social world. In keeping with Makoni and Pennycook (2005), we understand *disinvention* and *reconstitution* as the problematization of modern/colonial metadiscursive regimes about language(s) and the construction of critical repertoires of meaning regarding communication and language education, respectively. Still based on these authors, including their latest discussion (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020), we employ the term *language* to refer to a more general understanding of what the construct *language* is considered to be. On the other hand, we make use of the term *languages* to refer to *all language repertoires* identified and/or described scientifically as *languages* throughout history.

With this endeavor, we expect to align ourselves with other researchers who have struggled to reshape the way we look at and deal with *communication* in language and communication studies (Calvente, Calafell, & Chávez, 2020; Covarrubias, 2007; Pennycook, 2018) and in the field of language education (Galante, 2015; García & Wei, 2014; Kramsch, 2006). This seems to be a vital struggle not only because we have lived times more uncertain than others (Carlson & Apple, 2003), but also, and perhaps most importantly, because we have witnessed a gradual democratic collapse in different parts of the world (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). This controversial move has caused extreme social polarizations, which have dramatically affected the way people interact and

negotiate meaning. More than ever in recent history, we are called, as both teachers and citizens, to recognize and engage with the complexity that pervades the communicative process.

LANGUAGE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF COMMUNICATION

Although the concept of language as an instrument of communication is expressed by Saussure (1916/2006) in his circuit of speech, we believe it is more directly rooted in the work of Russian linguist Roman Jakobson. For this researcher, the structural perspective of linguistic analysis, focused on what he calls *individual discourse*, should consider the importance of *interlocution* in its theorizations, for the reason that "any individual discourse presupposes an exchange," a perspective that invalidates the idea of "emitter with no receiver" (Jakobson, 1967/2010, p. 26). Along these lines, the author argues that the theory of communication has much to contribute to the linguists' work, since one of its objectives is to analyze the communicative process, which is performed through the use of a code shared by its interlocutors, namely a code that operates as "their instrument of communication" (Jakobson, 1967/2010, p. 98).

The author suggests a linguistic model that highlights the aspects of communicative interaction between *emitter* and *receiver*. A brief description of this model can be observed in the following assertion:

> The emitter transmits a message to the receiver. In order to be effective, the message requires a context to refer to (or a *referent*, in another ambiguous terminology), which is both comprehensible by the receiver and verbal or likely to be verbalized; a code that is totally or partially common to both emitter and receiver (or, in other words, to both encoder and decoder of the message); and finally, a contact, a physical channel and a psychological connection between emitter and receiver, which makes both of them able to start and sustain communication. (Jakobson, 1967/2010, p. 156, emphasis in original)

Regardless of its acceptance in the field of language studies, the model suggested by Jakobson (1967/2010) was later expanded and resignified by other researchers, amongst whom was North American linguist Dell Hymes. Starting from a critique of Chomsky's (1957) idea of *competence*, Hymes (1972/2001) focused on the elaboration of the concept of *communicative competence*. This author's critique is based on the assumption that Chomsky's (1957) theory disregards the influence of sociocultural features in the development of linguistic competence. For Hymes (1972/2001), this is not a particular or simplified view of competence, but an ideologically guided one. At this level, the author's viewpoint dialogues with Jakobson's (1967/2010) to the extent that both reveal that the greatest attribute of Modern Linguistics had been the analysis of language structure as an end in itself, neglecting its relation to other elements and social practices. This shows that, back in the 1970s, Hymes (1972/2001) already believed that no linguistic theory is disconnected from ideological guidance, making room for the perception that the theoretical choices made by linguists were intimately related to the scientific paradigms of that time.

