

# Deconstructing grand narratives in Applied Linguistics: Queer praxiologies and language education from the tropics

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*My objective in this paper is to present some contributions from queer praxiologies to the field of language education. More specifically, I propose an inquiring analysis of the constructs education, language, beliefs, and interaction, which still reproduce a variety of concepts rooted in modern/colonial grand narratives that have operated as grand narratives themselves within Applied Linguistics. Based on a range of critical studies carried out in Brazil, the queering of these four constructs enables the comprehension of language education as queer literacies practice, that is, as an activity mediated by a set of textual repertoires which may foster the construction of new meanings of gender, sexuality, and other identity categories in the classroom. As a Brazilian/Latin American scholar, I hope my reflections work as a subversive micro-narrative from the tropics, inspiring other dialogues and teaching performances that might turn language education into a transformative activity in different contexts around the globe.*

**Keywords:** Queer praxiologies, subversive micro-narratives, language education, social change

*[...] as we think about worlds that might one day become thinkable, sayable, legible, the opening up of the foreclosed and the saying of the unspeakable become part of the very "offense" that must be committed in order to expand the domain of linguistic survival. The resignification of speech requires opening new contexts, speaking in ways that have never yet been legitimated, and hence producing legitimation in new and future forms.*  
(Judith Butler, 1997, p. 41)

## 1 A world of disputed narratives

One of the pernicious consequences of modernity was the imposition of universalizing concepts on social life. Created as facts and presented as unquestionable truths, those concepts were globally spread as *grand narratives* (Lyotard, 1979/1984), articulating totalizing explanations for history and the subject. In this sense, we can assume that modern grand narratives have worked

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as “march[es] to prison” (Bauman, 1997, p. vvii), considering their ruthless intention to order the world through the *disciplinarization* of bodies, ideas, and behaviors (Foucault, 1975/2009). Therefore, it can be concluded that, despite its promises of equality, freedom, and peace (Santos, 1999), modernity has produced a range of clashes, restrictions, and inequalities in privileging certain forms of being in the world, as well as certain ways of understanding it. Given that such repertoires are intimately connected to the colonial enterprise and still operate in our present-day life, I prefer to recognize them as products of the historical frame that has been termed *colonial modernity* (Quijano, 2007).

Nevertheless, the contemporary moment has also been characterized by the emergence of subversive micro-narratives that problematize modern/colonial grand narratives about power, knowledge, and the subject (Rocha, 2013). Besides, those micro-narratives have responded to the growing projection of conservative and authoritarian voices in politics around the world, which have questioned discursive and empirical changes in the social order, weakened or rejected progressive ideas and projects, and promoted a gradual and quite unperceivable collapse in democratic systems – as we have witnessed in Brazil with President Jair Bolsonaro. Like Bauman (1991/1999), I believe we are living the time of “contingency as destiny”, an idea that presumes the “acknowledgment of contingency as a suitable reason for living and having permission to live” (p. 248). According to Fabrício (2006a), this idea points to the fact that contemporary life is immersed in a field crossed by plural forces that combine a series of cultural meanings. Thus, I agree that the most appropriate standpoint before the problematizing atmosphere that permeates the current world is the attempt to *unlearn* every kind of axiomatic perception of reality, which involves “thinking the unthinkable” and “relying on what is known to make it different” (Fabrício, 2006a, p. 61).

A distinguished point of articulation of subversive micro-narratives in the present moment has been the field of *queer theories* (Halberstam, 2011, 2012; Jagose, 1996; Louro, 2004; Love, 2016; Miskolci, 2009, 2012; Pereira, 2019). Starting from the resignification of an injurious linguistic term – queer –, queer theories propose a radical critical analysis of the essentialisms related to the categories *gender* and *sexuality*. They argue that these categories do not preexist culture and discourse, and highlight the violence produced by one of the most accepted modern/colonial grand narratives: the cis-heteronormative matrix. Understood as a *critique of normalization*, the queer framework seeks “to transgress the binary logic that results in the establishment of hierarchies and subalternizations”, hence advocating for “the multiplicity of differences” (Miskolci, 2009, p. 175). From this perspective, queer theories can be defined as deconstructivist analytical strategies that move us beyond normative social accounts. As maintained by Seidman (1995), queer thinkers imagine society as a text to be interpreted and critiqued with the intention of challenging hegemonic knowledges.

Throughout the text, I adopt the phrase *queer praxiologies* to refer to queer background more broadly. At first, the word *praxiology* is inspired by the work of Bourdieu (1996), who suggests a dialectical combination of objectivist and phenomenological repertoires in knowledge production. Secondly, this word embodies the concept of *praxis* used by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970/2005), who defines it as the activities of reflection/action we perform to understand and act upon the world. Therefore, I believe the adoption of *queer praxiologies* breaks with the binarism *theory/practice*, challenging the merely

theoretical notions that queer theories have at times (re)produced. The phrase is employed in the plural to highlight the heterogeneity of the queer framework and the multiple ways one can turn to in order to deal with its premises. An important argument I intend to develop is that such perceptions might contribute to producing alternative perspectives of queer knowledge. As a Brazilian/Latin American scholar, I hope to align with the project Pereira (2019) names *queer in the tropics*, which involves the production of subversive micro-narratives on queer knowledges that reflect and respond to the local histories, demands, and dynamics of the Global South.

