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Intercultural language educators for an intercultural world: action upon reflection

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ABSTRACT

Bearing in mind that learning a new language is much more than acquiring a new code, but a new way of being in the world, the aim of the article is to briefly raise and discuss relevant issues relating to language teacher education in these contemporary times, especially in the area of English Language Teaching (ELT). Emphasis is placed on the importance of teacher education responding to the new demands of this globalised world, proposing among several aspects, new political and pedagogical postures which are to lead into preparing students to become more critical of their own realities and more sensitive to the intercultural encounters they are supposed to engage with this highly complex and ever increasingly intercultural world.

Classrooms across the world are increasingly populated by students and teachers of diverse language and cultural backgrounds and can therefore be understood as contexts for intercultural communication par excellence. (Kasper and Omori 2010, 455)

Initial words

The internationalisation and the consequent global spread of natural languages in contemporary times, especially English, is a recurring phenomenon, and, unquestionably, has contributed to the dissolution of national borders, calling our attention to the many implications at various levels in different areas, including language teacher education. As postulated by Block and Cameron (2002, 1), language remains an issue of crucial importance when it comes to global communication since the 'intensification of worldwide social relations [equally] intensifies the need for members of global networks to develop competence in one or more additional languages, and/or to master new ways of using languages they know already'. This implies that 'globalization changes the conditions in which language learning and language teaching takes place' (Block and Cameron 2002, 2), as much as what

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speakers of these languages do with the powerful cultural capital (Bourdieu 1999) they acquire throughout the years.

According to Kubota (2002, 14), 'while globalization projects the image of diversity, it also implies cultural homogenization influenced by global standardization of economic activities and a flow of cultural goods from the center to the periphery'. The search for a performance more consistent with this current global society of transcultural flows (Risager 2006; Pennycook 2007) has brought us to contend that our societies are in need of intercultural language educators for a world which has been presenting itself as more intercultural than ever before. Concerning English specifically,[1] due to its spectacular spread around the planet, the quality of teacher professional preparation has become a key issue. More than that, the global scenario that we have in front of us today presupposes, among several challenges, an epistemic break with certain ideological and pedagogical traditions, which is to envisage possibilities and strategies for transformation, liberation, and transgression in the process of English language education in practically every corner of the world (Kumaravadivelu 2012).

In other words, a paradigm change is taking place in the area of language education, which is to distance itself from the idea of solemnly drawing on pedagogical premises dictated by certain 'brilliant minds' of the global North, and that, for decades, has conceived the act of learning additional languages basically through instrumental and conventional lenses once languages have been taken as mere economic commodities (Block and Cameron 2002). But as Mignolo (2000) argues, learning a new language is much more than acquiring a new linguistic code, it is a new way of being in the world, and due to the consequences (good and bad) of globalisation, it is possible to affirm that we are seeing now the rise of a process of conscience raising, which becomes deeply critical of the fact that so far what has prevailed in language education in practically all contexts around the world is the construction of a political activity solely oriented by the hegemonic centres where the languages operate (Rubdy 2015).

With this scenario in mind, our objective here is to briefly discuss and reflect on the challenges and goals that await the contemporary language teacher, especially the English teacher, this professional who, among other things, is responsible for opening doors to a great number of people from dramatically different walks of life through the acquisition of the language which today holds a symbolic power never seen before in the history of mankind. With this in mind, the paper also seeks to problematise the political, ideological and pedagogical implications of the expansion of English as a global language, now widely taken as an international means of communication, and the importance of teacher education, defending the consolidation of a sociopolitical commitment whose aim is to help students produce their own discourses and counterdiscourses through the global language, fighting and rejecting any kind of oppression and marginalisation perpetrated by forces which still tend to ignore the plurality that unites us and has always made us uniquely diverse.

Whether we are fully aware or not of such matters, it is an undeniable fact that today's globalisation process has reached every society in the world, generating all kinds of consequences and affecting different players in various ways. One of these consequences has been the expansion of certain (neo)imperial languages, along with the worldviews instilled by the movement which, in the specific case of language teaching and learning, makes imperative a critical scrutiny and assessment of certain pedagogical postures considered untouchable for a long time. In a nutshell, this implies the questioning of the conception of language courses, curricula and programmes, the adoption of certain teaching practices and strategies, the rationales behind the production of classroom materials, the universalisation of evaluation systems, to cite a few, prompting us to propose changes, adaptations, re-orientations towards language teacher education in order to respond to the demands and configurations of the current global context.