Based on the assumption that social life affects the subject's linguistic competence and performance, the author proposes an understanding of language as an element shaped by sociocultural features that operates as a means of communicative exchange. The core of Hymes' (1972/2001, p. 60) model can be observed in the extract in which he describes children's development of linguistic competence:

We have then to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. This competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other codes of communicative conduct. (Hymes, 1972/2001, p. 60)

This description points to the fact that the development of linguistic competence is clearly influenced by personal and contextual matters, as well as by a range of other social experiences. Such a view refutes the classic model that restrains language to referential meaning, sound structure, and structural analysis. What Hymes (1972/2001, p. 60) proposes is a model that expands to "communicative conduct and social life." According to him, an analysis that intends to focus on the social dimension of language cannot be restricted to occasions when social factors interfere in grammatical issues, for there are contextual regulations which determine the relevance of certain grammatical rules. In this perspective, the development of *competence for use* intersects with the development of grammatical competence: in acquiring the rules of a certain language, children simultaneously acquire a number of rules that comprise the forms by which language rules are used. Put differently, children also develop, in the process of language acquisition, "a general theory of the speaking appropriate in their community" (Hymes, 1972/2001, p. 61).

These assumptions lead to the idea that there is a series of elements other than grammar that constitutes *communicative competence*. For this reason, the author argues that four questions about language use should be raised: 1) Whether (and to what extent) something is possible; 2) Whether (and to what extent) something is doable, considering the meanings available; 3) Whether (and to what extent) something is appropriate, regarding the context where it is used; and 4) Whether (and to what extent) something is truly accomplished. The first question refers to the possible structures, or grammaticalized forms, of a language. The second one points to the importance of apprehension capacities and psycholinguistic factors in interlocution. The third question refers to the cultural particularities of the context where communicative exchanges take place. And the fourth one points to the interrelation among what is possible, doable and appropriate in a certain language in order to produce cultural behaviors. Anchored in these four questions, Hymes (1972/2001) defines *communicative competence* as *the ability for language use*, recognizing the importance of both cognitive and cultural spheres in the process of language acquisition.

Despite their limitations, the concept of *language as an instrument of communication* (Jakobson, 2010 1967/2010) and the concept of *communicative competence* (Hymes, 1972/2001) triggered a great improvement in the studies of language acquisition/learning. Their principles dominated the field of language education for a long period of time and served as a basis for a series of methods and approaches (Silva, 2004). Next, we present some reflections concerning how such principles influenced the *communicative approach* in its traditional and more contemporary senses.

LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION, AND TEACHING: THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

Historically speaking, the *communicative approach* was a response to the audio-lingual method, anchored in the assumption that language education should be guided by the grammatical structures of the target language. By contrast, the main objective of communicative language teaching, according to Banciu and Jireghie (2012), is to help learners create meanings and use the target language under different circumstances. This means that the learning process should concentrate on the development of the learners' *communicative competence*, that is, on "their ability to apply knowledge of a language with adequate proficiency to communicate" (Banciu & Jireghie, 2012, p. 94).

The concept of communication that grounds the communicative approach dialogues with the perspectives of Jakobson (1967/2010) and Hymes (1972/ 2001), for it designs a process whereby people convey meaning with the purpose of establishing *mutual understanding* (Banciu & Jireghie, 2012). Therefore, communicative language teaching

> makes use of real-life situations that generate communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life. Unlike the audio-lingual method of language teaching, which relies on repetition and drills, the communicative approach can leave students in suspense as to the outcome of a class exercise, which will vary according to their reactions and responses. The real-life simulations change from day to day. Students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics. (Banciu & Jireghie, 2012, p. 95)

As we can see, the main goal of communicative language teaching is to foster communication, so the structures of the target language should be used for this purpose (Banciu & Jireghie, 2012). However, since its emergence in the 1970s, the assumptions and objectives of the communicative approach have been expanded, enabling its own resignification in different contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 1986/2010). Nowadays, communicative language teaching has been regarded as an approach that aims "to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching" and "[to] develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986/2010, p. 155). These authors assert, however, that all versions of the communicative approach tend to define it as "a theory of language teaching that starts from a communicative model of language and language use, and that seeks to translate this into a design […] for materials, for teacher and learner roles and behaviors, and for classroom activities and techniques" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986/2010, p. 158).