My objective in this paper is to present some contributions from queer praxiologies to the field of language education, which continues, at least to some extent, reproducing a variety of concepts rooted in modern/colonial grand narratives that have operated as grand narratives themselves in the area. Based on my personal experiences as an English teacher and an Applied Linguistics researcher in Brazil, I believe these grand narratives can be noticed, among others, in four perceptions maintained by several language professionals: *education* is a neutral practice; *language* is an instrument of communication; *beliefs* are personal impressions about learning and teaching experiences; *interaction* is a site for consensus. I have decided to focus on these four constructs and perceptions because they result from grand narratives produced in and imposed by hegemonic territories in the Global South. Moreover, they essentially connect to language teaching worldwide and offer great potential for epistemological deconstruction within Applied Linguistics. In keeping with Derrida (1967/1997) and some of his reviewers (Butler, 1990; Culler, 1997), I do not employ the word *deconstruction* as a means to reject or destroy culturally rigid concepts, but to provide them with other possibilities of meaning and operation.

I must explain that my purpose in this article is not to analyze data from empirical studies or to share practical ideas of how to plan and implement queer language lessons, but to present *an introductory praxiological background* for teachers who have been seduced by the possibility of queering their language classrooms. How does the objective of problematizing identity performances and categories dialogue with the objective of learning or teaching languages? This is the main broad question that guides my discussion throughout the text. In the following section, I bring up a few premises of queer praxiologies, including a brief overview of their context of emergence and some of their social, political, and epistemological repertoires and dilemmas.

## 2 Queer praxiologies and social life: A brief narrative

In spite of being related to the emergence of and the claims posed by the so-called *new social movements* in the 1960s, the queer praxiological framework was consolidated in the late 1980s, in the United States, as a response to the sexual panic generated by the AIDS epidemic. For Miskolci (2012), the epidemic was both a biological fact and a social construction, seeing that AIDS was discursively produced as a sexually transmitted disease, and not as a viral infection, which made it be regarded as a kind of punishment for those who somehow deviated from traditional sexual standards. As a result, the discourses founded on the AIDS epidemic led certain groups within the homosexual movement to embrace more radical ideas, since those discourses had motivated the articulation of practices

ideologically guided by hegemonic values. In this sense, AIDS worked as a “biopolitical catalyst that produced more astute and radical forms of resistance” (Miskolci, 2012, p. 23).

Although it might refer to something positive in languages other than English, perhaps for its extensive popularization as the name of an academic field of inquiry, it is important to highlight that, in the Anglo-Saxon context, the word *queer* originally refers to a mockery, a swear word, an injury ascribed to non-heterosexual people. This is the reason why it is historically associated with a movement that intends to problematize coercive, disciplinary, and excluding discourses and practices established by the AIDS epidemic. In Louro’s (2004) view, those repertoires came to strengthen the tensions within the homosexual movement, in particular because most of its campaigns had been marked, since the beginning, by the interests of a male, white, middle class group of people who was eager to be socially accepted. Another question explored in the debates promoted at that time was the idea of a permanent, coherent, and unified homosexual identity (Louro, 2004). After all, do all gays and lesbians perform their gender and sexual identities in the same way? Articulating the requirements that emerged from the AIDS epidemic and the internal conflicts within the homosexual movement, queer theories sought to move beyond the mere social acceptance or inclusion of non-heterosexual subjects, demonstrating how certain sexual standards “produce experiences of abjection, dishonor, and stigma” (Miskolci, 2012, p. 25).

Academically speaking, the queer praxiological framework is often related to the publication of the books *Epistemology of the Closet*, by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, by Judith Butler, both published in 1990. The main question posed by Sedgwick (1990/2008) involves the idea that binary oppositions restrain freedom and knowledge, especially with regard to *sexuality*. Therefore, she argues that the binarism *heterosexual/homosexual* interferes negatively in our aptitude for thinking and knowing. In her turn, Butler (1990) proposes the deconstruction of the concept of *gender* which supports traditional feminist theories, an objective that is accomplished through the problematization of the idea that *sex* is something natural and *gender* is a social construct. The author claims that both *sex* and *gender* are not pre-discursive categories, but rather products of language and culture.

In problematizing this distinction, Butler (1990) troubles the subject of feminism – the woman –, making room for a radical critique of identity. Her main argument in this respect can be observed in the following account:

[...] *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the “congealing” is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. (Butler, 1990, p. 33, emphasis in original)

The problematizations articulated by Sedgwick (1990/2008) and Butler (1990) were crucial for the setting up and the consolidation of queer praxiologies in the academic sphere. As stated by Louro (2004), the popularly called *queer theories* pertain to the “sets of contemporary Western thinking which, throughout the 20th century, problematized classical notions of the subject, identity, agency, and

identification" (p. 40). This statement allows us to assume that the queer praxiological background upholds the construction of a *post-identity* politics for social life, namely, a politics that takes into account the ambiguity, the multiplicity, and the instability of the meanings attributed to and performed by the subject. According to Jagose (1996), queer theories problematize all the conceptions of identity, community, and politics which are believed to have naturally emerged from normative perceptions of the body. This is one of the reasons why some queer projects have focused on questions that expand to a broader spectrum of identity categories, such as *race*, *class*, and *religion* (Kirsch, 2000; Rocha, 2013; Sullivan, 2003; Urzêda-Freitas, 2018).

