9. *Palabrear* the Colombian ELT Field: A Decolonial Approach for the Study of Colombian Indigenous EFL Teachers' Identities

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Introduction

I believe in the pursuit of building up a bridge to overcome the knower-known epistemologic separation nested in positivism (Semali, & Kincheloe, 1999). I also believe that historicity can be the rigth tool to build it. Historicity plays a pivotal role in identifying the locus of enunciation of either, an individual who might be interested in conducting research or a person interested only in sharing an informed opinion. Under the umbrella of these two foundational beliefs, I do not adhere to the idea of *mere* historicity of the concepts (Grünner, 2006), while I do not consider history as a lineal and progressive thread that brings us naturally to the present. On the contrary, I regard it as discontinuous and multiple. Perhaps most importantly, I do not believe that universality is an atribute of history; in fact, I see it as rather particular to the cultures of human beings (Moreno, 2000). In this chapter, I intend to establish my locus of enunciation with the hope that it could also add meaning to who I am as a researcher, similarly to how their loci of enunciation allowed Semali and Kincheloe's (1999) to ethically commit to their research study. However, aspects that seem to be as evident as my ethnicity, have become untraceable within the determinism of what Chaves and Zambrano (2006) called *la nación mestiza* (the mixed nation), as well as within the dominant collective imagination of the Colombian population and its genetic and ideological construction that still leads positioning and contestation practices around race and racialization. The *mestizo* identity conveys the supra-ethnic homogeneity, and, simultaneously, heterogeneity and conflict; that is because of the many ways of being *mestizo*, as well as the

practices of exclusion and subjugation in the (re)construction of *the other*, be it women, the Indigenous, the black/dark, or the poor (Olarte & Díaz, 2014).

Following this still-blurry ethnic positioning, which is already surrounded by all kinds of uncertainties, I would need to resort to the professional dimension of my identity in order to intertweave *the narrative* with *the positioning of the self* as a locus of enunciation. I am an English-language teacher and teacher educator pursuing a PhD degree in education. I am well aware that the discourses of academia have traditionally pretended to be color-blinded, and have been positivistic with the intention to show objectivity and universalism. I am also aware that my professional field, the ELT (English Language Teaching) can be instrumentalized as a mechanism of colonial difference, as López- Gopar and Sughrua (2014) have claimed for the case of México, and that even well-intended constructs in education (such as the case of minority education), can play a role in perpetuating social, linguistic, and ontological asymmetries while also becoming accomplices of linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2001). I am, too, aware of the fact that, as Cajigas and Rotundo (2007) discussed, scholars political positioning of solidarity when conducting ethnographic research with non-dominant ethnic groups, would welcome the alternative ontologies and epistemologies of the *border beings* (Dussel, 2013) a term used in decolonial literature to refer to beings that embody apparently oppositional identities. In this sense, it is pivotal to listen to *the others*, acknowledging both, their epistemic rights (Mignolo, 2009), and their epistemic priveleges (Dussel, 2013), while committing the self to decolonial research projects about life and its problems.

I work as an English-language teacher, and teacher educator in Colombia, a country where at least 70 languages or dialects are sopken: Spanish (Castillian), and 69 native languages. About 65 of such native languages are Indigenous; two are Creole (Palenquero from San Basilio and Creole from the San Andrés Archipelago); and the others are Romani, and Colombian sign language (ONIC, 2018). Despite of this diversity, bilingualism is often conceptually treated in the country as an excluding binary practice, mostly reduced to Spanish-English. Binary and exclusive essentialisms *de facto* seem to construct indigenous linguistic diversity as something that is expendable for the nation. That is, in part, because indigenous languages embody the epistemology of the *anthropos* (indigenous cultures), while appear to be of no importance to the modernity of the country, whereas in the particular case of Spanish-English, the mainstream bilingualism becomes linked to the *humanitas* (Modernity), and entitled to dictate the biopolitics of coloniality (Mignolo,

2013). Here, it is imperative to recognize that the binary approach is the result of colonial major narratives in the nation project that, by instrumentalizing the learning of English to the insertion of the country into the global village, generate constraints to the being, the knowing, and the doing of Colombian ELT teachers.

Some of the main narratives in the Colombian ELT field can be understood as paradigmatically framed within positivism and post-positivism that, as De Sousa (2009) claims, result from applying the epistemic principles pertaining to the study of natural phenomena to the study of social phenomena. Examples of such dominant narratives include:

- Quantification as a principle of scientificity. There is a practice of reducing teachers' language knowledge to the *measurable* trait of language proficiency, which allows for the adoption of a quantifying attitude towards teachers, both individually and collectively. Such attitude implies that something as complex as a language is seen from a reductionist and standardizing perspective where the test score is taken as the signifier of a signified (English language) filled with multiple traits that are never going to be embraced by a test.