These are some of the issues and discussions that, potentially, demand the rethinking of the profile of the contemporary language teacher, imprinting, among other aspects, a more 'glocal'[2] attitude that shall make practitioners more conscious of their role as intercultural mediators in this globalised world. Regarding English specifically, such a debate is extremely pertinent at this moment as its peculiar condition of the world's lingua franca (Ur 2010) prompts educators to pursue the goal of, thorough the teaching of such a powerful language, preparing future users to function effectively in all kinds of contexts. Besides that, provide users of English with the skills and competences to communicate with the other at the same level in any particular situation, thus becoming more critical of their own realities and more sensitive to the intercultural encounters they are supposed to engage in along their lives. The implications and controversies of such a complex reality comprise what the paper aims to discuss in the sections to come.

Globalisation and the emergence of a common language

It is not necessary to engage in deep and heated debates in order to reach the conclusion that the current globalisation process has provoked many changes, both positive and negative, in today's world society. Globalisation has also marked its trajectory, to many an overpowering one, with the emergence of different phenomena more and more visible each day, and in several aspects, rather controversial. When it comes to languages, as Wright (2004, 10) remarks, 'the massive migrations of the second half of the twentieth century has an immense effect on language behaviour as large numbers of speakers of diverse languages came into contact'. Although there have been movements to privilege languages of origin in the new 'homes', thus rejecting complete assimilation like in the past, the revolution of information technology, among other features related especially to the massive and uncontrolled spread of the U.S. cultural industry notably during the post-war era and the cold war, has enforced and paved the way to the idea of a global common language. In other words, '[a]s globalisation has brought people

into association and caused the need for a medium of communication, the general solution has been to use English as a lingua franca' (Wright 2004, 11). So, doubtlessly, the global expansion of English, which has helped bring to surface the discussion about the hegemony of an imperial language which navigates on the waves of the power of its strongest stakeholder, the United States of America, is cause and consequence of today's globalisation.

While the most common discourse is the one which states that 'English was in the right place at the right time', authors like Phillipson (1992, 2011), for example, disagree with such a conveniently propagated argument, and are always reiterating the not always admitted intimate relationship between language and power. In his review of the volume, *The Last Lingua Franca. English Until the Return of Babel*, written by Nicholas Ostler (2010), Phillipson (2011) criticises the author of the book for his offering the reader a very soft facet of a language which, like several European imperial languages, carries blood in its historical trajectory. For Phillipson (2011), Ostler views English in its expansion around the globe simply as a language of convenience. According to the author,

> Coercive military force is occasionally mentioned, but there is not a word on the global militarism of the USA of the past century. [He] uncritically considers English as 'the world's lingua franca' and 'the world's language of choice' (p. xix), profoundly classist, ethnocentric claims that are common in politicians' special pleading for English. (Phillipson 2011, 197,198)

As we can see, this never imagined spread of English (and to a certain extent of other natural languages) is just one of the many controversies involving the current globalisation process. Certainly, there are other elements to be considered, and factual reality has shown us that such discussions do not happen in a very pacifist, harmonious and generalised way. We are all aware that we have been experiencing a very complex contemporaneity in which a profusion of disputes at various levels continue to emerge. Once we realise that this is a global phase which distinguishes itself from the previous ones for taking into consideration several of its intrinsic and peculiar characteristics such as the conception of the world as a global village, or as Blommaert (2010) prefers, a complex web of villages, encounters and/or confrontation of cultures, dissolution of national borders, intensification of tensions and conflicts between centre and periphery, the very high global mobility, generating what (Vertovec 2007) would see as 'superdiversity', technological advances unimaginable until recently, and, of course, the question of a common global language.

Concerning the 'threat' of a single common language to our ecology of languages,[3] it is always important to bear in mind that the global hegemony of English is not something unanimous, and, consequently, unquestionable. Other internationalised (or denationalised) languages have also demonstrated their power and, in the near future, they can surely compete with English in a more incisive and substantial way. As an example, in 2012, while the number of *Facebook* English-speaking users practically stagnated within the span of 10 years,

Portuguese-speaking users in the same period increased more than 800%, along with Arabic speakers – a 500% rise.[4] Additionally, we also have to consider Chinese Mandarin.[5]

But our reflection here is on English exactly because it is still the widest spoken language nowadays. However, it is plausible to suggest that many of the more general assumptions posed here, if not all, are highly compatible with any teaching context of a language which moves beyond its borders and travels around the world, experiencing, above all, intercultural encounters. In other words, several of those languages that we consider 'denationalised', like Arabic, Portuguese, French or Spanish, for example, preserving due proportions, are to be submitted to such principles and assumptions, putting into a relative perspective what Wright (2004, 11) says when she states that 'from the end of the Cold War, the hegemony of English in political, economic, cultural and technological spheres has remained unchallenged'.