Despite its undeniable contribution to the field of social sciences, queer thinking has sometimes been criticized for its mainly theoretical position and for its eminent relationship with colonial territories. Regarding the former critique, I believe Jack Halberstam is a notable scholar that has related the queer framework to everyday-life issues, an attempt that is made clear in his option to use resources from popular knowledge to analyze a range of social topics (Halberstam, 2011, 2012, 2018). In *The queer art of failure*, for instance, the author draws on the concept of *low theory*, defined as "a mode of accessibility [...] that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 16), to problematize the idea of *success* that has structured the individual's life in capitalist societies. Bringing into play the elements of different cultural products, such as films and children's animations, he argues that "failure is productively linked to racial awareness, anticolonial struggle, gender variance, and different formulations of the temporality of success" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 92). Another example of this praxiological move can be observed in a review by Heather Love (2016), whose main objective is to reflect on the potential of queer studies to create alternative social repertoires. Based on Jagose's (2013) assumptions of twentieth-century orgasm, she contends that such views pose "a series of questions about taken-for-granted relations between sex acts, sexual identities, and the potential for social transformation" (Love, 2016, p. 169), thus pointing to "a largely untapped reservoir of queerness, hiding in plain sight - the queerness of everyday life" (Love, 2016, p. 173).

Pertaining to the latter critique, Brazilian anthropologist Pedro Paulo G. Pereira offers a set of reflections that dislocates queer thinking from its colonial roots and reshapes it according to other territories' particularities and social political claims. One of the main questions that guide the author's endeavor is: "are we faced with another theory that goes from the center to the peripheries (and that simply re-inscribes this center-periphery division in other colors)?" (Pereira, 2019, p. 5). Using the word *tropics* to designate the Global South, he suggests a close dialogue between queer praxiologies and decolonial thought as a way to construct other narratives and interpretations of social phenomena involving the categories *gender* and *sexuality*. According to him, this dialogue is likely to be productive for the reason that both queer and decolonial premises "are not modes of thought closed unto themselves, but rather movements of opening toward Others, of the insertion of other-theories and other forms of thinking and being" (Pereira, 2019, p. 6). Pereira's (2019, p. 44) argument is that, as inhabitants of the *tropics*, we have to move queer thinking toward local bodies, desires, and histories, so that it is "affected and reconfigured in processes of translation brought about by these other-experiences".

In the next section, I relate the social, political, and epistemological repertoires of queer praxiologies to the field of language studies, with special emphasis on the concept of deconstruction, on the theory of performativity, and on the poststructuralist critique, which somehow permeate the field of inquiry that has been named *queer linguistics*.

### 3 Intersecting narratives: Queer praxiologies with(in) language studies

The questions posed by queer thinkers have, since the beginning, pointed to the field of language studies, for the reason that, in avoiding classical ways to understand reality and the subject by providing “resistance to whatever constitutes the normal” (Jagose, 1996, p. 99), they have problematized the very notion of coherence, fixity, and stability of *the meaning*.

One of the academic repertoires that have supported this problematization is the concept of *deconstruction* proposed by Jacques Derrida in his *Of Grammatology* (1967/1997). The author’s perspective involves the notion that the Western world operates through a binary logic, which presupposes the existence of a central subject, regarded as superior, and an opposing subject, regarded as inferior, therefore creating a hierarchy between opposite terms/concepts/bodies. This is what happens, for instance, in the binarisms *man/woman* and *heterosexual/homosexual*. For Derrida (1967/1997), this traditional logic can be challenged through a deconstructivist procedure that enables the destabilization and the rearticulation of its determining binarisms. In keeping with Culler (1997), the deconstruction of a binary opposition does not imply its destruction, but the recognition of its artificiality, that is to say, the demonstration of its cultural development. Hence, the objective of deconstruction is to provide binary constructions with other possibilities of meaning and operation.

Jacques Derrida was one of the thinkers who inspired the deconstruction of identity put forward by Butler (1990). As I mentioned in the previous section, the main question raised by this author involves the perception that *sex* and *gender* are not pre-discursive categories. It is based on such an idea that Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) articulates her *theory of performativity*, which attributes to language the power to construct bodies and identities. In reference to the work of Austin (1962/1975), she claims that the language addressed to the body does not presume its mere description, but its construction: language produces what it refers to. This postulation allows us to understand that when doctors affirm to future parents, after checking the result of an ultrasound scan, *It’s a girl!* or *It’s a boy*, they are not simply describing what they see, but “attributing a sex and a gender to a body that cannot exist outside of discourse” (Salih, 2002/2012, p. 125). Their statement can be defined as a *performative utterance* for it compels the referred body “to repeat both sexual and gender norms in order to be qualified as a subject within the heterosexual matrix” (Salih, 2002/2012, p. 126).