- A deductive approach where theory informs practice. Often within the field, a determinism of Modernity can be detected, which would favor the recipe, the method, and the technological transformation of reality. There is less emphasis in understanding and more emphasis in transforming.

- Focus on formal cause-effect relations. An inmediate consequence of this is an oblivion of the intention and the agents behind the practices in the field. This implies the reduction of complexity by means of analysis and specialization, the formulation of laws, and the prediction of future phenomena (Aristotle's formal causality), among others, all of that given prevalence to the study of how things work instead of focusing on who is the agent or what are the ultimate goals of actions in the field.

- Ontological configuration of utopic and docile bodies. The practices of learning and teaching English often resort to an ideal speaker. Hence, often times English-language speakers from core English-speaking countries are the ones who become the model from which the norm is constructed to dictate standards of what the usage and the teaching of the language should be. Such establishing of standards is manifested in many different ways, including favoring prototypical English speakers and guaranteeing them better hiring conditions in language-teaching jobs, based only on their *being native*, even

> over people who are not English-native but have acquired the formation and experience needed to be English-language teachers.

In the Colombian ELT field, the state of language-teaching policies also favor Anglo-European epistemologies, as much as those discourses and practices that privilege the native English speaking instructions over the non-native speaking teachers (Gómez-Vásquez, & Guerrero Nieto, 2018). The result is a subtle ontological configuration, because teachers might end up trying to sound like the *constructed* idea of a standard native speaker, and resemble every aspect of the native-speakers being, which is utopic. A second consequence to keep in mind, is a symmetric crisis of knowledge-representation; that is because in those countries where English is learned as a foreign language, the knowledge about English-language teaching is often rather consumed than produced; that is, it is imported from the core English-speaking countries, and dictated to the non- native English-language teachers. Tuned with this dynamics, the Colombian ELT teachers are often constructed, even from the official bilingual policy discourses, as deficitary or not fully reliable in terms of their language competence, their language usage, and their teaching. That is something that forces Colombian ELT teachers to permanently attempt to counteract the official and dominant discourses that construct them as unprepared (González, 2007) by means of either being docile to the foreign discourses about English-language teaching or highlighting and strengthening their professional profiles (often also dictated by those Anglo-European epistemologies).

My experience as an educator in the ELT field has allowed me to personally meet (and get involved with differing degrees of interaction) four different English-language teachers who could have been considered a challenge to dominant narratives in the sense described by Mignolo (2013). Actually, they seem to be an embodiment of those epistemic and ontological obediences and disobediences that are often found in our field.

These teachers are: a) an English language teacher who is a member of the Uitoto, Murui- Muinanne native tribe from the Colombian Amazon; after attending school in Bogotá, this teacher returned to his hometown to teach English at the local school. b) a second English-language teacher who is a member of the same Uitoto tribe, who moved to a mayor Colombian city upon completion of his education in Bogotá, where he now teaches English-language to elementary-school children. c) an English-language teacher yet to obtain his degree, who is a Wayuu native, a tribe from Guajira, and has lived most of his life in Bogotá; and, d) an English-language, Muisca teacher yet to complete her education, who is dedicated to contribute to the vindication of

her peoples' rights, while in pursuing such goal she exerts active leadership in re-indigenization, and actively participates in initiatives to rescue her tribe's original language (Muysc Cubun) that originally was spoken in what is now Bogotá and was among the first ones to suffer the factual policies of linguistic genocide of the colony and the republican nationhood. In my view, the existence of English-language teachers who belong to native indigenous tribes, can be understood as resulting from the nationhood project of modernity, and the obediences and disobediences that challenge the homogenizing ontological asymmetries of the nation, which offer horizons to understanding the societal projects and the individual selves that have been just invisibilized. Here is precisely, as Mignolo (2013) proposes, where spaces for the reflection of *border thinking* and *border epistemologies* can be found.

What could do, a person who was not born speaking one of the privileged languages of the world and who was not educated in privileged institutions? Either such person accepts his/her inferiority, or makes an effort to demonstrate that he/she is a human being equal to those who placed him/her as a second class person. That is, two of the choices are to accept the humiliation of being inferior to those who decided that you are inferior, or to assimilate. And, to assimilate means that you admited your inferiority and accepted to play a game that is not yours but that has been imposed upon you. Border thinking and border epistemology *is* the the third option here (Mignolo, 2013, p. 134).

A study with indigenous ELT teachers (and ELT teachers to be) requires the decolonial inflection (Mignolo, 2009; Grossfoguel, 2006; Maldonado-Torres, 2007) as the lens through which to look at the stances of epistemic violence exerted towards their ontologies. Such lens should as well uncover the epistemic obediences and disobediences that oscillate in their ontological and epistemological agency, i.e. their practices of resistance and (re) existence that challenge the colonial invisibilization of these border beings in the Colombian ELT field.