Consequently, the communicative approach suggests particular views of language, learning, evaluation and error, teachers' and students' roles, and the role of the students' first language in the learning process. Regarding the view of language, this approach is guided by four principles: 1) Language is a system of expression and exchange of meanings; 2) The main function of language is to provide communication; 3) Language structure reflects its functional and communicative uses; 4) The main elements of language are its functional meanings (Richards & Rodgers, 1986/2010). With respect to the view of learning, it follows three basic principles: the *principle of communication*, according to which activities that provide opportunities for communication encourage learning; the *principle of activity*, according to which language activities that make room for the sharing of meaningful information determine effective learning; and the *principle of*

signification, according to which meaningful uses of language result in learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1986/2010). Concerning the view of evaluation and error, the communicative approach argues that teachers evaluate not only grammatical competence, but also, and mainly, their students' fluency. Thus, errors made in fluency-based activities are seen as a natural stage in the development of communicative skills. Finally, considering teachers' and students' roles, this approach regards teachers as facilitators of interaction, attributing to them the responsibility to establish potentially communicative moments in the classroom; in their turn, students are regarded as communicative subjects, being encouraged to actively participate in the process of meaning construction (Larsen-Freeman, 2000/2010). From this perspective, the students' first language is viewed as an element that facilitates target language learning, although the use of the latter is recommended whenever possible (Larsen-Freeman, 2000/2010).

Such views point to a series of specific principles of the communicative approach, the most important of which are: students learn another language through its communicative use; the activities done in language classes should mainly aspire to create opportunities for meaningful communication; fluency is a crucial aspect in the process of language learning; communication requires the integration of different language skills; and learning is a creative process that involves attempts and errors (Richards & Rodgers, 1986/2010). For Almeida-Filho (2010, p. 36), the communicative approach "organizes learning experiences in terms of relevant activities/tasks of real interest and/or necessity of the student so that he/she becomes capable of using the target language to accomplish true actions in interaction with other speakers-users of this language." However, in spite of arguing that communicative lessons should not concentrate on grammatical forms of the target language, the author highlights that these lessons do not reject "the possibility to create moments for […] systematized practice of grammatical subsystems in the classroom" (p. 36).

Although these views and principles still integrate the scope of the communicative approach, its more contemporary perspectives have been influenced by different educational paradigms, allowing us to observe, more than in any other period, a multifaceted number of discourses and practices turned to its implementation. Like Richards (2006, p. 22), we believe that communicative language teaching nowadays refers to certain "general principles that can be applied in different ways." In reference to Jacobs and Farrell (2003), the author suggests that the resignifications of the communicative approach have caused a paradigm shift in the way we comprehend language education. This shift can be noticed, for instance, in the following trends: there has been a greater emphasis on the social nature of learning; learners' individual differences have been more directly approached; and contextual particularities have been more acknowledged. Based on Richards (2006) and Jacobs and Farrell (2003), we consider that this paradigm shift has generated a range of possibilities for the implementation of communicative lessons, possibilities that have supported the emergence of a great number of approaches which suggest different perceptions of communication and/in language education.

DISINVENTING AND RECONSTITUTING COMMUNICATION IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

In this section, we problematize the idea of communication that grounds both traditional and more contemporary perspectives of the communicative approach. The reason for this endeavor relates to our belief that, despite the plural and multifaceted nature of present-day versions of communicative language teaching, their notions of *communication* and *communicative competence* seem to be still guided by the concept of language as an

instrument of communication (Jakobson, 1967/2010). This section is divided into two subsections: in the first one, we propose the *disinvention* of the communicative approach; in the second one, we suggest the *reconstitution* of some principles that we find suitable for a complex perspective of communication in language classes.

Disinventing...

We believe that the disinvention of the communicative approach must start from the unveiling of its invention, which is intimately related to the invention of the metadiscursive regimes that invented languages as fixed and autonomous entities disconnected from other elements that constitute reality. As Makoni and Pennycook (2005) suggest, recognizing that languages were invented requires an understanding that their existence is embedded in colonial discourses and practices, seeing that it was through those repertoires that the metadiscursive regimes of languages were invented and came to work as means of production, regulation, and constitution of *language* as a theoretical construct and of *languages* as instruments of communication.