In my viewpoint, the foremost contribution from the theory of performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997) to the field of language studies is the comprehension that identity construction is intimately related to language. Put differently, “[t]here is no Self outside of language, given that identity is a signifying practice” (Salih, 2002/2012, p. 91). Besides, the theory of performativity encourages us to consider that, although the body is immersed in a discursive network that forces it to comply with pre-established notions, its relation to the discourses that

constitute this network makes room for ruptures. Based on Butler's (1990) idea of *the woman*, it can be stated that, as products of language, identities are never complete, but rather always open to intervention and resignification. This means that we must recognize, for instance, that a body designated as *male* can, from its interaction with the discourses which pervade the social world, construct itself as a *female* body and express its sexuality in ways that transgress the heterosexual matrix. Such identity transgressions constitute one of the main targets of queer praxiologies, whose political aim is to deconstruct binarisms and regulatory norms applied to the body.

In comprehending identities as performative constructs, the queer framework attributes to language an imperative role in the construction of reality and the subject, including the violence and the coercion experienced by individuals who challenge the regulatory norms established by the structuralist logic that rules the Western world. In this sense, queer praxiologies can be associated with poststructuralism, which, in Williams's (2005/2012) words, proposes

a general rupture of our safe conception of meaning and reference in language, of our understanding, of our senses and of the Arts, of our comprehension of identity, of our sense of History and of its role in present-day life, and of our understanding of language as something disconnected from the work of unconsciousness. (p. 16)

The word *rupture* has a positive connotation in the author's perspective, which seems to relate to one of the major spotlights of the poststructuralist critique: to unveil the limits of knowledge imposed, legitimized, and structured by means of language. Considering its efforts to deconstruct standardized concepts, I believe poststructuralism can be relevant to social struggles against discrimination on the basis of *race, class, gender, sexuality*, and other categories, for its analyses warn "about the partly ostensible, partly hidden violence implied in compulsory values" (Williams, 2005/2012, p. 17). Bearing in mind that queer praxiologies favor the destabilization of fixed meanings applied to the body, we can assume that they relate to poststructuralism as one of its primary intentions is, correspondingly, to demonstrate "how the limits of knowledge can be crossed and turned into subversive relations" (Williams, 2005/2012, p. 42). In so doing, queer praxiologies might present alternative ways for social change, especially regarding identity construction and performance, and the rights of those who have been socially excluded in the course of history.

These reflections seem to comprise the praxiological framework of *queer linguistics*, a field of inquiry that has emphasized the connection between queer and language studies. The foundation of queer linguistics came about with *Queerly phrased: language, gender, and sexuality*, a collection of articles organized by Anna Livia and Kira Hall (1997) that aimed to respond to traditional standards in linguistic research by demonstrating the relationship between language use and the performance of gender and sexuality. This relationship is highlighted in a revised version of an article about queer linguistics in Brazil published by Brazilian applied linguist Rodrigo Borba. For him, today queer linguistics is recognized "as a field of inquiry that studies the semantic-pragmatic space between dominant discourses (i.e. heteronormativity) and the situated language performance" (Borba, 2015, p. 94). In her turn, Hall (2013, p. 635) draws attention to some conflicts between queer praxiologies and queer linguistics, which lead her to argue that queer linguistics "would do well to counter the analytic

distinction between identity and practice that characterizes much of contemporary queer theory". Bearing such premises in mind, I believe queer linguistics is an important field of language studies not only because it focuses on the relationship between language and (post)identity performances, but also for its efforts to act upon issues and practices that permeate the subject's everyday life. Therefore, it is a set of praxiological repertoires of knowledge that intends to criticize and change the social order.

In the section to follow, I present some contributions from queer praxiologies to the field of language education, with special attention to the constructs *education*, *language*, *beliefs*, and *interaction*, which still reflect a number of concepts rooted in grand narratives within Applied Linguistics.

#### 4 Queer praxiologies in language education: Deconstructing grand narratives

One of the areas in which queer praxiologies have been mostly exerted within the field of Applied Linguistics is that of language education, for it is an area that requires a constant movement of reflection/action (Freire, 1970/2005) from its actors – teachers and students. In her leading work, Australian researcher Cynthia D. Nelson (1999) draws attention to the role of the queer framework in the construction of a *pedagogy of inquiry* in English classes, an educational perspective that shifts from the inclusion of non-heterosexual individuals in classroom activities to the problematization of the construction and performance of all sexual identities. This perspective is exemplified through the analysis of an English class in which themes related to sexuality were explored. The teacher-participant's intervention derived from an activity about modal verbs that required her students to present three or four possibilities of interpretation for some ordinary situations, amongst which was this one: *Those two women are walking hand in hand*.

The researcher identified two main challenges in the intervention. The first one involves the perception that not all students were familiar and comfortable with the topic, and the possibility of divergent views being shared in the classroom. The second challenge, in its turn, concerns the difficulty of finding ways to problematize marginalized sexual identities without reinforcing discourses that might contribute to their marginalization. Nelson (1999) concludes that "sexual identity was more than just the topic of discussion. Even as the participants talked about lesbians or gay men, they were positioning themselves and each other in terms of sexual identity" (p. 388). Such an alternative way to understand language education is restated in further papers by the same author, in which she explores the pedagogical work with queer topics in relation to other social domains, such as culture (Nelson, 2004) and globalization (Nelson, 2006). All these studies converge to the extent that they offer some helpful insights for teachers to start queering their language classrooms or at least to make them queerer, considering the particularities of their social and working contexts.

