



Article

Ecolinguistics: The battlefield for the new class struggle?

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Abstract

According to its founding fathers, ecolinguistics was conceived as a discipline whose object of study is the relationship of language with its environment; that is, the relationship between humans and non-human animals, plants, minerals, etc. (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001). Although its formal beginnings as a discipline occurred at the end of the twentieth century, its background brings together a multitude of critical studies based on well-established traditions, such as critical animal studies, decolonial studies, glotopolitical studies, etc., adopting as framework and theoretical tools different elements from different linguistic subdisciplines: critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, etc.

But due to this broad approach, at times its critical perspective seems to blur: its “ecological” approach goes after the shallow environmentalism posed by the *Brundtland Report* (1987) moving away from the Marxian logic of class struggle and does not deepen its analysis enough to identify actors and processes in social practices.

Our proposal argues that the critical effectiveness of the discipline must not only be based on a reworking of the concept of social classes, following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), but that the deconstruction of the logic of hegemony must also include the theoretical perspectives that analyse the situation of other oppressed groups: feminist movements, ethnic, sexual, national divergences, etc.

Keywords: ecolinguistics, discourse, Marxism, hegemony, oppressed groups

1. Ecolinguistics as a critical perspective

The development of ecolinguistics as a discipline is relatively new. While the term “ecolinguistics” appears to have been suggested by the American linguist Einar Haugen at

a conference in Chicago in 1972 (Fill, 2018, p. 2), interest in the relationship between language and environment has existed long before the formulation of a specific discipline. As Couto points out, since classical antiquity this interest was manifested by thinkers such as Heraclitus, Parmenides, Cratylus, and others (2016, p. 15). The Pythagorean school, whose ideas span several centuries and sustain respect for non-human life forms, is also a powerful antecedent. The concept of language as a living organism, brought to modernity by the Comparative Grammar of the 19th century with exponents such as Rask, Bopp, and Schleicher, also imposes a vision adopted by current ecolinguistic studies. Close in time, in the 20th century, critical animal studies, whose origins have been signalled in the United States with the Center on Animal Liberation Affairs founded in 2001 (Best, 2009, p. 10), and decolonial studies, which pose strong criticism on Eurocentrism and its destructive practices (Quijano, 2000, p. 251), make another close precedent even when these studies are not related to language research.

One of the first modern authors to openly mention the concept of environment in relation to language is Edward Sapir, in a conference before the American Anthropological Association called “Language and Environment” that was published by the *American Anthropologist* (Couto, 2016, p. 17). But the critical vision that characterises ecolinguistics flourished in the 1990s, and represented a new research paradigm that includes not only the social context in which language is inserted but also its environmental situation. At this point, it was Michael Halliday one of the first modern authors to mention that linguistic studies must become relevant to contemporary problems, particularly the destruction of ecosystems (1990). For him, the discourse of economic development, that builds dualities such as *growth is good, many is better than few, more is better than less, big is better than small*, etc., has destructive consequences for species other than human and the environment itself. Following this idea, the new discipline was defined (Fill, 2018, p. 2), and its object was determined: to disarm harmful discursive forms toward other species and the environment and reformulate them in order to change in a positive way this relationship (Stibbe, 2015, p. 7). In order to accomplish such task, theoretical and methodological devices were taken from neighbouring disciplines as sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, sociology of language, and, especially, critical discourse analysis (CDA). This plurality of theoretical approaches allowed to range from speciesism in the discursive construction of non-human animals and environmental pollution to the political situation of endangered languages and social problems arising from situations of languages in contact and linguistic colonialism.

As a discipline, ecolinguistics classifies different lines of research in several groups (Fill, 2018, p. 3), of which two main interests emerge: 1) Critical analysis of animal/ecological discourse; and 2) Ecology of languages.

1.1. Critical analysis of animal/ecological discourse

This first group adopts a wide range of linguistic tools from CDA, framing theory, cognitive linguistics, identity theory, rhetoric and systemic-functional linguistics. These

tools are used to highlight destructive narrative constructions on topics related to other species and the environment. According to Stibbe, narratives govern our lives naturalising what is social; we live through stories that bring into play socially shared signs and influence the relationships that humans maintain with humans, other animals, plants, forests, rivers and the physical environment (2015, p. 6) and refer to the exercise of power by different groups. These can be stories of massive consumption, economic growth, advertising, intensive agriculture, animal exploitation, and stories that represent nature as a machine or as a resource to be used or exploited by humanity; or they can be of respect, coexistence and understanding, with a different and more respectful vision.

