

Topics of Language and Culture

Professor: Daniel Ferraz

Student: Paula Karoline Pontes

Paper on *Negotiating Diversity in English Language Teaching: A Tragedy in Four Acts* (Canagarajah, Suresh) + *Critical and alternative directions in applied linguistics* (Pennycook, Alastair)

Canagarajah's text *Negotiating Diversity in English Language Teaching: A Tragedy in Four Acts* called my attention as a potential english teacher and as a student of english as a second language. I learned from the text that when teaching english for different nationalities students, we cannot assume that because a student of ours is chinese that they have x or y values, or these and that difficulties of learning, or a or b interests. We live in a world of multiplicity of cultures, but also in a world of multiplicity of subjectivities regardless of their nationality. Each student will have certain values and interests and certain group of students will demand certain abilities of the teacher in proposing lessons and activities that will consider the group profile. Also, as a teacher - and as a social individual - we cannot expect that a student leave behind the culture heritage that is intrinsically subscribed in their writing expression in favor of achieving a level of speaking and writing extremely close to the native; first because it is impossible to do it, secondly because the merging of the two cultures in a linguistic context enriches the writing and/or speaking production, making it more complex. Furthermore, this idea represents a social lesson: diversity exists and must be considered and respected in all kinds of social interactions.

As students, it is healthier to us to realize this idea, this way we don't get so anxious about writing and so harsh about the quality of our productions. I, for example, am always concerned, while writing, in making it as close as possible to how a native english or american student, for example, would write. I never thought about "developing a hybrid realization" until reading the text about Kyoko's experience and the final analysis Prof. C. made of her development. And I thought that Kyoko was doing very well on her analysis of her own difficulties, past experiences in educational and familiar contexts and how they influenced her in a good or a bad way. I find it very difficult to have this self-awareness, being able to identify the marks of our cultural identity in our writing and recognizing that our own culture can't be forgotten. Likewise, it is difficult to be aware and intelligent enough to identify an ongoing process between first language heritage and second language learning and

that it shapes the construction of a particular way to communicate ideas, express thoughts and create meanings in L2.

One's subjectivity cannot be detached of their linguistic productions, even though, like Kyoko, we must seek for objectivity in academic writing. Kyoko narrates her feelings about the struggle between academic writing and personal experience, and the feeling that her subjectivity had to be suppressed in order to produce an academic text in English. In a way, imitate writing styles to make our own writing more objective is positive when we consider that we learn a lot about grammar rules and acquire great vocabulary. Although, the mechanic repetition of others' voice might eclipse ours, and keep us from conveying our own ideas or weaken the expressivity of our discourse. That is why Canagarajah comes up with the idea of "negotiation" in the process of learning and teaching a second language. He proposes practices like narrative research, narrative analysis and classroom ethnographies in order to develop the teacher's identity by studying the class/students cultures and profiles and motivating students to self-awareness, to think critically about their writing productions; namely, orienting them to the critical analysis of their own process of learning. In his words:

Teachers will be creative and agentive in shaping relevant curricula based on their changing knowledge and beliefs from their ongoing teaching practice. For this reason, many teachers realize the need to become researchers themselves. It is possible to combine teaching and research without letting one's biases distort the findings. Methods such as classroom ethnographies, action research, and narrative research enable practitioners to produce useful knowledge on teaching (see Lankshear & Knobel, 2004 for an introduction to these methods). By combining teaching with research, practitioners are able to reflect on the unpredictability inherent in negotiating diversity and develop relevant knowledge for instruction. (p. 1)

He also points out the importance of negotiation of meaning to create a more tolerant and open space so the multiple voices can emerge, communicating their values, beliefs, life experiences, and thus, can help to construct a more complex and rich experience to all the involved in the process of learning.

Learning emerging from the context of interaction resembles very much the concept of *metrolingualism*, thought and studied by Pennycook and Otsuji:

Emi Otsuji and I (Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010) have started talking in terms of metrolingualism, which describes the ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language; it does not assume connections between language, culture, ethnicity, nationality or geography, but rather seeks to

explore how such relations are produced, resisted, defied or rearranged; its focus is not on language systems but on languages as emergent from contexts of interaction. (p. 16.6)

Accordingly, we can think Canagarajah's classroom as a microcosm of a wider social phenomenon, i.e., the negotiation of a multiplicity of identities in order to enable a more open and rich discourse space. In such a way, the cultural background of each speaker altogether with their subjectivity - feelings, ideologies, lifelong experiences - is being conveyed, shared and also manipulated by discourse in order to adapt and adjust the discourses of one another. From this exchange relation, a new, hybrid, expression emerges.

In conclusion, like *transposition*, that is to say, the "appropriation of competing discourses in the writer's own terms to achieve a new discursal space" (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 116), the merging of different cultures by a single individual in order to learn a second language and still be true to their own subjectivity is very much alike *multilingualism*, with the difference that the negotiation of competing discourses, in this case, occurs between multiple individuals.