By resorting to what De Sousa (2009) called the *ecology of knowledge*, I, as an ELT field scholar, intend to join my voice to the voices that vindicate *other* forms of knowing and *other* forms of being, so that together we may contribute to document (and enact) the practices of existence, resistance, and re-existence. The search for totalities is to be rejected. Acknowledging the hybridity, the agency, the difference, the *border thinking* and *border theorizing* is a step forward towards the de-articulation of the colonial binaries. Such step is necessary for the understanding of the identities of indigenous

ELT teachers as the materialization of multifaceted concepts of languages, cultures, and learning experiences framed between their agencies and the determinisms of the nationhood projects. Ultimately, it is a call to admit that peoples, languages, and cultures "have the right to be different precisely because *we* are all equals" (Mignolo, 2000, p. 311).

Reflections on Ethnicity and Ethnicity Contestations within ELT

Colombian indigeneity, despite contributing to the survival of a Colombian nationhood project once the Europeizing mestizaje failed (Ariza, 2004), is often constructed from the otherhood. A disciplining *differential homogenization* resulted in non-indigenous State agents shaping indigenous into "subjectivities, subjects, and social groups that are believers in, and productive parts of, the national political and economic system while, at the same time, are also *othered* or considered culturally distinctive" (Ferrero, 2015, p. 294). The *othered* indigeneity has become a supra-ethnic dreamed homogenizing nation-state metaphor that fails to acknowledge their diverse in-group identities as distinct peoples (Anderson & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2015); it also might reduce their social, cultural, and political life to a scheme that could perpetuate the continuity of coloniality (Rojas- Curieux, 2019).

Otherhood is framed within an essentialist continuum established by the constitutional reform of 1991, and the ulterior sentence SU-510, which used "scientific criteria of anthropology and sociology" (Corte Constitucional, 1998), thus establishing three kinds of indigenosu communities: a) *Traditional indigenous communities* as the ones that have attempted to avoid the contact with the *white* people at all costs and consequently are subjected to the strict rules of their traditions, while and are granted total autonomy (for example the Kogis of the Sierra Nevada); b) *Semi-traditional indigenous communities* who have experienced mestizaje and have a permanent contact with the hegemonic society, but give a great value to their indigenous identities; and, c) *Uprooted indigenous communities* who have been uprooted from their indigenous ancestry and inserted in the *white* society. An example are the indigenous children who were separated from their parents and educated by catholic and protestant communities.

The political and economic agenda of the country, led by globalization and its free-market education, recognizes the strong historic indigeneity and its mobilization, while at the same time it privatizes, decentralizes, and promotes natural resource extraction (Rey-Martínez, 2011; Ferrero, 2015). Framed within the contemporary capitalism, and neoliberalism at large, extraction and extractivism do not only target the dispossession of ancestral territories due to the mass-scale industrial extraction of non-renewable natural resources (e.g. oil, minerals, or country biodiversity), but also enable deeper logics of exploitation and subjectification (Junka-Aikio, & Cortes-Severino, 2017).

Ethnicity and race are also dispossessed and racism is always present in policy and pedagogy by means of discursively-entrenched commonsensical conceptualizations such as *ability, aptitude,* and *the right attitude* (Gillborn, 2005). Color blindness and invisibilization of colonial practices in the establishment of language educational policies, are often disguised by discourses of multiculturalism and diversity as mechanisms that intend to show that racism and colonialism no longer exist. Nonetheless, "in that case, the unequal power relations evoked by the language of race are flattened out into a mere multiplicity of diverse cultures to be celebrated and affirmed" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 127).

The dispossession of the border beings' selves promotes a socially-constructed ignorance resulting in "epistemic blank spots that make privileged knowers oblivious to systemic injustices" (Bailey, 2007, p. 77). The practices of epistemical and ontological extractivism (Grossfoguel, 2016), align with the re-enactment of a history-long doctrine of Eureopean discovery of America, which paved the way for the dispossession (Robertson, 2005), while instead of pursuing the horizontal dialogue with the border beings, extract their ideas as raw materials to colonize and subdue them by means of the looting and marketing of their knowledge as commodities that can be traded and accumulated as some form of symbolic capital.

However, rooted in the often not self-acknowledged counter hegemony, Colombian ELT scholars are also often finding peripheral anthropological approaches that contest the subaltern role ascribed to their identity, thus recognizing that *the other* is simultaneously subject and object of knowledge (Cajigas- Rotundo, 2007). Being able to recognize indigenous populations beyond the traditional othering impositions as ahistoric, primitive, and in need of protection (Menezes, 2005), would not just be an epistemic shift but also a response to the ontology of knowing subjects and its epistemic privilege of objectifying *the other* (Correa, 2007).