Considering that the disinvention of languages entails the disinvention of the metadiscursive regimes that invented them (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005), we believe that the next step towards the disinvention of the communicative approach is the unveiling of the invention of the concept of language as an instrument of communication. Based on Makoni and Pennycook (2005), we understand that, if languages were invented by means of the construction and spread of certain metadiscursive regimes, it becomes possible to affirm that such a concept of language was one of the metadiscursive regimes that contributed to (re)inventing language within the modern/colonial context. The only difference is that, if in previous times language was regarded as a *structured system* or as an *innate competence*, with the advent of Jakobson's (1967/2010) communicative model, it came to be seen as an *instrument* used to solve a technical problem: the transmission/reception of messages.

Like Rajagopalan (2008), we consider that the concept of language as an instrument of communication presents two basic problems. The first one is that it conceives language as an untroubled entity, for it seems to suppose that all people from a speech community understand the messages transmitted by their interlocutors uniformly, with no conflicts and/or hierarchies. We believe that "to say that perfect communication happens in a speech community just because members of such a community share a language is to ignore the fact that real speech communities are hierarchically organized [settings] where linguistic capital is unequally distributed" (Rajagopalan, 2008, p. 35). It is made clear by Pennycook (2018, p. 99) when he affirms that "mutual misunderstanding is our communicative norm." By that he means that "humans are not universally united in cognitive similarity, able to understand each other as long as they speak the same language, but rather are always seeking forms of alignment as they work each other out" (Pennycook, 2018, p. 99-100).

The second problem with the concept in focus is that it defines *communication* as an apparatus that can itself generate appropriate interlocution, while daily experiences show that neither language nor communication are peacefully guaranteed to all individuals. Thus, it is necessary to comprehend that

> the term 'language' does not designate an object promptly finished in the real world. It is a name given to an imaginary object, which is believed to be shared by members of a community who have a shared system of values, common interests and collective aspirations; or the name given to a simplified way of referring to the sense of belonging to a community... (Rajagopalan, 2008, p. 35-36).

In the same line of thought, we can say that communication cannot be defined as a finished activity that can be reduced to a logic schema, regarding the personal and contextual particularities of the subjects who engage in the communicative process (Galante, 2015; Kramsch, 2006). On the contrary, communication is marked by heterogeneity, which means that the members of a speech community enunciate from determined discourse positions that locate them in language practice and in broader social life. Pratt (2012) illustrates this with perspicacity when she juxtaposes Saussure's (1916/2006) circuit of speech with another depiction of a speech situation made almost exactly 300 years earlier, in a work by an Andean indigenous writer from colonial Peru named Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala. While in Saussure's drawing, the identicalness of the two figures "represents a relation of both equivalence and equality, in relation to each other and in relation to langue, the language" (p. 17), in Ayala's drawing is depicted "everything Saussure's seeks to dispel," that is, "'two individuals' joined in multi-faceted relations of radical hierarchy, inequality, passion, and violence" (p. 19).

Calvente, Calafell and Chávez (2020) powerfully demonstrate how the complexity that permeates communication is made visible in an individual's professional life. Based on their experiences as non-white scholars in predominantly white institutions, the authors' narrative accounts of situated communicative events allow us to observe the location of difference and nonhumanness they are subject to in those contexts. One of their central arguments is that "in every institution marked by Western modernity, white supremacy is inseparable from its structure" (Calvente, Calafell, & Chávez, 2020, p. 203). Another real-life example of such a complexity is offered by Covarrubias (2007), who reflects on the meaning of *silence* in the communication held by certain cultural groups. In keeping with the narrative accounts of an American Indian woman, the author coins the concept of *generative silence*, namely "[the] type of silence that serves as a creative and powerful communicative means within which communicants achieve productive personal, social, and cultural ends" (Covarrubias, 2007, p. 268). In our view, both examples, as well as Pratt's (2012) critique, illustrate that communication is a complex activity crossed by power relations and characterized by negotiations and conflicts of various levels.

These reflections, which move beyond modern/colonial premises (Quijano, 2007; Walsh, 2009) of language and communication, encourage us to disinvent the classic notion of communicative competence, which, in spite of considering the contextual particularities of communication and bringing Sociolinguistics into the field of language education, seems to insist on disregarding the complexity of the communicative process, that is, its intimate relation to other complex dynamic elements (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Like Pennycook (1990/1998), we believe that the main problem with Hymes' (1972/2001) idea of communicative competence is that it disconnects the question of (social, cultural, contextual) adequacy from the political nature of linguistic forms. Therefore, it can be concluded that, in teaching with the objective of improving communicative competence in its traditional sense, without exploring how languages and the use of languages have been historically constructed within power relations, we are, once again, "developing a teaching practice that has more to do with accommodation than with access to power" (Pennycook, 1990/1998, p. 28).