The measure parameter to classify these stories is damage to the ecosystem: they are destructive if they promote or make possible some kind of harm to species and the environment; and they are considered beneficial if they encourage attitudes or behaviours towards care and protection. These “beneficial” stories are new narratives, which could replace the destructive ones, focusing on nature itself and not as a resource to be exploited.

1.2. Ecology of languages

Linguistic diversity means plurality of world views. If a language constitutes a particular view, a selection of what communities see around them, a multiplicity of languages represents multiple visions (Whorf, 1956, p. 246) from which different stories may emerge to replace the harmful ones. Since ancient times, imperialism has used language enforcement as a way to impose a vision of the world. In times of globalisation, linguistic imperialism makes possible the minorisation and marginalisation of local languages, which entails the minorisation, marginalisation and eventual disappearance of cultures along with alternative world views to hegemonic ones.

Besides the criticism of destructive stories and provision of new alternative stories, one of the primary goals of ecolinguistics is to protect both cultural diversity and the linguistic diversity that underpins it (Mühlhäusler, 1995, p. 5). In this sense, Raiter and Zullo mention an example of the imperialistic enforcement of languages: in the 17th century, King Charles II of Spain prohibited the use of the Quechua language in the entire viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata.

Que en cada parroquia — manda el rey — se ponga una escuela pública donde los niños aprendan a leer en castellano y que en el mismo idioma sean instruidos en la doctrina sin permitir que el maestro les hable en otro ni que los niños se traten entre sí usando el nativo.

Que bajo de alguna pena se mande en la ciudad que los padres de familia y madres, así e los verdaderos españoles y de los de distinción como de los plebeyos y mestizos ... no les permitan en ningún caso responder en ningún caso en quichua ni que ellos

entre sí se traten en él. (2004, p. 150)¹

Records can be found since ancient times about the use of languages and grammars for colonial purposes, such as Alexander the Great, who wanted to impose Greek throughout his empire as an official language (Rochette, 2011, p. 549); or the Francoist oppression towards regional languages in Spain during his dictatorship (Montrul, 2013, p. 50). From this perspective, we are not dealing just with linguistic ideologies but also with institutionalised policies to erase languages and with them, the world views they propose.

2. Critical perspective and targeting

The spirit behind all research that claims to be “ecolinguistic” must necessarily be critical. But the multiplicity of perspectives generates contradictions within its theoretical frameworks. The axis that ecolinguistics seeks to deconstruct is given by two elements mainly: anthropocentrism, institutionalised in the vast majority of hegemonic discourses, and the ecological discourse established since the publication of the *Brundtland Report*.

Regarding anthropocentrism, it is not necessary to remind the role human species has exercised over every other it got involved with. Even when as a philosophical thinking it started in the 16th century, its roots can be traced much further back. On the other hand, the importance of the *Brundtland Report* (1987) in the 20th century development thinking is undeniable. It was the cornerstone of so-called conservationism. This report sought to contrast economic increase with a new concept for that moment: sustainable development. It made possible a discursive change and the construction of new linguistic categories, which did not lead to a true empirical change in social practices related to a benefit for the environment but managed to ensure capitalist continuity and its destructive functioning, justifying the abuses through the notion of sustainability. The report introduced new meanings: *scarce resources, recycling, sustainability, clean technologies*, etc., in the common senses of western societies, that, unlike concepts like *racism, speciesism, deforestation, extinction*, etc. which have clear and established connotations, evade the designation of clear agents in the processes they pose. For example, indiscriminate deforestation has clear responsables: timber industry, animal farming, intensive cultivation, etc. The ecological discourse established since the appearance of the report states that all humans have equal responsibility to curb pollution and global warming, that scarce resources are responsibility of everyone and that the relationship between economic development and preservation of the ecosystem can be balanced. While it can be said that as a species we all have the same

¹ That in each parish — the king demands — a public school be set up where the children learn to read in Spanish and that in the same language they are instructed in the doctrine without allowing the teacher to speak to them in another or that the children treat each other using the native.