The adoption of *epistemologies others* (Cariño, 2013) propels the acknowledgement of other forms of knowing, and in that sense, other forms of constructing the identities of Colombian ELT identities with the specificities of Colombian ELT teachers of diverse origins, which might have been formerly denied within the discursive coloniality. In that sense, scholars such as Escobar & Gómez (2010), Jaraba & Carrascal (2012), Arias (2014), Anderson & Uribe-Jongbloed, (2015), and Arismendi (2016), to mention a few, have problematized elements of *race*, ethnicity, or pluri-culturalism as units of analysis in the Colombian ELT field. Works from these scholars have focused on contesting the discursive constructions of ignorance or invisibilization of race that have historically been used to transform racial minorities into colonial subjects (Bonilla-Silva, 2005).

The decolonial thought might need to make visible the ethnic minorities even within the ELT; there is a need to recognize epistemic, colonial, and racial injustice and join the voices that claim for a shift in terms that can be used as units of analysis regarding pluri-ethnicity, thus moving from acceptance to respect. "While acceptance of differences calls for changes in the legal arrangements of society, respect for them requires changes in its attitudes and ways of thought" (Parekh, 2000, p. 2). Such changes in ways of thought might also imply acknowledgment of that indigenous peoples might think of themselves as being owed a recognition of their human dignity, which has de facto been put to question while they have been vernacularized. It is the collective apology, the recognition, and the respect what should accompany the land, monetary, and political reparations (Robertson, 2005). An attitude of respect would be aware that, by reclaiming race and land, the indigenous are also helping the oppressors recover their humanity (Sullivan, 2006). Although reclamations do not wipe out centuries of racism and subtle whitening in the form of *mestizaje* (prompted ethnic mixing), as an act, reclamation does not mean just confronting economic and social injustice, but also the unconscious habits of white privilege, including the very colonial hierarchies that have perpetuated injustice (Robertson, 2005).

Challenges in the Epistemic Dialogue Between Bilingualisms

The invisibilization of others knowledge, and the practices that promote color blindness, generate an epistemic violence and epistemologies of ignorance (Mills, 2000) towards indigenous bilingualisms, and the knowleddge they have

about themselves. Studying the conflux of ethnic bilingualism and mainstream bilingualism clashes with the tenets of the paradigms that traditionally have nested the Western academia in general, and the EFL field in particular. The uncertainties are exacerbated when we bring into consideration the need to dialogue with a body of epistemologies of which little is known, and where knowledge has been often the result of intercultural translation into Western eyes. Some of the uncertainties that a dialogue with indigenous ways of knowing might bring, should include: the risk of commodification of indigenous knowledges; the risk of a paternalistic and condescending attitude towards their voice; and, the unpredicatability of what languages and bilingualisms might mean for the identity of indigenous EFL teachers

The risk of commodification of Latin America indigenous knowledge. The academic gatekeepers have deemed indigenous knowledge on bilingualism irrelevant and unfittable within the dominant epistemologies of Western knowledge production. However, indigenous people of Latin America might be the population that historically most have lived bilingualisms despite of the colonial attempts to reduce their linguistic diversity. Their knoweledge of bilingualism is not just epistemological, but it is rather a constituent of their identities and consequently a part of their ethos and their ontologies.

The interesting turn of events is that, in a contemporary colonial mechanism (following the recognition of pluriculturality of indigenous populations in the constitutions of Latin American countries in the 1990s), the Latin American region has strived towards Spanish-English *bilingualism* in the 2000s, based on neoliberal principles of globalization and competitiveness. Thus, it seems that their concept of bilingualism, similar to what has already happened to indigenous populations' lands and ancestral botanic-medicinal knowledge, has been snatched from indigeneity, where it originally belonged. Now, when the term bilingualism is used in the policies, academic, and pedagogical discourses in the region, it is often unproblematically equated in the collective imagery as Spanish-English.

The maisntream bilingualism in the region is often more discursive than experiential, and often falls short in its attempts to accomplish the goals of its educational and linguistic policies. Resorting to acknowledging the reality of bilingualism practices in indigenous groups, might be useful as a referent that shows the historical, social, and political ethos of bilingualism beyond a device that is simply institutionalizing and imposing, as it is the case with the contemporary bilingual education policies.

The uncertainty here lies in the pursuit of establishing dialogues between mainstream and indigenous bilingualisms, while at the same time intending to protect indigenous knwoledge from its commodification by the Western counterpart. Knowledge, thus, should be reagarded as a vital non-comodity that is often subjected to the commodity fiction, similarly to what happens to land and labor when subjected to the market doctrine of capitalism. Precisely, considering the effect of the doctrines of capitalism regarding the Western contact with indigenous peoples, Jones (2009) acknowledges that by the creation of sophisticated legal mechanisms where *conservationism* is the driving discourse, globalization jeopardizes the traditional development of indigenous peoples around the world. Factors of globalization like the capital's need for the ownership of productive lands for the purpose of industrializing agricultural production, the extraction of natural or mineral resources, and the massive cattle ranches, to just metion some examples, have threatened the territory of the native populations causing the dispossession of their lands, as well as their first-hand knowledge of plants, animals, fungi and other living organisms. Besides, "the intrusion of Western styles in their traditional cultures and the exploitation of natural resources in their territories —a typical behavior of the Western actor, have produced emigrations as well as the consequent subsuming of indigenous peoples as a whole" (Jones, 2009, p. 196).