This language has gained a status never reached by any other natural/national language. Its impressive global expansion has made us realise that we are living a reality where there has been an emergence of a 'fever for English'. That is, English is more than ever *en vogue*, in fashion, and, consequently, the entire world feels compelled to learn the language of technology, entertainment, global scientific knowledge and transnational businesses. These days, if one is not set to learn English, one almost becomes a creature from another planet, a real alien. The marketing industry is more than aware of this situation, and takes advantage of its enormous power, and at all levels, incorporates and sells the idea of acquiring English. Naturally, even unconsciously, people buy and join that trend in an almost always uncritical way.

And in this amazing rush for the global language, in the pedagogical realm, for instance, it is possible to come across all kinds of opportunistic strategies which promise to facilitate the access to this commodity such as 'learn English through hypnosis', 'learn English in your sleep', 'speak English fluently in one week through exclusive methods', or just like what has been happening in Asia, something like *Crazy English* is invented and flourishes, a supposed methodology originated in China and that has become viral in that region, where thousands of people gather in huge venues such as parks, gymnasiums and even stadiums, in order to join an instructor with the profile of a TV entertainer, and start their studies shouting and screaming lessons to themselves. Needless to say, such initiatives around the learning of a powerful language like English have turned people into millionaires of the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry, along with famous writers of textbooks of great international penetration, usually connected to the powerful and transnational editorial conglomerates mainly based in Great Britain or the United States of America.

All in all, it is impossible to deny, as Pennycook (2001, 78) would remind us, that 'English is the world and the world is in English', and although *linguas francae* are a phenomenon as old as humanity itself, what has called the world's attention about

English is exactly the reach of its spread. Never before has a language travelled so far, landing on so many different corners of the planet. And as it could not be otherwise, the phenomenon per se and its implications are to be conceived, investigated, analysed, and interpreted through different perspectives. Several labels have been attributed to the phenomenon, but as Erling (2005, 43) would point out, 'more important than finding an appropriate name for English is ensuring that ELT professionals around the world move their practice away from an ideology that privileges [native] varieties'. It is our contention that in today's super diverse world, with people moving rapidly across continents for many different reasons, language is to be taught as a social practice since communication is much more than a transmission of information, but 'a creative, cultural act in its own right through which social groups constitute themselves'. (Liddicoat and Scarino 2013, 13). With this in mind, Erling (2005, 43) defends that, in the case of English, for instance, 'the language must be taught as a means of intercultural communication, critical analysis and indeed, where necessary, resistance', revealing that current practices and pedagogies in language education in order to respond to different users' expectations and profiles need to be clearly associated with an intercultural perspective.

Interculturality and language teacher education

A denationalised language like English, which today has more non-native speakers than native, brings to visibility several important characteristics such as high levels of hybridity, great diversity of users, and, above all, it makes possible for speakers to engage in more and more meaningful intercultural interactions, having as interlocutors individuals from any part of the world, bearing the most diverse *linguacultural* backgrounds.

Contemporarily, we would argue that it may sound strange and outdated to discuss the process of teaching and learning languages without connecting certain fundaments, for example, to the concept of interculturality. In other words, if the intercultural condition in language teaching is becoming more and more visible and broadly acknowledged as extremely important, it is imperative that university courses, programmes and curricula begin to consider placing emphasis on the process of educating intercultural language professionals who, in their daily classroom practice, oriented by equally intercultural approaches upon graduation, will leave for the real world of teaching much better equipped and, certainly, more sensitive to the education of users who need to be ready, not only to acquire a new language, which theoretically belongs to somebody else, but to appropriate, manipulate and reshape it according to their own needs and interests (Nault 2006).