That under some penalty it is ordered in the city that fathers and mothers, as well as true Spaniards and those of distinction as commoners and mestizos ... do not allow them in any case to answer in any case in Quichua or that they treat each other using it. (Author’s translation)

level of responsibility, it is clear that not all of us have the power to stop industries directly and make them modify their business, scope and way of working. Furthermore, the so-called scarce or limited resources are considered as resources only by a part of humanity. Many people around the world do not consume or are not interested in preserving resources like oil. In other words, the meanings established by this discourse refer more to the benefits of the market for a part of humanity than to the care for the environment and the species that inhabit it. So we can say this discourse is based on the difference between preservation and conservation:

Por un lado la preservación de la virginidad del sistema, por el otro, la posición conservacionista que favorece su protección desde una perspectiva netamente antropocéntrica, fundamentalmente, para seguir contando con aquellos recursos útiles al ser humano. La primera aproximación al ambientalismo es históricamente expresada en términos más bien espirituales y románticos, típicos del trascendentalismo americano y el romanticismo europeo. La segunda posición se asocia al utilitarismo y a aquella filosofía social que asume como objetivo el mayor bien para el mayor número de gente. La interpretación individual que se haga del concepto de desarrollo sustentable está condicionada por la posición que se mantenga dentro de ese espectro. (Greco & Crespo, 2015, p. 57)²

The first definition is a utopic perspective about wildlife: animals live in harmony in nature without humans around. The second case represents the vision of anthropocentrism: to maintain useful resources for the human being and obtain as much of them for the majority of people. This ecological discourse enables the reproduction of capitalist structures, by, instead of questioning the destructive processes that it proposes, hiding them by eliding actors, erasing the responsibility of the agents involved: industries, governments, power elites, etc., keeping the logic of neoclassical economics. This ecological discourse dictates that it is everyone's responsibility to take care of what the ecosystem provides to us, not to pollute, etc., forcing us to reduce the consumption of plastic items instead of immediately prohibiting their manufacture, allowing the establishment of agreements to twenty years to reduce carbon emissions instead of immediately stopping them, etc.

In analysing this discourse, ecolinguistic criticism has presented some points where the debate seems to draw back. On the one hand, they move away from the Marxian basis

² On the one hand, the preservation of the virginity of the system, on the other, the conservationist position that favours its protection from a clearly anthropocentric perspective, fundamentally, to continue counting on those resources useful to the human being. The first approach to environmentalism is historically expressed in rather spiritual and romantic terms, typical of American transcendentalism and European romanticism. The second position is associated with utilitarianism and with that social philosophy that assumes the highest good for the greatest number of people. The individual interpretation that is made of the concept of sustainable development is conditioned by the position that remains within that spectrum. (Author's translation)

proposed by critical discourse analysis, as we mentioned before, which distances them from the concept of hegemony (and this is to fall into the trap of Brundtland ecological discourse), losing sight of those directly responsible for destructive discourses. When recovering the utopic definition, that of the virginity of the system, they leave aside the agency of animals within human societies: it is only contemplated in natural environments without the intervention of our species. But if we consider the concept of agency as direct responsibility for the events developed in their own lives, animals have lived for a long time in human societies and have developed another type of agency that has been systematically erased in those contexts. This is the kind of agency that is necessary to recover in order to restore the place they have occupied.

On the other hand, many ecolinguistic studies have adopted the so-called positive discourse analysis (PDA) as a theoretical framework. This division is also debated within critical discourse analysis itself. For some ecolinguists this means:

PDA provides a way of searching for positive uses of language that can provide alternatives to what the analyst perceives as negative or damaging dominant discourses. (Stibbe, 2018, p. 169)

However, some CDA theorists have objected this use:

The very notion of “positive” discourse analysis, moreover, contextually presupposes a rather limited notion of what the “critical” in CDA implies in the first place — in fact it presupposes that “critical” discourse analysis is “negative” discourse analysis, which is surely misleading. (Wodak & Chilton, 2005, p. xvi)

This situation calls for a revision of some concepts and, in our opinion, a further development of some theoretical groundings and analysis tools.