I believe that the premises of queer praxiologies, as well as Nelson's (1999, 2004, 2006) and other scholars' queer interventions from the Global South (Moita Lopes, 2006; Moita Lopes & Fabrício, 2013; Rocha, 2013; Urzêda-Freitas, 2018), make room for the deconstruction of stagnant concepts of *education*, *language*, *beliefs*, and *interaction* that have operated as grand narratives within Applied Linguistics. In the following section, I critically analyze these concepts with reference to my



personal understanding of the reflections presented so far and others I have read, and to my own experiences as an English teacher and an Applied Linguistics researcher in Brazil. Each construct in their queer perspective will be illustrated by some critical studies performed within the Brazilian context, which may contribute to the construction of a situated comprehension of queer praxiologies in language education. As Pereira (2019, p. 63) suggests, it is a way produce queer knowledge from the tropics, namely, a set of praxiological repertoires “that passes through our bodies, as well as through a politics of localization”.

#### 4.1 *Education as an embodied practice*

One of the concepts that has operated as a grand narrative within Applied Linguistics is that of *education* as a neutral practice, which reflects two other views anchored in modern/colonial premises. The first one is that knowledge is apart from its knower, a view that leads to a merely objective comprehension of the pedagogical work. As Hooks (1994) points out, it claims that students and teachers are rational beings who enter the classroom with their minds and leave their bodies outside. In its turn, the second view – actually a consequence of the first one – is that the classroom is a place for knowledge transmission, which is in line with Freire’s (1970/2005) concept of *banking education*. According to this view, teachers are expected to simply transfer their knowledge to their students’ minds, with no genuine space for dialogue and critical inquiry.

Given that queer scholars propose other ways to think of and act towards social reality (Halberstam, 2011; Jagose, 1996; Sullivan, 2003), we can assume that their reflections point to an understanding of education as a *subjective practice*, for it inevitably deals with intrinsic features of our subjectivities, such as fears, anxieties, and pleasures; as an *ideological practice*, for it spreads a range of ideologies of social life that expressively contribute to (re)constructing worldviews; and as a *political practice*, for it (re)produces countless values and moral standards that supposedly relate to society’s welfare. In this sense, the idea of education as an *embodied practice* presumes, first and foremost, that pedagogical environments are constituted by social actors that express their feelings, emotions, desires, and identities through their bodies.

This understanding of education enables us to perceive classrooms as spaces of care, self-knowledge, dialogue, resistance, and change where the subject is entirely present – with mind and body. Such a perception, in its turn, requires the acknowledgement of the social character of the schooling process, as it reflects a connection between practices engendered in pedagogical contexts and in the world at large. By doing so, education might present alternative ways to challenge circumstances that promote inequality and dependence, as well as to educate students as critical and political citizens. According to Freire (1970/2005, p. 80), “[t]he more we problematize the notion of students as beings who are in and with the world, the more challenged they will feel and the more encouraged they will be to respond to that challenge”.

Considering the epistemological premises of queer praxiologies, we could affirm that the challenges put forward by a *problematizing education* involve the deconstruction of binarisms related to the body and of the interdictions produced by those binarisms in the individual’s daily routine. Hence, it is presumed that a queer pedagogy and curriculum should be

directed to the process of difference production and should work mostly with the instability and the uncertainty of all identities. In putting up for discussion the ways through which “the other” is constituted, they would question the narrow connections between the I and the other. The difference would move from the outside, the other side, apart from the subject, and would be comprehended as indispensable to the very existence of the subject. (Louro, 2004, p. 48, emphasis in original)

Regarding the categories *gender* and *sexuality*, I believe that the queer framework potentially supports the articulation of pedagogies that seek to deconstruct linguistic binarisms, such as *man/woman* and *heterosexual/homosexual*, and the problematization of discourses and regulatory norms that, in theory, maintain the body’s coherence. For Louro (2004), queer praxiologies ask for the making of practices that enable us “to deconstruct the process by which some subjects become normalized while others become marginalized” (p. 49). This was one of the objectives that guided Fernandes’ (2012) study, which aimed to investigate the consequences of exploring topics related to gender and sexuality in English classes for beginners. The teacher-researcher’s intervention was composed of activities that intended to stimulate students’ linguistic production, and simultaneously, to encourage them to problematize naturalized ideas about gender and sexuality, such as the social positions of men and women in the contemporary world, and the daily routine of transgender people in Brazil. Despite the limitations and difficulties she identified, Fernandes (2012) concludes that it is possible to make use of critical perspectives in language teaching for beginners, which, in her view, might contribute to improving students’ linguistic and critical repertoires.

Reflections such as these and others constructed on a similar basis (Rocha, 2013; Hoelzle, 2016; Urzêda-Freitas, 2018) lead me to sustain that queer praxiologies understand education as an *embodied practice*, that is to say, as a site for situated problematizations and rearticulations of modern/colonial grand narratives about the body, the subject, and the social world. Such an understanding involves the construction of pedagogical ideas and sociocultural repertoires that provide a deconstructivist analysis of culture, history, and identities (Derrida, 1967/1997), so that it becomes feasible to motivate students “to go beyond limits, to transgress themselves, to distrust, and to problematize what is taken for granted” (Louro, 2004, p. 64). From this perspective, the language educator’s core challenge is to recognize and explore the embodied character of education in order to create discursive possibilities for social change.