A risk lies in the Western regulations of knwoledge ownership and accessibility by means of a legal system (the patenting of intellectual property), which commodifies knowledge production and transforms it in information, as well as in ideas that can be capitalized and transacted as a commodity. This separation between the human being and the human being's knowledge (Whitt, 2009), might be conflictive with indigenous populations' conceptualizacion of knowledge and its purposes, despite the fact that the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous concedes to indigenous populations the right to maintain their own cultural and educational institutions, and the protection of their cultural and intellectual property (Wessendorf, & García-Alix, 2009).

For indigenous people, knowledge is understood as handed down by their sacred ancestors, thus instrinsic to the existence of the individuals and the commmunity, which needs to be passed on to each successive generation of families, tribes, and indigenous nations; thus, it cannot be the property of individuals, and cannot be privatized and should not be profited. Conversely, the Western commodification of knowledge poses a threat to their way of knowing, since "intellectual property laws serve as means of transforming

indigenous knowledge and genetic resources into profitable commodities and of advancing the commodification of nature" (Whitt, 2009, p. 139).

The risk of a paternalistic and condescending attitude towards indigenous voices. The rights of indigenous people in Colombia have been the result of their own constant battle for recognition, while their movement has contributed greatly to the recognition of cultural diversity in the country. The inclusion of etnic groups within the social and economic life of the nation has been worded as a pursuit of some of the national policies: "At the same time, however, these policies have been based on governmental administrative structures', own concepts and appraisals of indigenous people's social problems, interpreted from the standpoint of indigenous economic disadvantage". (Borda & Mejía, 2005, p. 185).

The socio-political role of sciences that ends up hierarchizing knowledge production and making it lineal, and (de)legitimizing knowledge (De Sousa, 2006), has drifted subordinated cultural beings to develop their subjectivtities in the margins of the dominant narratives of modenism (Macedo, 1999). However, when the anti-racist and indigenous inclusion has been embraced by the Western epistemologies (which continues to deploy its illusion of objectivity, neutrality, universalism, and cartesian division of the knower and the known within a framework of unbiased truth), such efforts have often landed upon the historical preference for rhetorics over transformative practices (Sieder, 2002; Gillborn, 2005).

Indigenous communities in Colombia have been subjected to paternalistic attitudes by which they are regarded as being different, disadvantaged, and in need of integration into mainstream society; hardly was their active participation considered necessary for the stability of the nation, and "at present, even with the overt recognition of diversity, and constitutional mechanisms permitting a degree of administrative autonomy for indigenous groups, the goal of the State remains to reduce diversity to homogeneity" (Borda, & Mejía, 2005, p. 186). An example of how the rights acknowledged by the Colombian Constitution and the attitudes of the State, fail to conflux, is the fact that indigenous university formation is lower than any other social group in the country; the existing tertiary education offer detaches the student from his/her culture, the programs fail to be really bilingual, and more than 50% of the indigenous population that enrols in tertiary education abandon their studies with the certainty that the schooling contents respond to the

needs of urban sectors and do not relate at all with rural indigenous realities (Mato, 2009).

Given the disadvantageous conditions for indigenous communities inside the schooling system, and within the concept of nationhood at large, one might expect that either they resist the national identity (or that the institutions and authorities at the national level represent them), or that they redefine the national identity by reclaiming their features as constituents of the nationhood, which is the result of their permanent struggle in the pursuit of the recongition for diversity (Fleisher, 2001). Borda & Mejía (2005) have identified three examples of how, in (and in spite of) a globalized world, Colombian indigenous have found the elements to strengthen their cause: a) new leaders of the indigenous movement gained formation by accessing formal education; b) the involvement of outsiders was allowed to join the indigenous movements to encourage the revitalization of their cause; c) the constitution of alliances with political parties friendly to their causes; such was the case with the ADM-19 with whom the indigenous opened space for their delegates to participate in the assembly that allowed the National Constitution of Colombia 1991. It was this alliance what prompted the declaration of Colombia as a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation.

Thus, it is this historical referent that I should bring to mind in each of the moments when I, as a researcher, might feel tempted to succumb to the romanticism of translating or (co)authoring indigenous knowledge, or when the paternalistic attitude drags me to the reductionist binaries between Western and indigenous knowledge.

Talking about language from a different place of enunciation. The unwritten discoursive practices that equate *indigenous* with the primitive, the wild, the natural (Semali, & Kincheloe, 1999), have driven the nationhood understandings of indigenous languages and the value ascribed to them (Anderson & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2015). Mule (1999) has already warned us about how the teaching of a non-indigenous language in an indigenous context clearly curtails the learning of individuals. Things seem to be even more dramatic when English as a foreign language is privileged by the school curriculum, which seems to homogenize the learners as monolinguals who would just add up a foreign language to their repertoire. This underestimates or totally ignores the linguistic capital of learners and their particular cultures.