3. Ecolinguistic deconstruction

The first definition and designation of its object of study seems to be devoid of ideology. As Fill suggests:

La lingüística se ha dedicado durante mucho tiempo a frases, lexemas, morfemas y fonemas. Él definió, analizó y catalogó estas unidades de lenguaje y las comparó en diferentes idiomas. Fue un trabajo grande e importante. Se acerca el momento en el que tienes que lidiar con la relación entre el lenguaje y el mundo. Se trata de examinar las relaciones entre el lenguaje y la convivencia humana, el papel del lenguaje en las relaciones entre individuos y grupos de diferentes tipos: hombres y mujeres, adultos y jóvenes, estados y religiones. Pero también puede ser una ciencia de la comunicación que examine el papel del lenguaje en la convivencia de humanos,

animales, plantas y materia, entre todo lo que vive y no vive en la tierra. (Fill, 1987, p. 9, quoted in Couto, 2018, p. 1)³

This definition presents an “innocent” approach to a broad object of study. We say that this approach is innocent because the role of language in the construction of reality and mediation between humans necessarily implies ideological analysis, and therefore, class representations. In Stibbe’s definition a vision a little closer to this ideological analysis we ask can be seen:

How we think has an influence on how we act, so language can inspire us to destroy or protect the ecosystems that life depends on. Ecolinguistics, then, is about critiquing forms of language that contribute to ecological destruction, and aiding in the search for new forms of language that inspire people to protect the natural world. This is a superficial explanation but at least starts to create connections in people’s minds between two areas of life — language and ecology — that are not so separate after all. (2015, p. 1)

Although this notion provides a few more clues about this relationship and the function of signs and language in it, it poses a destruction/protection duality, leaving aside the context of class struggle (Voloshinov, 1976, p. 36) proposed by Marxism. Following this pattern, this author describes why ecolinguistics troubles the concept of hegemony:

The role of language in structuring power relations, in particular, has come under close scrutiny ... Most of this work on language and power focuses on the role of discourse in oppression and exploitation. For example, the journal *Discourse and Society* is dedicated to “power, dominance and inequality, and to the role of discourse in their legitimisation and reproduction in society, for instance in the domains of gender, race, ethnicity, class or world religion”. However, with rare exceptions, the role of discourse in the domination by humans of other species has been almost entirely neglected in the field of critical discourse analysis. Power is talked about as if it is a relation between people only; for example, Fairclough (1992) describes the way that “language contributes to the domination of some people by others” ... Because of the neo-Marxist roots of critical discourse analysis, analysis focuses on

³ Linguistics has long been dedicated to phrases, lexemes, morphemes and phonemes. It defined, analysed and cataloged these language units and compared them in different languages. It was a big and important job. The time is approaching in which we have to deal with the relationship between language and the world. It is about examining the relationships between language and human coexistence, the role of language in relationships between individuals and groups of different types: men and women, adults and young people, states and religions. But it can also be a communication science that examines the role of language in the coexistence of humans, animals, plants and matter, among everything that lives and does not live on earth. (Author’s translation)

hegemony, where oppression of a group is carried out ideologically rather than coercively, through the manufacture of consent. In the case of animals, the power is coercive, carried out by a small number of people involved in organisations that farm and use animals. The animals do not consent to their treatment because of an uncritical acceptance of the ideology of the oppressor, and they cannot be empowered to resist the discourses that oppress them. (Stibbe, 2012, pp. 19-20)

But Marxist roots do not prevent a modification of the concept of class, so this perspective should not be abandoned but reworked. Hegemony, as understood by the first Marxism, implies human social classes. But nothing makes it impossible to think that, as a species, humans exercise our hegemony on others, subjecting all non-human beings to our rules. In fact, that is what Stibbe states in his work. Marxian hegemony refers to social classes, but in this context, humanity as a species can be homologised to the dominant class, it is the dominant species.

Regarding that matter, Laclau and Mouffe mention:

A question-mark has fallen more and more heavily over a whole way of conceiving both socialism and the roads that should lead to it. This has recharged critical thinking, at once corrosive and necessary, on the theoretical and political bases on which the intellectual horizon of the Left was traditionally constituted. But there is more to it than this. A whole series of positive new phenomena underlie those mutations which have made so urgent the task of theoretical reconsideration: the rise of the new feminism, the protest movements of ethnic, national and sexual minorities, the anti-institutional ecology struggles waged by marginalized layers of the population, the anti-nuclear movement, the atypical forms of social struggle in countries on the capitalist periphery — all these imply an extension of social conflictuality to a wide range of areas, which creates the potential, but no more than the potential for an advance towards more free, democratic and egalitarian societies. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 1)