In respect to the disinvention of the communicative approach, our central argument is that, if the concept of language as an instrument of communication was one of the metadiscursive regimes created to (re)invent language as an untroubled entity disconnected from other elements that constitute social life, the communicative approach was a construct invented to legitimize this notion of language in the field of language education. Such an argument is in keeping with Franzoni (1992), according to whom communicative teaching simply replaces grammatical elements with pragmatic

features, maintaining the focus on the structural schemas of language operation. For this author, in attempting to bring linguistic and communicative abilities closer, this approach ended up reinforcing the Saussurean dichotomy that separates *language* – linguistic abilities – and *speech* – communicative abilities (Franzoni, 1992), which, in our viewpoint, strongly contributed to the consolidation of the idea of language as an "autonomous [entity] in relation to everything but itself and its own internal relations" (Oliveira, 2007, p. 83). This idea completely ignores that language is intimately connected to other components of reality (Morin, 2009; Torres, 2009) and, consequently, that "language is developed in context, as use in context shapes language resources" (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 69).

Reconstituting...

The articulation of a broader concept of language requires the recognition that the invention of languages is inscribed within a range of Christian and colonial hegemonic discourses that aimed to homogenize and hierarchize cultures, knowledges, and identities (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005; Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). Along these lines, it can be stated that languages are actually situated and contingent forms of expression (sets of linguistic practices), which cannot be understood outside the spectrum of power relations and the hegemonies produced by the process of language invention. In Pinto's (2011, p. 70) words, these sets of linguistic practices must be understood "as local actions present in the disputes of cultural power, strategies for the production of linguistic consensuses or for the resistance to linguistic coercion and violence," and as such they should be analyzed "in relation to other linguistic and somatic practices that surround them."

In suggesting the disarticulation of *language-as-object*, Pinto (2011, p. 81) proposes the rearticulation of *language-as-praxis*: "an action in open and plural space". As praxis, we believe that language can, therefore, be reconstituted as *social practice*, which requires us to perceive languages not as instruments rooted in technical and simplistic schemas of communication, but as situated and complex forms of production and negotiation of meanings immersed in power relations. After all, as Hanks (2005/2008, p. 53) points out, "by engaging in language practice, and despite their intentions and goals, social actors are partakers of the diffuse power relations to which their language is attached." This seems to be one of the reasons that led Kramsch (2006, p. 250) to state that, depending on the situation, we need to move beyond communicative strategies and employ multiple semiotic practices "to make and convey meaning" and "to position [ourselves] in the world, that is, find a place for [ourselves] on the global market of symbolic exchanges."

We understand that the concept of language as social practice relates to four principles: the invention of language(s) is inscribed within hegemonic discourses; languages are sets of situated and contingent forms of expression; language is always involved in power relations; as praxis, language operates as a form of action upon the world. Such principles reveal the political and performative nature of language, namely its productive force in the comprehension and (re)construction of social life. Thus, we could assume that, in engaging in communicative situations or events, we do not simply exchange messages and/or describe the things which surround us; we actually *produce effects of meaning that (re)construct the world*. For this reason, as Galante (2015) suggests, we have to be especially attentive to the meanings we mobilize while engaged in a communicative practice. With regard to the context of language education, the author claims that "teachers should encourage students to develop the ability to critically question meanings from pre-existing dominant discourse" (Galante, 2015, p. 34).