Once we embrace the term interculturality, we affiliate ourselves with the thoughts of Guilherme (2000, 297), when she defines the concept by saying that it is 'the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures we recognise as being different from our own'. For Estermann (2010, 33), 'interculturality describes

symmetric and horizontal relations between two or more cultures, with the objective of mutually enriching one another and contributing to greater human plenitude'.[6] In the same line of thought, Mendes (2012, 359) adds that the sense of 'intercultural' that she defends refers to the 'comprehension of what is possible, in the entanglement of cultural differences and shocks which are at play in the contemporary world', or still, continues the author, interculturality is about the establishment of 'bridges, dialogues among individual and collective cultures, so that we can live more respectfully and more democratically'[7] (Mendes 2012, 360).

Consequently, as Siqueira and Barros (2013) argue, the intercultural dialogue to which these and other authors refer seeks to contribute to the construction of a positive interpretation of the social and cultural plurality of the world we live in, departing from a point of view based on the 'respect for difference, under a perspective of education for alterity and on the comprehension of the different which characterizes the singularity and the unrepeatability of each human being'[8] (Padilha 2004, 14).

Similarly, Scheyerl and Siqueira (2006, 93) postulate that the intercultural dialogue is one which 'privileges the respect to differences and makes visible identity traces as constructors of a politics of solidarity'.[9] In this sense, we refer to a solidarity dialogue, but we understand this is not necessarily a pacifist one, as we all know it is generally criss-crossed by all types of conflicts (Siqueira and Barros 2013). Within such framing, Mendes (2007, 121) has earlier pointed out that conflicts among cultures are something inherent, once

> [t]here is no encounter between different cultures and people which does not count on an intricate web of forces and tensions that emerge from the battles of different world views. There is no encounter of differences without conflict.[10]

Having said this, and taking into consideration that today interactions in English, for instance, 'typically occur in highly variable socio/linguacultural networks', (Cogo and Dewey 2012, 8), it is our conviction that, for being confronted with a totally new and even more challenging pedagogical dynamics, it makes no sense to insist on holding to the old tradition of forming language teachers, especially teachers of English, to still plan and give their classes founded in paradigms, practices and procedures notoriously anachronistic and distanced from the current reality clearly pointed out by Cogo and Dewey (2012, 25):

> In the past few decades a wealth of research has demonstrated that with globalization and increased mobility more people have come into contact, with the result that communication has become evermore 'intercultural'. Since English is the primary means of international communication (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006) it is increasingly regarded as the most form of intercultural interaction.

However, for some sectors in research agendas, it seems that the picture described above does not mean much. In this sense, Cogo and Dewey (2012, 25,26) insist that, 'despite the fact that most communication in English takes place between second language users, until relatively recently the focus of intercultural communication research was on native versus non-native communication'.

Bearing this in mind, and conceiving language as 'much more than an object of teaching, but the bridge, the mediating dimension between cultural subjects/ worlds [whose] focus lies within the dialogical relationships, within the place of interaction'[11] (Mendes 2011, 140), it is our argument that we need to have as an important goal the internalisation of the fact that a lot of things are to change in today's language classrooms, and that there are innumerable and complex implications for current educational practices, once we begin to pay closer attention to the new realities around us and get fully prepared to deal with a new student profile, within a conception of language distanced from the structuralist tradition (Saraceni 2015), still prevalent in most language courses the world over. In other words, it is crucial that we understand that 'an intercultural orientation focuses on languages and cultures as sites of interactive engagement in the act of meaning-making and implies a transformational engagement of the learner in the act of learning' (Liddicoat and Scarino 2013, 49).

Additionally, we shall also need to seriously think about new ways of decolonisation at several levels such as methodologies, curricula, assessment systems, instructional materials, which are still extensively used in language classes, paying heed to what Kumaravadivelu (2012) would call an 'epistemic break', for him, a thorough re-conceptualisation and re-organisation of knowledge systems, 'the episteme which basically symbolizes West-oriented, Center-based knowledge systems that practitioners in the periphery countries almost totally depend on' (Kumaravadivelu 2012, 15).

However, for this to start to materialise, it is crucial that we involve all language professionals, especially the ones in a pre-service condition (student teachers), as these are part of a new generation of educators who will have to work with a totally different student, today much more skillful in several aspects, and willing to engage in global intercultural encounters, potentially capable of exercising their planetary citizenship in a more emphatic and critical way.