In the case of Colombia, where ethnoceducation, recognized as early as 1985 (based on the support by the national Minsitry of Education,the

partnership with universities, research groups, and indigenous organizations), includes bilingualism as one of its tenets (Patiño, 2004), it seems that it is the epistemological approach towards language what generates conflicts with the indigenous understandings and livings of it. The following principes could be used to exemplify the constituents of the invisibilization and epistemic violence (Sousa, 2006) towards indigenous linguistic capital: a) language as an instrument to objectivization: authorities conceive it as a regulator that allows the objectification of the existing nature, and constitutes a finite realm of possible transformations (Escobar, 2000). b) language as cultural artifact that can be reduced to an structure that can be quantified and controlled: efforts seem to revolve around the idea of establishing grammar rules, linguistic codes for the writing, and linguisitc corpuses; c) language as an instrument for acculturation and homogeneization: when teachers who are bilingual in Spanish and an indigenous language are hired, they are not given the right to teach, but actually used as translators of the mainstream teacher (Moreno, 2011); and, d) language is considered from a limiting terrotorial logic: the States, with their mindsets still framed within the colonial and missionary thoughts, conceive languages as cultural artifacts that can presuppose linguistic mappings of monolithic languages demarcated onto concrete physical boundaries, thus confining ethnolinguistically homogeneous groups that can be localized, apprehended and naturalized (Errington, 2001).

As a counter-part, indigenous ppopulations seem to regard nature as possessing an essence that goes way beyond the human control (Escobar, 2000); this is something that immediately debunks the belief of language as an instrument to apprehend nature. The models of culture and knowledge are based on historic, linguistic, and cultural processes that, although are not entirely isolated from larger historical narratives, are however much more bound to the specitifity of the culture's territory and the anthropology of the experiences of the indigenous groups (Escobar, 2000).

The indigenous land is not the manifestation of a potential possession in terms of Western private property, but, as it also happens with traditional knowledge, it has a collective nature and is undetachable from the ancestral territories (Lander, 2000; Lander, 2002). Unlike non-indigenous, the indigenous people refer to mother-nature as the provider of fruits, montains, rivers, valleys, but also of the secrets of the territoires, and sacred knowledge as resulting from the harmony with the forces and spirits that animate nature (ICCI, 2002). This premise takes Noboa (2006) to suggest language more as the product of a corpus of nature, instead of a linguisic corpus.

The word, the language, and the symbolic construction of reality and their cosmovision, constitutes the essence of the indigenous movements that claim for their visibilization and their trascendence and respect beyond the hegemonic discourses (Lamus, 2006). Language (overlapping with the spiritual realm, and their history) becomes a cultural distinctive trait when defining a group as a *people* that is entitled to the legal principle of self-determination (Hendrix, 2008) —a principle also acknowledged by Wessendorf, & García-Alix (2007) as essential constituent of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations.

Thus, the understanding that "the whole of humanity is enriched (or impoverished) by the survival (or loss) of its languages and culture" (Anderson & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2015, p. 137), drives the claims of indigenous movements and their dialogue with a critical and/or decolonial community of thought. As the CRIC (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca) claimed, as early as in 1973, defending the history, the language, and the indigenous customs, allowed indigenous populations to remain united and strong. Their own writings, their own documents, the stories of their ancestors, their own drawings did not just boost them to understand and feel the life, but also constituted their defense and taught them to not be humilliated and to fight.

As Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez (1989) argue, indigenous knowledge is a rich social resource for any justice-related attempt to bring about social change; intellectuals should, then, "soak themselves in this knowledge . . . assimilate the feelings, the sensitivity . . . " (p. 46) of epistemologies that offer epiphanies of what is unimagined by the academic impulses of Western knowledge. A particularly informing case, in regards to how indigenous knowledge manifests its novelty is the linguistic, pedagogic, and anthopologic scientific development with indigneous participation resulting from the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca CRIC and its Programa de Educación Bilingüe (Bilingual Education Program or PEB—, which is linked to the community projects of the indigenous communities yanacona, coconuco, totoró, guambiano, nasa, eperara-siapidara and inga (Patiño, 2004).

The openness to the prospective epiphanies of what indigenous know about bilingualisms, is based upon the belief that, in the colonial mindset, cognitive injustices have traditionally set the ground for social injustices (De Sousa, 2006); however, justice will not be based on more equal distribution of academic knowledge on mainstream bilingualism, but rather on acknowledging that the scientific/academic mainstream has constructed

bodies of ignorance (as opposed to bodies of knowledge), as well as disdain towards alternative ways of bilingualism and alternative knowledge about languages and bilingualisms, due to their unwillingness or incapacity to treat them on equal terms.