Another point that pervades the concept of language as social practice is that it transgresses the idea that meanings are rooted in the words or in communication, as it

argues that meanings are (re)produced in interaction and express the relation between languages, cultures, identities, knowledges, and worldviews. According to Fabrício (2006, p. 57), this concept generates three implications:

> Firstly, it shows us that senses have to do with how people use language in their everyday practices. It also indicates that language can have some degree of stability without having to appeal to the representation of something external to itself. Finally, it deconstructs the belief in the principle of the existence of a single meaning for things, showing that the problem is our tendency to naturalize rules that end up consecrating determined forms of life, ideas and beliefs…

Such implications make room for a reconstitution of the idea of communication in language classes, which involves the rearticulation of its classic notions within the concept of language as social practice. Drawing on this concept, we understand communication as a complex activity crossed by various discourses and practices that relate to other elements that constitute reality (Morin, 2009; Torres, 2006). In this sense, when engaging in communication, subjects are not only engaged in the transmission of factual messages, but also in the negotiation and (re)construction of meanings directly connected with those elements, and therefore, with their personal experiences and social positions. And, precisely because of its direct relation to other elements that constitute the broader social world, communication produces effects that either corroborate or subvert hegemonic discourses and practices which cause suffering, exclusion, inequality, and dependence. Like Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 162), we argue that it is a matter of emphasizing "the interconnectedness of individual language use with the products of language use."

As an example, let us observe the following excerpt by Pessoa (2014, p. 355), extracted from an interaction between a white teacher researcher and three black students from a public school in Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil. The interaction was originally held in Brazilian Portuguese and took place when the students were answering a questionnaire (distributed by the teacher researcher) which contained a question about their racial identity:

> **Student A:** Teacher, I want to talk about my race, but I don't know what it is.
> **Teacher researcher:** Well, you have black skin and curly hair, right? So, your race is black. (Students B and C started laughing)
> **Student B:** Gosh, teacher! Stop swearing at him! (The teacher researcher asks if people's skin color is a matter of laughing and making jokes)
> **Student A:** I didn't find it funny either, teacher. And you (talking to his classmates) have to write down that you're black too. Or do you think you're white? You're also black, like me.

The topic of this event revolves around the category of *race* and how we define ourselves racially. Taking into account the historical roots and peculiarities of racism in contemporary Brazil and the places where those participants are located within Brazilian racial dynamics, it can be stated that their speech acts are not restricted to the communicative event itself, as their content goes beyond the classroom and the mere exchange of messages. Student A's difficulty in defining his race, for instance, may be related to his ignorance of the physical characteristics of black identity or to his fear of or resistance to proclaiming himself black in a context where blackness is regarded as a negative trait. The teacher's directive speech, in its turn, may be related to both her position of authority in the classroom and her racially privileged position in the broader

social context. On the other hand, Student B's assertive positioning may be related to the hegemonic discourses that have contributed to stigmatizing black traits and black identity in Brazil. Finally, Student A's reaction may be related to an attitude of empowerment encouraged by the teacher's disapproving attitude to the racist position of Students B and C. The speech acts uttered by the participants in question surpass the micro context of communication, expanding and relating to other elements that constitute reality, such as history, the body, identities, racism, etc. This connection allows us to claim that speech acts should be regarded as complex acts of identity that depart from and address different places in the social structure, that is, language practices reveal themselves as complex, partial and embodied elements that always transcend communication.

The reconstitution of the idea of communication in the language classroom invites us to reconstitute some principles of the communicative approach, including its objectives, assumptions and views of language, learning, evaluation and error, teacher's and student's roles, and of the role of the students' first language in the learning process. In defining communication as a complex activity (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), we believe that the goal of a communicative language class should be to make learners engage in a relational construction of meanings, which implies using their linguistic repertoires not only to convey messages, but also to construct more complex analyses of social life and to take responsibility for what they say. In other words, it is not enough to teach learners how to use the target language in different contexts; it is necessary to teach them to relate their language practices to other elements that constitute reality, so that they can gradually situate the use of the target language in a wider context of communication.

From this perspective, we understand the communicative lesson as a social pedagogical endeavor turned to the relational construction of meaning across different languages. Such an endeavor involves five basic characteristics: 1) emphasis on the learning of the relational construction of meaning provided by communicative events; 2) use of multiple texts that encourage complex analyses of reality and speech acts within a broader social context; 3) opportunities for learners to focus on their own learning and speech acts considering the micro and macro contexts of communication; 4) comprehension of students' personal identities and experiences as important elements in the process of relational construction of meaning; and 5) attempt to relate language learning to different social practices. Rather than providing a connection between the language as it is taught and how it is used in different contexts and/or situations (Banciu & Jireghie, 2012), we consider that these five characteristics point to a complex pedagogical practice (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Morin, 2009) that takes into account the productive force of language education in the (re)construction of social life beyond the classroom.