As Guilherme (2002) reminds us, citizenship education is being reintroduced in many countries as an independent discipline at all levels of basic and secondary education, and this is extremely important once language educators can have at their disposal materials and resources which can easily link this area directly with language education, sharing and discussing meaningful and relevant issues like identity, mobility, social responsibility, community involvement, cultural diversity, just to cite a few. Certainly, such possibilities are to involve all kinds of learners, especially those who find themselves in disadvantageous conditions either in their own countries or in a new and strange land where, very often, they are supposed to start their lives practically from scratch. This is when the language factor holds the potential of making things easier or extremely difficult, and in this sense, language teacher education shall not continue failing to take such matters into consideration as it still happens practically everywhere in the world. Actually, whether we admit or not, the language teachers we are educating in our universities are roughly prepared to teach language as a structural system, let alone as the aforementioned

social practice. As we argued here, it is within such a perspective that the possibility of having the desired critical intercultural speaker emerge in language classrooms all over the planet gets to be much higher and, naturally, more aligned to the new global reality. With this in mind, we believe the words by Guilherme (2002, 158) trigger an important reflection:

> It is the task of foreign language/culture education to interrogate dominant and sub-ordinate ideologies, to give 'voice' to those discourses that have been silenced and to the particular narratives of the students, and to make connections between different narratives both at the local and global levels.

If we agree with Estermann (2010, 44) when he states that interculturality points to the mutual enrichment of parties involved in different encounters, and that one of the objectives of interculturality is 'the harmonious interaction among human beings, different groups, nations, civilizations and religions',[12] it makes no sense to still relegate these topics and the issues associated with them to a secondary level within the scope of language teacher education. As broadly recognised, today, the world's population is more interrelated to one another than any period in human history. Because of that, it is only natural that we expect, and even demand, that language teacher education, besides other practices that are to be updated, incorporates an agenda which guarantees the formation of interculturally sensitive language teachers since it is basically through language that these intrinsically intercultural encounters take place on a daily basis. Our language classrooms, regardless of conditions and objectives, cannot ignore such a scenario and continue depicting a reality different from that of the world outside, that is, they cannot still be conceived according to the questionable tradition of teaching languages mostly dissociated from what happens in the real world.

Action upon reflection

As we discuss intercultural education, teachers' personal opinions, beliefs and commitment should go along with the elaboration of curricula, programmes, materials and the construction of a school community oriented towards this perspective. Despite the fact that many language educators around the world are well aware of the current global scenario and the pressing implications related to classroom pedagogy, it is plausible to say that these professionals still seem to be entrapped in a deep conflict which involves, on the one hand, teaching languages for a 'fictitious' purpose, solely based on traditional assumptions that regard languages as sets of rules, or on the other, teaching languages for the real world, considering that one of the most important objectives in this process is to be empowered to deconstruct hegemonic discourses and place ourselves actively in a game where players should be able to function on equal terms. This is especially true when it comes to the teaching of a denationalised language like English, since 'the more widely spoken a language, the greater will be the visibility of the internal dissensions that mark its speech community' (Rajagopalan 2004, 113).

As more and more teachers from different parts of the globe gain easier access to the knowledge being produced by research pertaining to language as social practice and the consequent deconstruction of traditional pedagogies and approaches[13] (especially among the younger generations), the more we are to expect the development of a critical posture from these professionals. Among other things, they will be able to conceive of changes at the personal level, for example, 'engaging in forming and reforming their identities in this globalized world' (Kumaravadivelu 2012, 12), and at the professional level, having their classes focus 'on what is essential for understanding to occur regardless of the accent of variety of English [or of any language] being used by participants in a conversation' (Chopin 2015, 198). This will also contribute towards having teachers and students bear in mind that when dealing with language the element of power is always present, as attested by Rajagopalan (2004, 113):

> If anything, all languages bear testimony to the presence of unequal power distribution, and the power politics that invariably and inevitably play out in their respective speech communities. To imagine a speech community entirely rid of such power politics is to deflect the whole discussion from the real to an ideal world.

With this background activated, which shows an increasing awareness of the implications of teaching languages in this intercultural world, it is extremely important to remember that the process of teaching a new language 'should [always] be liberating for teachers and learners' (Kirkpatrick 2006, 79). Such a reflection makes us realise that preparing language teachers for the new global context and the demands attached to it is not a luxury. On the contrary, it is the logical thing to do. As Souza and Fleuri (2003 63) argue, we are always interacting with people that differ from us culturally, near or afar, and within this interplay of communication, it is important to remember that intercultural relations, in many ways, 'disturb the hierarchical and purist vision of cultures, power, and knowledge'.[14] In this sense, Candlin (1984, 22 cited in Crookes 2013, 34), advocated language curricula developed around relationships among certain issues like questions of race, gender, class, rights, etc., arguing that such an approach 'helps in the relativizing, personalizing and problematizing of experience, the enhancing of intercultural understanding'. Incredibly enough, even today, most of these issues do not comprise the syllabus of most language programmes and the contents of classroom materials of every nature.