The perspective of class struggle is lost in the analysis of the ecological discourse that poses the struggle of one class, the human one, against a constructed category: climate change, distancing human responsibility. Humans fight against one faceless enemy: climate change. By making everything part of environmental issues, it is avoided direct responsibility for destructive processes and animal agency in their own narratives. When some ecolinguistic studies analyse this type of narrative, they aim to reconstruct the agency of animals in their daily natural life (Stibbe, 2012; Riedlinger, 2019), but what they do not recompose is their role within human society in which they live: it is important to talk about the conditions in which non-human animals live in the wild, but since they are oppressed and brought in as slaves, objects, raw materials, etc., within the walls of human cities, there is an imperative to restore their agency in these contexts. They are always considered affected in processes

carried out by human agents and not actors in their own history. Even though the analysis exposes the erasing of non-human animals' agency in the hegemonic narratives, the alternative stories do not replace that lost agency and the resulting vision of the analysis is somewhat paternalistic: animals are children who must be protected.

Now the relationship between pigs and humans is one of distance, as the relentless push for cheap pork has led to pigs being kept indoors in intensive conditions. With the aid of technology and machinery a few people look after hundreds of pigs, while for most people the only contact they have with pigs is on their dinner plate. However, the intense negativity towards pigs within the English language remains, and since language is intimately bound up with culture; the image of the pig continues to play a part in English culture. (Stibbe, 2003, p. 377)

Nevertheless,

For William Hornaday, donkeys were property. They were to be thought of and treated as commodities for sale, technology for power, exhibitions to display, or subjects to conserve. To use anthropological terms, the relationship between Hornaday and the donkey was not an emic one (like the cottiers) but rather an etic. Hornaday stood outside of the donkeys' world. There was a distinct and significant divide between humans and other creatures. Animals did not possess an independent form of agency. They did not deserve collective rights. Their life had little to no value outside of its service to humanity. This was a perspective from above. (Hribal, 2007, p. 101)

Hribal argues that animals are part of the working class because they have been the workforce behind human labour, an exploited voiceless workforce. It can be thought that non-human animals are found in conditions similar to those of women of African origin in European cultural communities: doubly exploited; first because of their status as women, then because of their status as African or Afro-descendants. Animals are exploited only for their condition of such, although they are exploited both by the bosses and by the workers with whom they share (although not so much) tasks. In this way, a key factor is evident: speciesist discourse is no different from misogynist, racist, anti-Semitic discourses, etc. Oppressor remains the same: white, western, Christian, heterosexual man.

The idea of animal "resistance", as we would understand human resistance, is beginning to appear in critical animal studies only in the first and second decades of this century:

Cows, Moryson came to recognize, had agency. They labored and produced. They resisted and fought. They negotiated with humans as to the actualities and limits of their own exploitation. Animals were themselves a force in social change. Faking ignorance, rejection of commands, the slowdown, foot-dragging, no work without

adequate food, refusal to work in the heat of the day, taking breaks without permission, rejection of overtime, vocal complaints, open pilfering, secret pilfering, rebuffing new tasks, false compliance, breaking equipment, escape, and direct confrontation, these are all actions of what the anthropologist James C. Scott has termed “weapons of the weak”. (Hribal, 2007, p. 103)

And he goes a little further:

Yet animals did not just labor. They also resisted this labor and fought against their exploitation. During the 1850s, the United States government introduced 75 camels into military service. Their primary duties were to provide transportation for equipment and human personnel. This was, however, a short-lived experiment. For the camels resisted. They refused to cooperate and obey orders. They were loudly vocal in their complaints. They spat upon their fellow soldiers. They bit their fellow soldiers. Their fellow soldiers learned to both hate and fear them (Essin 1997, 59-60). The U.S. army stopped employing camels, and the horse and mule returned to full service in these units. The camels, in truth, were the ones who made their labor an experiment. In other words, this was no experiment. The U.S. Army actively sought to turn camels into soldiers. They failed. Hence, what was to be a permanent program became, after the fact, a trial period, an audition, an experiment. (Hribal, 2007, p. 105)

Accordingly, some works show the same line of interest although they do not focus on non-human animal resistance:

Other researchers have compared linguistic patterns associated with salmon agency, finding similar patterns in representation. Stibbe (2003) looked at the way Atlantic salmon are represented in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) reports and found that these reports remove the agency of salmon by referring to them as “fish stocks”, “fish harvesting”, “commodities”, and “fish productivity”. He compared these representations to Rachel Carson’s representations of salmon in *Silent Spring* where she recognised the intrinsic worth and agency of salmon by referring to them using the plural nouns “fishes” and “they”. According to Stibbe, Carson also used verbs that gave salmon agency by relating salmon to their intrinsic actions in the greater environment such as moving, ascending and feeding, rather than verbs associated with economic productivity. (Riedlinger, 2019, p. 2)