#### 4.2 Language as a form of action

Another grand narrative that still pervades the field of Applied Linguistics relates to the concept of *language* as an instrument of communication. As we have argued recently (Urzêda-Freitas & Pessoa, 2020), this concept roots in the modern/colonial project that invented languages as unproblematic elements that are used to distinguish people and convey messages. Its major problem is that it diminishes the complexity of the communicative process, which is characterized by relations, differences, conflicts, and negotiations (Urzêda-Freitas & Pessoa, 2020). Moreover, it seems to consider that language is absent from what happens in the social order

through and beyond communication, hence pointing to a merely functional understanding of language practices and language education (Pennycook, 1990).

However, in keeping with the reflections introduced in the previous sections, it is possible to assert that the queer framework (Borba, 2015; Butler, 1990; Hall, 2013; Louro, 2004; Nelson, 1999) recognizes the productive force of language in reality construction and transformation. Therefore, as stated by Moita Lopes (1995), we need to acknowledge that “[the] use of language [...] is not neutral: discourse is constituted by the social world that involves it” (p. 32). In other words, it is through our language practices that the meanings which organize the social order are (re)produced and can be problematized and/or rearticulated in other bases. From an instrument used to convey messages, language turns to be regarded as a form of action upon the world.

Such a comprehension is founded on Austin’s (1962/1975) performative view of language, according to which language does not simply describe, but produces a series of effects in social reality. In arguing that all sorts of utterances are performative, the author presents “an analytical method for philosophical problems through the examination of language use understood as a form of action, namely, as a way to do things with words” (Souza-Filho, 2006, p. 223). Put differently, Austin’s (1962/1975) reflections break with the concept of language as an instrument of communication, for it dislocates the speech act from the information exchange, in a purely functional level, to the creation of language practices that *make things happen*. According to Pinto (2007), this can be understood as a “radical theory of speech acts” (p. 7), which takes into consideration

not only linguistic formulas and speech conditions. A performative view of language must involve the complexity of the conditions of the speaker and take the identity between saying and doing to its ultimate consequences, insisting on the presence of the act in language; an act that transforms – operates. (Pinto, 2007, p. 7)

Concerning the field of language education, which basically works with the production of meanings (Moita Lopes, 2002), I understand that the concept of *language as a form of action* presupposes that classroom language practices have a prominent role in the legitimization or problematization of discourses that impose moral standards on the subject and produce coercions and inequalities in public life. This requires us to understand that the language we teach can be explored as a means to articulate counter-discourses to compete with existing hegemonic ideologies (hooks, 1994). In short, if performativity enables the resignification of identity performances (Butler, 1990), it is possible to assume that it also makes room for the subversion of discourses that cause pain and exclusion in the larger society (Moita Lopes, 2002; Rocha, 2013; Urzêda-Freitas, 2018).

Despite their situated objectives, the studies carried out by Rocha (2013), Pessoa (2014), Hoelzle (2016) and Urzêda-Freitas (2018) share the assumption that language plays a significant role in the construction of identities and in the (re)production of hegemonic ideas about social life. Moreover, they comprehend language education as an activity with great potential to foster the construction of a myriad of cultural meanings. Rocha’s (2013) research, for instance, develops the idea that, in problematizing questions of gender and sexuality through out-of-school textual repertoires, such as *mangas* and *animes*, English teachers might contribute to the production of new perceptions of what genders and sexualities

are. According to the researcher, if language practices result in the performance of concrete actions, it is possible “to do politics in language with the problematization of speech acts which are believed to describe “identities” but which, through repetition, have produced what they refer to” (Rocha, 2013, p. 50, emphasis in original).

### 4.3 Beliefs as identity performances

The third concept that has operated as a grand narrative within Applied Linguistics relates to the construct *beliefs*. Anchored in the domain of (meta)cognitive knowledge, this concept embodies the perception of beliefs as guiding principles of the individual’s response to certain activities or experiences (Puchta, 2010). Regarding the context of language education, beliefs have been commonly defined as preconceived notions about language learning and teaching, which are believed to have considerable impact on how learners respond to that process (White, 1999; Barcelos, 2004). For its inscription in rational schemas of knowledge, I believe that this definition points to a representational view of beliefs, reinforcing the modern/colonial separation between mind and body in pedagogical contexts (Hooks, 1994).

As queer praxiologies are interested in embodied aspects of life and in the subject’s identity experiences (Louro, 2004), and given that our beliefs normally relate to our personal stories, I consider that the queer framework enables the comprehension of beliefs as situated narratives. This means that the perceptions raised by the participants of a communicative event about their personal experiences reflect “contingent events” which are presented “according to a spatial-temporal order” imposed by the narrator (Fabrício, 2006b, p. 191). In such a way, for this author, narratives are social practices, in view of the fact that our stories reveal our positions before the social and cultural expectations of our contexts, an understanding that turns our narratives into “privileged location[s] for the presentation [...] of who we are in the social world” (Fabrício, 2006b, p. 201, emphasis in original).