So, as we can see, when it comes to language education, the intercultural element has always been present, but usually not given the importance it indeed holds once we venture into a new world of learning an additional language. Since looking at language as social practice has always had to battle against the prevailing dogma of language as a structural system within the foreign language teaching realm (Saraceni 2015), globalisation and the spread of languages like English throughout the world have triggered considerable discussion about the many intercultural encounters that have become more and more common in our everyday routines.

Certainly, such a panorama brings about discussions about intercultural communication to the forefront, and because of this, not only practitioners, but especially teacher educators, have to be aware of the fact that they need to abandon their traditional practices and be ready to humbly rethink a lot of what they have been doing over the years in order to indeed prepare intercultural teachers to this more than ever intercultural world.

Whether we realise it or not, in fact, it is not at all absurd to affirm that foreign language teacher educators are sort of lost, puzzled with an extremely complex reality, which calls for a teacher education oriented by premises, practices, conceptions, tools and strategies different from the ones still used, though many of us are aware that a great part of these earlier orientations have been proven obsolete and outdated (Rajagopalan 2004). Bluntly put, the education of this new language teacher implies, above all, the destabilisation of the comfort zone of teacher educators themselves. This means, in many ways, going back to studying, reviewing concepts and developing sensitiveness to what has been produced in different areas related to language education. In other words, in order not to be considered some type of 'illiterate of the twenty-first century', language teacher educators should make themselves willing to learn, unlearn and relearn[15] (Toffler 1990).

When it comes to intercultural communication, as Cogo and Dewey (2012) point out, the type of research undertaken in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), for example, differs from traditional intercultural communication research, which, as already mentioned, basically focuses on native versus non-native communication:

> One common denominator in most research in intercultural communication is what might be described as the 'conflict view', which sees communication as inherently problematic, and sees research into cultural differences as a way of preventing conflicts. (Cogo and Dewey 2012, 26)

For these authors, then,

> the type of research that we undertake is *intercultural* in nature (or maybe better still, *transcultural*), in that it concerns communication that takes place among speakers from various linguacultural backgrounds […], interacting in English, and making use of the language as a contact language or lingua franca. (Cogo and Dewey 2012, 26)

This is just a sample of what teacher educators should work on in order to be able to adjust their studies and pedagogy to this new reality. Bearing some of these questions in mind, it is our argument that today's intercultural world, in fact, will demand intercultural teachers that, besides being introduced to studies like the ones cited by Cogo and Dewey (2012) and many others, are able to understand what it means to deal with issues like identity, power, racial conflicts, social change, global mobility, just to cite a few, while engaged in the tranmission of the powerful 'cultural capital' languages like English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Chinese, Arabic, etc. In fact, more than the intercultural practitioner, we should aim for the development of *critical* intercultural teachers, that is, a professional who is fully aware of the fact that interacting in a new language involves teaching it in a realistic way. A professional willing to engage in empowering pedagogical practices

that hold the potential to entitle him/her to search and devise local solutions to the many challenges he/she is certainly to face along the development of his/her career.

Based on such a reflection and taking into consideration findings from a study with non-native teachers working in Brazil (Siqueira 2008), we propose the adoption of a few initiatives on the part of practitioners which can encourage them to rethink their practices and lead them into the adoption of a critical intercultural language pedagogy. For this goal to be potentially accomplished, we suggest that teachers engage themselves in:

(1) approximating language education to education in general, thus, to the socio-political issues inherent to the process of educating people;

(2) recognising and conducting language teaching as an eminently political activity;

(3) understanding language as an essentially social and ideological instrument, not as a package of grammar rules to be memorised;

(4) rejecting methodologies that privilege practices related to a 'banking' linguistic education, in the Freirean sense;

(5) searching the re-signification of concepts, the re-evaluation of foreign language teaching paradigms, the questioning of methods and procedures founded on the monolingual native speaker model;

(6) joining, as frequently as possible, teacher development programmes, instead of teacher *training* programmes, aiming at expanding knowledge in theoretical and pedagogical not just methodological contents;