If hegemony ceases to be a central element, not only animal agency can be lost in the way. The responsibility for the state of the planet becomes a duty for the entire human species, unlike what happens with speciesism, a term with its own name, associated with other forms of discrimination like racism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, etc., that identify individuals

and groups with specific ideologies as agents. This does not mean that the ecolinguistics as a theory is the problem, which of course allows Marxist visions and in fact it supports them. What we see as a conflict is that, by modifying their paradigm, some research became less combative as they abandoned the perspective of the class struggle, forgiving capitalism its guilt to make it collective.

On the other hand, the adoption of positive discourse analysis (PDA) as a theoretical framework presents some problems, as we mentioned before. When considering PDA as something splintered from CDA, a negative vision is assigned to the second, relegating its critical vision, while the first is associated with not necessarily “positive” concepts, in optimistic terms.

Historically, the concept of positive is associated with positivism. It cannot be used without somehow summoning this meaning.

Se entiende por positivo: 1) lo real por oposición a lo quimérico, 2) lo útil por oposición a lo ocioso, 3) lo cierto por oposición a lo indeciso. Aptitud de construir la armonía lógica en el individuo y la comunión de la especie entera, en lugar de aquellas dudas indefinidas y de aquellas discusiones interminables suscitadas en el antiguo régimen mental, 4) lo preciso por oposición a lo vago y a opiniones apoyadas en autoridades sobrenaturales, 5) es positivo lo que se opone a lo negativo, por lo cual este espíritu no es crítico sino constructivo, tiende a organizar y no a destruir, 6) lo verificable en lugar de lo no comprobable, lo que tiene el sentido de sustituir lo absoluto por lo empíricamente relativo. (Marí, 1993, p. 179)⁴

The idea of “positive” as opposed to “negative”, constructive and not critical, threatens the constitution of the discipline itself. This opposition between critical and constructive is part of a discussion that has already taken place in the past regarding the concept of positive science:

De esta forma, el concepto de “positivo” arbitrariamente designado, choca contra una tradición de estudios de una forma que parece ingenua. Es muy frecuente encontrar la palabra “deconstrucción” en los trabajos de pensadores contemporáneos. Sin embargo, si bien no fue usada por Federico Nietzsche, es a él a quien debemos dirigirnos a la hora de precisar su significado. La “deconstrucción” hace referencia a una forma de trabajo intelectual que consiste en derribar a golpes

⁴ Positive is understood as: 1) the real as opposed to the chimerical; 2) the useful as opposed to the idle; 3) the true as opposed to the indecisive. Ability to build logical harmony in the individual and the communion of the entire species, instead of those indefinite doubts and endless discussions raised in the old mental regime; 4) what is necessary as opposed to the vague and opinions supported by supernatural authorities; 5) what opposes the negative is positive, for which this spirit is not critical but constructive, it tends to organise and not to destroy; 6) the verifiable in place of the not verifiable, which has the sense of replacing the absolute by the empirically relative. (Author’s translation)

los edificios de la filosofía clásica hasta llegar a sus cimientos, para sacarlos a la luz y exponer su irredimible contingencia. (Marí 1993, p. 72)⁵

Searching for alternatives is not necessarily deconstructing the problem. Considering that many of the representations that ecolinguistics seeks to change have their origin in classical antiquity, looking for alternative discourses does not invalidate the discourses that it considers harmful or destructive. In its quest for narratives, any story other than the western one seems to be, a priori, a good one. Most researchers in ecolinguistics insist on the importance of not only maintaining a critical perspective but also of proposing some type of solution. That is, if the language created the problem, the language must be able to solve it. PDA shifts the emphasis from highlighting injustices to identifying and promoting alternatives. But, if the destructive representations have their origin in classical antiquity and the PDA proposes to look for new discourses, the problem remains unsolved. From this perspective, post-industrial neo-liberal discourses are considered destructive and are currently linked to the representations installed by the *Brundtland Report*. But many of these representations come from yesteryear and are at the base of the new stories and narratives analysts present as beneficial. For example, anthropocentrism and misogyny are present in many stories that come from non-capitalistic, apparently non-destructive, discourses.