Based on these principles, we propose the reconstitution of some views supported by the communicative approach. Concerning the view of language, we believe that a complex perspective of communication in the language classroom should be sustained by the following assumptions: 1) language is a form of action; 2) the central role of language is to (re)construct meaning in and for the social world via interaction; 3) language practices are always related to other elements that constitute reality; 4) the use of language reflects the personal choices of its users, which are located in different identity spaces and power matrices; and 5) the main element of language education is its potential to problematize social practices and worldviews. Pertaining to the view of learning, we understand that a complex communicative language class should be guided by a concept of learning as a space of sharing and co-construction of knowledge, identity performances and discursive clashes that make room for the articulation of complex analyses of social life. It is a perception that shifts from centering the process of language

acquisition itself to focusing on the complex nature of language learning, which, according to Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 158), points to "the constant adaptation and enactment of language-using patterns in the service of meaning-making in response to the affordances that emerge in a dynamic communicative situation."

As far as the view of evaluation and error is concerned, we believe that a complex perspective of communicative language lessons radically questions the idea of error, for teachers are expected to focus on the development of their students' potential to use the target language in creative and understandable ways in order to construct more complex analyses regarding different social practices. Thus, instead of traditional models of evaluation, we propose the implementation of a diverse range of truly collaborative activities throughout the whole process. The aim is that students have the chance to think critically about their learning experience, which involves the constant development of their linguistic, analytical, and identity performances. Both views–of error and evaluation–corroborate Larsen-Freeman and Cameron's (2008, p. 158) idea that "language development is not about learning and manipulating abstract symbols, but is enacted in real-life experiences" that require us "to take into account learners' histories, orientations and intentions, thoughts and feelings" (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 159). Along these lines, the teacher's and student's roles also undergo some changes in the context of language education: teachers assume the role of problematizers, acting beyond language practices, the classroom and communication itself; and students assume the role of subjects crossed by different discourses that locate them in the learning process, in the use of the target language, and in the broader social context. Hence, teachers and students need to be attentive to a communication that emerges from and sustains itself across differences, both with regard to language practices and to the places occupied by the participants of the communicative event in discourse.

Following these premises, the students' first language assumes a distinguished role in the classroom: in addition to being perceived as a facilitator of target language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000/2010), it is conceived as an imperative resource for articulating certain analyses that relate language practices and meanings produced in interaction to other elements and social practices. This means that, in a complex perspective of communicative language teaching, all the languages involved in the process must be considered, given their intrinsic relation to the subjectivities and the linguistic and (onto)epistemological repertoires of the subjects who participate in the teaching and learning process. In other words, a teaching activity that is intended to be communicative nowadays should encourage the practice of *translanguaging*, which basically refers "to the ways in which bilinguals use their complex semiotic repertoire[s] to act, to know, and to be," making visible their "different histories, identities, heritages and ideologies" (García & Wei, 2014, p. 137). Such an undertaking would then operate *between languages* in order to produce trans-semiotic systems, trans-spaces, and trans-subjects, which, in the authors' view, would contribute to "trans-forming subjectivities and identities, cognitive and social structures and the sociopolitical order," as well as to "[opening] up a space of limitless possibilities for speakers and learners" (García & Wei, 2014, p. 137).