(7) analysing critically the reality around them, taking into consideration the highly sensitive nature of the role exercised by several natural languages in today's world;

(8) investing in the development of their critical intercultural competence in order to be able to foster similar abilities in their learners;

(9) understanding clearly that any language is what its speakers/users, either native or non-native, do with it;

(10) preparing learners to become speakers/users capable of functioning both at local and global levels;

(11) defending and adopting initiatives of democratisation of the access to powerful languages like English, for example, as a right;

(12) fighting against myths and prejudices as much as any xenophobic, ethnocentric, imperialistic attitudes associated to language (Siqueira 2008, 335).

Once we are able to foster sensitivity and openness to the issues involving language education posed here, we arrive at a place where these future professionals can become relatively conscious of their role as potential critical intercultural teachers in this current globalised world. As Kumaravadivelu (2016) would suggest,

they can be empowered to see themselves as intellectuals and become equipped to move away from the subaltern position they have historically conformed to. Once these teachers internalise that 'critical consciousness and the will to act can be achieved through education' (Kumaravadivelu 2016, 76), in our case, a more solid and broader language teacher education, they will certainly respond much more positively towards the goal of, as Kumaravadivelu (2016, 78) again would remark, '[untangling] themselves from the colonial and hegemonic [matrices] of power, method, and discourse' that have practically remained untouched and unquestioned. In other words, we just need to put reflection into action.

Final remarks

As Silva (2002, ix) states, 'it is difficult to think of a time in history when education was viewed as a more significant enabling social, political and cultural force than at the end of the twentieth century and the dawning of the twenty-first century'. Having already reached half of the second decade of the new century, the assumption is still true, and, in our view, such a claim, more than ever, is to be extended to language education. For what was discussed and explained in this paper, although in a brief manner, for us, it is important to highlight that language education as a whole is usually refractory to radical changes which may destabilise enrooted beliefs and the consolidated practices that derive from them. It seems reasonable to say that a lot of this resistance, at least in our context, is anchored in the fact that teacher educators are somewhat confused, not to say, aloof, once they find themselves having to face a much more complex reality that is all the time testing their knowledge, beliefs, flexibility, and so forth.

As we attempted to make clear, this scenario, which is very different from the ones we were all used to, has been calling for a language education oriented by premises, practices, conceptions, strategies and tools very diverse from the ones teacher educators have been utilising all these years, even in the case of those who have reached the realisation that several of them have proven to be outdated and anachronistic, and are in need of being re-evaluated if not discarded.

In this sense, with all this reflexive apparatus inviting us to take action, it is important to pay heed to the fact that the education of this new language teacher (who will have in his/her room totally different learners from past years) implies, above all, a serious rethinking of the posture of teacher educators. A simple change in attitude, for example, will bring teacher trainers and educators to reaching the goal of forming the long-desired critical intercultural teacher who, potentially, will be much better prepared to safely and confidently operate in this intercultural world.

Furthermore, engaged in action upon reflection, we can envision an empowered contemporary language teacher who is willing to collaborate with his/her fellow teachers in order to fight for the updating of curricula, courses, programmes and disciplines, someone who can demand a broader access to the knowledge

produced in the field and in other interrelated areas, and, as Kumaravadivelu (2012) contends, a language professional who will be able to free himself/herself from the historic dependence on language teaching hegemonic knowledge systems and orientations. We can think of having teachers who support and sponsor the strengthening of an autochthonous epistemology, who demand the re-evaluation and re-structuring of assessment systems, who engage themselves, as previously cited, in behaviours of decolonisation of minds, attitudes, and, in a more practical way, of instructional materials, especially those produced by the multibillionaire transnational textbook industry. Teachers who are able to fight for their empowerment as educators and language researchers, aiming at the (re)construction of a professional profile more adequate to their local reality so that they, relying on their own means and efforts, become capable of producing local solutions for local challenges.

As the title of the paper suggests, language education has been going through serious transformations, and, consequently, our goals need to be scrutinized thoroughly and be systematically revised at the light of the enormous challenges that are (and will always be) naturally attached to them. However, moments of crisis should always be taken as instances of opportunities, once it is from the experience of 'losing the ground under our feet' that we certainly get to learn the best and most meaningful lessons. The common and lucrative utilitarian vision attached to language teaching, so consolidated and celebrated in many corners of the world, was to have been abandoned a long time ago, but consolidated and universalised practices, especially if originated in centres of power, have always resisted to any sign of change, mainly when closely associated with gigantic industries that feed on them, and out of them get their enormous revenues and fat profits.