Hence, it is possible to infer that all perceptions and experiences shared in particular communicative events

come from someone who carries specific identity markings that locate him/her in social life and that position him/her and his/her interlocutors in discourse in particular ways... This means that when we use language we do not simply do so with an interlocutor or language user, but, for instance, with a man who is black, bisexual, young, working-class, Brazilian, a nurse etc. (Moita Lopes, 2003, p. 20)

This reflection allows us to assume that, in sharing perceptions founded on particular experiences, subjects “are not only telling the events of a narrative (the narrated events); they are also involved in the performance of who they are in the act of telling a story (the act of narrating)” (Moita Lopes, 2009, p. 135). Understood as situated narratives, beliefs can be construed as *identity performances*, which leads us to recognize that identity experiences of *gender, sexuality, race*, among others, just as those related to language learning and teaching, might be relevant to the analysis of certain discursive practices. In respect to the queering of the language classroom, we could assume that students’ and teachers’ positions before the topics explored and the events emerged in class result from particular

repertoires which tend to reveal their identity locations with regard to those topics and events. From this point of view, beliefs not only represent how we see and/or how we feel about a certain experience or situation, but also perform who we are in a determined frame and who we are becoming in the social world.

In my doctoral study, for instance, which aimed to analyze the experience of a group of language teachers with queer literacies, I observed that the group's perceptions were intimately related to their identity experiences of *class*, *race*, *gender*, *sexuality*, and *religion* (Urzêda-Freitas, 2018). The sharing of those perceptions was clearly motivated by the participants' reflections on the engagement of queer praxiologies and queer teaching practices with questions of power, access, inequality, and social change. My analyses show that, in problematizing queer topics and events, as well as their own pedagogical repertoires involving queer literacies, the teachers were, in fact, performing who they were – becoming – in the very act of sharing – or telling about – their personal values, knowledges, identities, and struggles. Although I did not work precisely with the construct *beliefs*, I consider that the group's perceptions of queer literacies derive from their comprehension of their own experiences (Barcelos, 2004), which are consequently understood as situated forms of presentation of the Self in the social world (Fabrício, 2006b).

#### 4.4 *Interaction as a site for conflict*

The last grand narrative I would like to emphasize concerning the field of language education roots in the concept of *interaction* as a site for consensus. Seeing the language classroom as a location where people come together to dialogically construct and/or expand their knowledge, this grand narrative maintains that interaction provides language learners with “opportunities for information and for the exchange of learning strategies” (Figueiredo, 2006, p. 18). The problem in such a concept is that it tends to understand dialogue as a consensual practice, a view that reflects the modern/colonial idea of communication as a disembodied, homogeneous, and essentially democratic activity that happens outside of power relations (Urzêda-Freitas & Pessoa, 2020).

Taking into account the inquiring and transgressive character of queer praxiologies, I believe we should regard interaction as a *site for conflict* (Ellsworth, 1992; Hooks, 1994; Menezes-de-Souza, 2011). The main argument for this comprehension is that language students and teachers speak from particular social and identity positions which locate them in discourse (Moita Lopes, 2003). To be more precise, the process of knowledge co-construction of queer topics and/or events in the language classroom makes those subjects position themselves according to their social and identity locations, which may produce a series of interpersonal conflicts. In this article, conflicts are understood as practices that make room not only for knowledge co-construction, but also for the articulation of new cultural meanings (Hooks, 1994; Moita Lopes, 2002).

Such a perception comprehends dialogue as a signifying process, that is to say, as “a complex sociohistorical and collective act in which meaning producers belong simultaneously to several and different communities that constitute a collective social group” (Menezes-de-Souza, 2011, p. 136). In this sense, we can say that one of the objectives of interaction in language classes based on queer praxiologies is the making of practices that provide the emergence of *queer moments* in the classroom. For Moita Lopes and Fabrício (2013), queer moments or situations

can produce a movement of meanings that [...] occurs among multiple and subtle persistences and “ruptures” of essentialized discourses, at times challenging and at other times reproducing dominant ideas about gender and sexuality. [Those moments or situations may lead students] to articulate new meanings in relation to sexualities and genders, which problematize binary regimes and cultural beliefs. In being sanctioned by the whole group [teacher and students], these meanings legitimize the reflective performances at issue, revealing the possibility for micro resistances. (p. 298, emphasis in original)

As we can see, one of the main objectives of queer moments or situations is to bring about possibilities for micro resistances towards binary conceptions of *gender* and *sexuality* – and other binary identity categories, I would add – in the classroom. This objective allows us to comprehend dialogue as a place for encounters and mismatches where different cultural and identity experiences (Hooks, 1994), as well as different power matrices (Ellsworth, 1992) intercross in order to (re)produce meanings. Hence, the interaction fostered in queer language classes is perceived as a locus for queer mismatches of meanings, namely, as a site where ideas and performances of *gender*, *sexuality* and other social identities are continuously comprehended, misunderstood, and negotiated through dialogic processes marked by tension and uncertainty (Nelson, 2006). Even hegemonic ideas should not be taken as repertoires that must be corrected or silenced, but as “ordinary occurrences that constitute not only an expected part of classroom interaction, but fruitful possibilities for teaching and learning” (Nelson, 2006, p. 230).