As Sastoque (2006, p. 30) narrates below, mother nature is also credited with having a language of its own. Such idea poses an example of the narratives written on the margins of the hegemonic epistemologies, and challenges deeply the Western idea of territory as the container and boundary reference of languages:

> During my time in the Sierra Nevada I had new and strange experiences. Hiking on the nature I felt how she started to talk to me, and I saw how the natives of the Sierra communicated with her.

Besides, Sastoque's quotation below (2206, p. 30) can also give a hint of what learning a language for communicative purposes can mean within the epistemologies/cosmovisions of indigenous populations:

> Among the many experiences I had in the Sierra, there is one very interesting that occurred to me in July 2006 in Nebusmake (the Arhuaca capital) on the way to Kochukwa. We were under the effect of the coca leaf, and when we sat down to rest and meditate, I felt how the river started to talk to me and I clearly understood his language.

Can one person, then, be bilingual by talking to the elements of nature in harmonic spiritual dialogues? Does such version of languages still allow the manifestations of learning by means of social interaction? Is social interaction limited to the human beings peer level? Here, Sastoque (2006, p. 30) continues:

> The air, the water, the fire, and the earth, like us, handle a language through which they express their knowledge and indoctrination of life for the mental, corporal, and spiritual evolution of the human being.

Regardless of the honest uncertainties of what will emerge as knowledge out of the linguistic identities of EFL teachers, my research study focuses on some form of ecology of knowledge that refrains from being blind to the social and cultural realities of societies on the periphery of the world system, "where the links between modern science and the designs of colonial and imperial domination are more visible, and where other non-scientific and non-Western forms of knowledge prevail in resistance practices (De Sousa, 2006, p. 21).

The ignorance of these elements, as referential to what Colombian bilingualisms are, becomes evidence that, despite the ground-breaking recognition of ethnic diversity in the Colombian constitution of 1991, policies targeting bilingualism have not been informed by a perspective of ethnic diversity. Rather, the State has targeted general and abstract indicators of achievement, poverty, and economic potential within programmes with specific time-frames and efficiency criteria that are different to the realities of diverse communities. Such policies demonstrate a lack of awareness or a conscious blindness to the fact that these political actions alter the collective life, threaten the cultural diversity, and create resistance which generally leads to the failure of such programs.

Against the Essentialism: Who are 'Colombian Indigenous ELT teachers'?

For the purpose of this study, there is not a strict binary or essentialist distinction of what it means to be a Colombian indigenous English-language teacher; therefore, defining participants ends up being a rather complex challenge. Indeed, I fear it because of the a priori readings that can be counterproductive to the idea of letting participants themselves construct the ontological reference. Another factor playing a roles here is the anticipated complexity of those ontologies that make me fear that I could fall in unfairness when describinG them. The participants' border being is the result of unusual identity configurations that conflux, including features such as being Colombia, being in the ELT field, and being indigenous, all of which can be constructed in conflictive ways beyond essentialism, as I will intend to elaborate on below. In this study, indigeneity of the participants is constructed on their life events, recounts, and reconstruction of their lineage, as well as in group indigenous leadership.

In fact, if there were some dimensions of such complexities that could seem less problematic, those would be the condition of being Colombian, and the condition of being an English-language teacher. Needed is to say here, additionally, that even those seemingly unproblematic dimensions are not fully transparent given that, on the one hand, indigenous communities like the tribes of Awás (who live in the border territories between Colombia and Ecuador), Wayuus (who live in the border territories between Colombia and Venezuela), and Muina Murui and Tikuna (who live in the triple border

between Colombia, Perú, and Brazil) could be entitled to double nationalities (Ley 43, 1993).

On the other hand, the condition of being an English-language teacher is intrinsically linked to the discourses of Modernity of the nationhood project, therefore, discursively constructed within the frame of the humanitas (Mignolo, 2013), which dictates the academic formation in the ELT field as well as the the career path following such formation. At any case, participants in my research study, who by definition are ELT teachers, made a decision when choosing such career path, which should be contemplated against the backdrop of the ontological nature of their particular border-beings (Dussel, 2013). Such border beings might move within certain continuum of subjacent epistemic obediences and disobediences (Mignolo, 2009), comformism and rebel actions, thus destabilizing subjectivities and conflicting against a historically ascribed marginality. Despite sharing the conflux of identities that move between the humanitas and the anthropos, there might be particular identity and cultural factors that will offer elements of reflection for which the fact that they are few participants adds up to the possibility of going more in depth in the dialogues and their polyphonies. Thus, being flexible on the criteria of being an ELT teacher, which concretely means that both, indigenous ELT teachers in formation and indigenous ELT teachers performing their careers (either in or out of their indigenous communities), could facilitate the *palabrear* with more participants, which could be benefitial for the intersubjective understanding of the practices that formerly had been invisibilized by scholars production within the field.