In sum, within the scope of the discussion, it is important to keep in mind that learning this 'new way of being in the world' is a very complex and sensitive process, or as Mignolo (2000, 37) would add, it 'is most of the time hard and painful'. For this reason, we insist that language education, more than ever, is in need of teachers who are sensitive and attentive to the 'pains' to be felt by future global language learners. Learners from a new era who, counting on the competence of those who are to guide them through many rocky paths, will develop the capacity of, without traumas and fears, entering the 'brave new world' that any adventure into learning a new language will always reserve for them. Inspired by Dewey's (2015) words, the time to wake up some dogs in this area has arrived, and from what we have recently seen and experienced, they are very hungry.

Notes

1. Though most assumptions discussed in the text are applicable to any language which holds the status of an international means of communication, our choice for English is due the fact that never before has a natural language expanded and traveled so far

throughout the planet like English, and it is exactly this expansion and all its inherent implications that comprise our main research interest in Applied Linguistics.

2. The term 'glocalization' is a neologism resulting from the combination of the words *globalization* and *localization*, and refers to the presence of the local dimension in the production of a global culture; the term dates from the 1980s, and has its origins in Japanese business practices. It derives from the Japanese word *dochakuka,* which means 'global localization'. The term was first introduced in the Occident by Robertson (1997), and according to this author, the concept has the merit of restoring the multidimensional reality of the current globalization movement. Adapted and translated from https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glocalizacao, Accessed 11 November 2015. See also Robertson (1994).

3. According to Mühlhäusler (2010), the first use of the ecology metaphor in linguistics is found in a paper by Voegelin and Schutz on language varieties, where there is a distinction between intralanguage and interlanguage ecology. The metaphor was introduced in 1971 by Haugen in a paper titled 'The Ecology of Language', in which he defines the term as 'the study of interactions between any given language and its environment' (325).

4. Source: www.socialbakers.com/blog/1064-top-10-fastest-growing-facebook-languages, Accessed 12 October 2015.

5. Check TIME Magazine cover story, *Get Ahead! Learn Mandarin!*, 6 June 2006. Available at:http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2047,305-2,00.html, Accessed 12 October 2015.

6. *La interculturalidad describe relaciones simétricas y horizontales entre dos o más culturas, a fin de enriquecerse mutuamente y contribuir a mayor plenitud humana.*

7. *[…] compreensão do que é possível, no emaranhado das diferenças e choques culturais que estão em jogo no mundo contemporâneo... pontes, diálogos inter/entre culturas individuais e coletivas, de modo que possamos conviver mais respeitosamente, mais democraticamente.*

8. *[…] respeito à diferença, numa perspectiva de educação para alteridade e na compreensão do diferente que caracteriza a singularidade e a irrepetibilidade de cada sujeito humano.*

9. *[…] privilegia o respeito às diferenças e dá visibilidade aos traços de identidade como construtores de uma política de solidariedade.*

10. *Não há encontro entre culturas ou entre povos distintos sem que esteja presente uma intricada rede de forças e tensões que são provenientes do embate de diferentes visões de mundo. Não há encontro de diferenças sem conflito.*

11. *[…] mais do que objeto de ensino, a ponte, a dimensão mediadora entre sujeitos/mundos culturais, [cujo] enfoque se dá nas relações de diálogo, no lugar de interação.*

12. *Uno de los objetivos de la interculturalidad consiste en la convivencia pacífica entre los seres humanos, diferentes grupos, naciones, civilizaciones y religiones.*

13. Referring specifically to English Language Teaching (ELT), Rajagopalan (2004, 113, 114) argues that many of the practices that have for long been in place need to be reviewed drastically with a view to addressing the new set of challenges being thrown at us by the phenomenon he calls World English (WE). For the author, 'up until now a good deal of our taken-for-granted ELT practices have been threatened with the prospect of being declared obsolete for the simple reason that they do not take into account some of the most significant characteristics of WE'.

14. Original in Portuguese: *As relações interculturais, em certa medida, perturbam a visão hierarquizada e purificada das culturas, do poder e do conhecimento.*

15. The complete quote by Toffler (1990) is: 'The illiterate of the twenty-first century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn'.

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