Attempts to promote micro resistances in language classes can be observed in a range of critical researches carried out in Brazil (Fernandes, 2012; Pessoa & Urzêda-Freitas, 2012; Rocha, 2013; Pessoa, 2014; Urzêda-Freitas, 2018). Despite their specific purposes, these studies share the objective to articulate counter-hegemonic practices through language education. Another aspect they share is the presence of conflict in interactions promoted in the classroom, an aspect that results, in most cases, from the processes of co-construction of meanings related to social identities. In Rocha’s (2013) study, for instance, which intended to challenge naturalized conceptions of genders and sexualities through a critical work with *mangas* and *animes* in English classes, we can notice that the movements promoted by her intervention are intimately connected to the conflicts provided by classroom interaction. In her conclusions, the researcher claims that the “reflective interaction”, marked by the conflict among different perspectives and worldviews, “provides more powerful destabilizations” (Rocha, 2013, p. 199).

## 5 A subversive micro-narrative from the tropics

My objective in this article was to present some contributions from queer praxiologies to the field of language education. More specifically, I have proposed an inquiring analysis of the constructs *education*, *language*, *beliefs*, and *interaction*, which, in my viewpoint, continue to reflect a number of concepts anchored in modern/colonial grand narratives that have operated themselves as grand narratives within Applied Linguistics.

Regarding the concept of *education*, I argued that queer praxiologies enable us to understand the schooling process as an *embodied practice*, namely, an activity

that recognizes the fully presence of students and teachers, and encourages the situated problematization of hegemonic views in the classroom. With respect to the concept of *language*, I stated that the queer framework seems to conceive language as a *form of action*, allowing us to assume that it is through our language practices that social meanings are (re)produced and can be rearticulated. Concerning the concept of *beliefs*, I contended that queer praxiologies point to a comprehension of beliefs as narratives, and therefore, as *identity performances*, because in sharing their perceptions of queer topics and/or events in the language classroom, students and teachers do so from specific positions that locate them in discourse. And finally, with regard to the concept of *interaction*, I asserted that the queer framework suggests that we understand classroom interaction as a *site for conflict*, which may be productive whether we take into account the possibilities offered by conflict for the construction of other perceptions and worldviews.

The queering of these four constructs enables the comprehension of language education as *queer literacies practice*, that is, as an activity mediated by a set of textual repertoires – such as images, videos, performances, graffiti, bodies, life experiences, written and oral texts etc. – which may foster the construction of new meanings of *gender*, *sexuality*, and other identity categories. In broader terms, I agree with Rocha (2013) when she defines queer literacies

as an association between the comprehension of literacies as social practices and the queer reflective attitude, which leads us to the queering of school literacy. To queer means, in this case, to not accept as natural the performances repeated for centuries of schooling with respect to forms of knowledge construction, canonical readings, legitimized literacy practices, patterns of classroom interaction, teachers' and students' performances, to mention some examples. (p. 69)

I strongly believe that the comprehension of language education as queer literacies practice might contribute to pluralizing discourses related to the body and to increasing possibilities for gender, sexual, and other identity performances in the micro context of the school and the classroom, and in the macro context of the larger society. However, in order to put such a project into practice, teachers should firstly problematize traditional theories of – actually, grand narratives about – language acquisition, which tend to regard the language student as not more than a language receiver. It is crucial that they ask themselves: in *acquiring* a certain language, what else does one *acquire*? What social meanings are constructed in this process? What cultural views do my pedagogical repertoires help (re)producing in the world at large? If one of our social political aims as language educators is to contribute to the construction of a more democratic and egalitarian world, we should radically challenge the modern/colonial grand narratives about language, education, knowledge, identity, and the subject that still pervade our teaching performances.

Nevertheless, I would like to explain that the alternative concepts presented in this article are not fixed, hence they should not be understood as new grand narratives. Just like every meaning produced at this time of *contingency as destiny* (Bauman, 1991/1999), those concepts/narratives are situated, incomplete, and as such they are always open to critique and resignification. A second matter I would like to emphasize is that queer praxiologies reveal different, contradictory, and sometimes conflictive principles, which invalidates whatever attempt to homogenize their repertoires. In other words, the queer framework is a plural and

heterogeneous field of knowledge, making room for a diverse range of academic and personal ideas of who we are – becoming – in the social world. As a Brazilian/Latin American scholar, my intention was to propose and share an alternative perspective of queer praxiologies in language education that might inspire other critical dialogues, reflections, meanings, and projects. It was an attempt to dislocate our epistemological journey from the *certainties* of modern/colonial grand narratives to the *contingencies* of a subversive micro-narrative in the tropics (Pereira, 2019).

Everything considered, I expect that this subversive micro-narrative contributes to the deconstruction of modern/colonial grand narratives that still operate within Applied Linguistics in a global frame. Besides, I hope they encourage language teachers from other cultural backgrounds to problematize their daily performances, so as to make language education become a transformative activity in different contexts. If queer praxiologies provide “new [and uncertain] ways of thinking culture, knowledge, power, and education” (Louro, 2004, p. 47), we might conclude that the toughest challenge they put forward is the acceptance of *contingence as destiny* (Bauman, 1991/1999) in our social, pedagogical, and academic performances. After all, it is to a place of doubt, conflict, uncertainty, and possibility that queer praxiologies seem to push the field of language education. And it is in such a kind of place where, I believe, one is more likely to accomplish what Judith Butler (1997) suggests in the epigraph of this article: to make prohibited narratives become thinkable, sayable, and legible.



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