As a final point, we maintain that a complex perspective of communicative language classes requires the development of a *critical intercultural* atmosphere in the classroom. According to Walsh (2009), in contrast to the traditional view of *interculturality* – centered on the idea of difference and acceptance –, *critical interculturality* starts from the question of power to analyze the places occupied by different cultures in the social structure. As a project from below, *critical interculturality* focuses on the claims of socio-historically marginalized groups; for this reason, its principles point to a counter-hegemonic type of analysis and action guided by the structural-colonial-capitalist problem and the desire for social transformation. In the context of language education, we

consider that *critical interculturality* can offer two contributions: the *intercultural* component could lead students to address different communicative positions, which presupposes different linguistic, (onto-)epistemological, cultural and identity repertoires; in its turn, the *critical* component could instigate students to relate their language practices, inscribed in a range of communicative events, to other elements that constitute reality (Morin, 2009; Torres, 2009). Therefore, a *critical intercultural* atmosphere in the language classroom would be grounded in the participants' intention to communicate from and within diversity in order to explore the complexity of the communicative process, making room for "questioning and critical analysis, transformative action, [and] also insurgency and intervention in the fields of power, knowledge and being, and in life; [actions] that animate an insurgent, decolonial and rebellious attitude" (Walsh, 2009, p. 27).

LANGUAGE EDUCATION, COMPLEXITY, AND EPISTEMIC DECOLONIALITY

In this article, we have made use of the praxiological framework of the disinvention and reconstitution of language(s) (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005) to problematize the concept of communication in the field of language education. Our objective was to propose a reflection that takes into account the complexity that characterizes the contemporary social world, and consequently, the language classroom.

Concerning the disinvention of the communicative approach, our main argument was that, if the concept of language as an instrument of communication (Jakobson, 1967/2010) was one of the metadiscursive regimes used to (re)invent language and communication as isolated and unproblematic elements in colonial modernity, the communicative approach was also a construct invented to reproduce such a concept in the field of language education around the world. On the other hand, regarding the reconstitution of the idea of communication in language classes, our main contention was that in reconstituting language as social practice (Fabrício, 2006) and communication as a complex activity (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), we must also propose a reconstitution of some objectives, principles and views of the communicative approach, so that it becomes possible to consider the complexity of language, language practices, communicative interactions, and the social order (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Morin, 2009; Torres, 2009;). Both analyses corroborate Kramsch's (2006, p. 251) idea that nowadays "it is not sufficient for [language] learners to know how to communicate meanings; they have to understand the practice of meaning making itself."

We believe that the reflections made in this article point to an understanding of language education as a complex literacy practice and as a space for epistemic decoloniality. It is a complex literacy practice because its activities revolve around multiple texts located in particular contexts, which relate to the singularity of the subjects who produced them, to the spaces in which they were articulated, and to the social discourses and practices that characterize the larger social context. Considering that it is from these texts that communicative events emerge, it is reasonable to infer that the communication provided in language lessons can also be defined as a complex element that should be analyzed in relation to other elements that transcend the communicative event, such as history, geographic location, the body, identities, and power relations. In a similar vein, the language classroom is a space for epistemic decoloniality because it is an environment with great potential for the rearticulation of hegemonic discourses engendered by colonial modernity, discourses that relate to language and to all discriminatory practices it has performatively constructed throughout history, such as ageism, racism, sexism, homo(trans)phobia, xenophobia, linguistic prejudice, and religious intolerance. By connecting language education to these and to other elements

that constitute reality beyond communication and the classroom (Morin, 2009; Torres, 2009), we argue that a complex perspective of communication in language classes (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) might reveal itself as a decolonial effort, since it stimulates "new forms of political action, insurgency and rebellion, while at the same time building up alliances, hopes, and other visions of being in society" (Walsh, 2009, p. 38).

Before concluding, we would like to emphasize that in this article we did not intend to establish a new teaching method, but to propose an alternative understanding of language education in order to raise questions and uncertainties, besides stimulating multiple teaching practices in a range of different contexts. It was not our goal to present practical activities that embody our reflections or that make them more *doable*, because we understand that, although educational contexts are permeated by global discourses and practices, each context presents a series of local demands and particularities. Thus, our intention was to push the envelope. In (onto-)epistemological terms, we believe that our role was to challenge hegemonic prescriptions of knowledge (considering the spaces where the communicative approach was produced – England and the United States), rearticulating them according to the claims and knowledges of a local counter-hegemonic context and as such making room for a deep reflection on two provocative questions posed by Makoni and Pennycook (2005, p. 152-153) at the end of their article: "how might languages start to look if an alternative conception were mapped back to the center from the periphery? [...] What are the political consequences when notions about language such as language rights, mother tongues, and bilingual education are disinvented?"

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