Alternative stories often come from contexts such as Native Americans or non-Europeans, posing a romantic outlook on life for the western world. They drag us back to the theory of the “good savage” who wandered through nature, at peace with their environment until they were forced to deal with the terrible inequalities as a consequence of life in society. If we go to Lévi-Strauss, there is no lag between primitives and moderns, then, it is possible that there is no salvation in their stories either:

L'utilisation des ressources naturelles dont disposaient les indigènes hawaïens était, à peu de choses près, complète; bien plus que celle pratiquée dans l'ère commerciale actuelle, qui exploite sans merci les quelques produits qui, pour le moment, procurent un avantage financier, dédaignant et détruisant souvent tout le reste. (Handy & Pukui, p. 213, quoted in Lévi-Strauss, 1962, p. 6)⁶

⁵ In this way, the arbitrarily designated concept of “positive” collides with a tradition of studies in a way that seems naive. It is very common to find the word “deconstruction” in the works of contemporary thinkers. However, although it was not used by Nietzsche, it is to him that we must turn to when defining its meaning. “Deconstruction” refers to a form of intellectual work that consists of knocking down the buildings of classical philosophy until they reach their foundations, in order to bring them to light and expose their irredeemable contingency. (Author’s translation)

⁶ The use of the natural resources available to the Hawaiian natives was almost complete; much more than that practiced in the current commercial era, which exploits mercilessly the few products which, for the moment, provide a financial advantage, disdain and often destroying everything else. (Author’s translation)

So, the optimistic view of ecolinguistics can be considered, at some point, a romantic colonialist one because it considers the other/different as the basis for a different potential development. Even though, we do not believe that the search for new stories or discourses is the wrong way, and at a certain level, the work involved in positive discourse analysis can lead to a real salience.

The first thing analysts must keep in mind is the use, the utility of their work:

While critique looked at the present through the means of past production, design shapes the future through deliberate deployment of representational resources in the designer's interest ... The task of the critic is to perform analysis on an agenda of someone else's design. As a result a considerable degree of inertia is built into this process ... Design sets aside past agendas, and treats them and their products as resources setting an agenda of future aims, and in assembling means and resources for implementing that. (Kress, 2000, pp. 160-161)

The product of the analysis can and must guide the search and assemble of new discourses and stories. New and different ways of looking at life, at the world, at our social system are the only way to construct a different future. But this quest for new stories and discourses cannot forget that our current social system demands exclusion as a form to reproduce itself (Martínez Romagosa & Flax, 2020, p. 4).

On the other hand, we cannot deny that much of the non-western perspectives can contribute to build new discourses and stories. As the origin metaphor reminds us much of what we have lost in our modern societies, many cultures that keep alive that connexion can help those that do not, bringing back some traces for the future. But what cannot be forgotten is that in many of these stories male-chauvinism, speciesism, homophobic ideals, etc., are present too. That is why a critical perspective is needed as well as a positive one.

4. Marxist salience

The influence of the *Brundtland Report* on the dominant discourses of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century presents the main challenge for ecolinguistics today. The restitution of the agency in the discourses about other species is the previous step to the restitution of their identity and recognition of rights; and this can only be achieved through criticism, which supposes the Marxian concept of class struggle. Rethinking and updating Marxian class logic, we can think of a particular group that systematically subdues the rest: white western culture, heterosexual men. Therefore, the deconstruction and alternative proposal must come from rethinking the concept of class: we can no longer think of social classes as Marx understood them, the oppressed cannot continue acting in isolation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 1). Many movements are becoming aware of the need to join efforts to combat the same oppressor. The idea of an intersectionality of struggles based on a reworking should be the new step for critical studies. At this point, positive discourse

analysis has much to offer: new discourses and stories must guide us, but without questioning hegemonic systems, these changes cannot take place. This is the reason why movements like the feminist shake the bowels of capitalism: they put under a close scrutiny representations anchored in classical antiquity, change signs and value indexes that upset the pillars of western societies while they think of new ways, new stories and discourses to conceive the future. The change of stories is certainly the way through, but the new stories do not automatically replace the old ones. Arbitrary changes come from class struggle and the change from one narrative to another necessarily implies this struggle, which we claim it must be redefined. This is the fight in which ecolinguistics has to take part.

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