The most problematic element is, indeed, what constitutes the *being indigenous*. In that sense, I need to first resort to a certainty before moving onto a tangle of uncertainties: the certainty is the rejection of the stance that we are all indigenous (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012). Participants in my research project need to have traceable links to their indigenous cultural heritage, even if they might have been denied their identity by the supraethnic binary distinction of indigeneity of insitutional discourses. So, the distinction made by the Constitutional Court (1998) between Traditional indigenes, Semi-traditional indigenes, and Uprooted indigenes, though interesting as a point of reference, does not work as the sole determiner of the population, precisely because of its essentializing nature, which can conflict deeply with participants nature as border beings. Instead, the sense of cultural, social, and ethnic belonging, the experience of their ingroup cosmovisions (however close they might be), and indigenes participating or even leading processes

of reindigenization (like in the case of the members of cabildos Muisca in Bogotá), might be insightful ontological features for the participants.

This study is framed in the understanding that there are also guiding elements, beyond the supraethnic binary distincion indigenous/non-indigenous that will depend on the particularities of the indigenous group of belonging, and identify and distinct such given indigenous groups, and consequently the participants. Elements that used to be more prototypical, not only of the supraethnic concept of 'indigenous' but also of the different particular peoples, might (because of conditions like violence, social and cultural vernacularization, the idea of progress, the contact with devices like schooling, and the like) be less essentializing. And that, which might at times be considered (not necessarily wronfully) threatening to the cultural diversity, might, as well, constitute the border being element, the dissonance, the ontologic and epistemic privilege to re-signdify the ELT field, but also the undersanding of the diverse identities that need to be acknowledged in our being Colombians, and being humans.

Examples of such formerly monolithic features can include factors such as territoriality and/or language. To instantiate, territoriality was considered as one of the main coiners of indigenous in-group identity of the Embera family, which meant that by moving away from the territories of their ancestors they ceased to be considered *indigenous* by their own relatives (Piñeros, Rosselli, & Calderon, 1998). It is in their territory where they recreate their culture, weave their history and sense of belonging to their motherland, which is the center of their education and their identity development (Tapasco, 2008). However, the dynamics of the Colombian armed conflict (which has often been linked not just to the historic fight for land, but also to current legal and illegal perspectives of exploitation of the territories in the pursuit of profiting from the insertion in the globalized world), obliged them to add the adverbial clause *embera in condition of displacement* to their identity, and their subalternized voices still show belonging and resistance (Sabogal, 2014).

A specific case that is worth to mention here, is the case of the Wayuu people, whose language is considered a key component of their body of culture. Wayunaki, is indeed a distinctive trait; however, the conditions of exploitation and empoverishing of their territories due to exractivism and abandonment from the State, might have taken many Wayuu families with very young children to migrate to the urban centers away from their Wayuu territory. This phenomenon, which corresponds to what the Colombian Constitutional Court (1998) calls an uprooted indigeneity, might have

hindered the development of their fluency in wayunaiki. If that was the case, the in-group-matriarchal lineage would work as a key element in the distinction of Wayuu people. Belonging to a matri-lineal clan (e'irükuu) e.g. the uriana, sapuana, uraliyuu, jusayu, ipuana, epieyuu, and having a Wayuu lineage (apüshi) accounts for the ancestral vinculation with common genetic ancestry (Puentes, 2009) even if disperse because of migration. An indigenous English teacher with such heritage might probabbly have links to the Wayuu cosmovision, thus *palabrear* could become an element to retrieve and reconstruct experiences as border-being and the identity interfaces on his conditions as indigenous, as Wayuu, as Colombian, and as member of the ELT field.

As a way to instantiate the multiple and complex shades of identity that are embodied in the indigenous ELT teachers, I will include actual verbatim from one of the prospective participants in my research study (Nicole), who is a leader in the reconstruction of the Muisca indigeneity and has understood that her formation in the ELT provides her with elements that help her construct the history of her pueblo and contribute to the re-consruction of their identity:

> There was a series of historic events that in the case of my people were forgotten because making people forget was precisely one of the pillars of colonization. So, one of the strongest instrumental mechanisms that they used was precisely forbidding the languages. In 1774, Carlos IV forbided the indigenous languages in La Nueva Granada, and the first language that felt the rigor of that law was of course the pueblo Muisca's, because it was located within the nearest vicinity to the town where these statutes where being signed. So, if they disposses you from your language, they are not just removing how you speak, but also the form, the thought, and so on, because languages are all that. That means that languages are not just a tool for communication, but also embody a bunch of beliefs, traditions… languages even reflect the way people envision the world, that is why they have so many analyses; yet, when the language is removed, what happens? People start to have another way of thinking, and consequently they also start to forget many things because there is no use of the language.

This excerpt does little justice to all the awareness, agency, and activism that has made of Nicole a young leader in her community. However, it does give account of the kind of reflective and informed tone that she uses when talking about her cause. In the excerpt below, there is a reference to Nicole's formation process.

> We know a bit of everything, at least the ones in languages, but in terms of pedagogy we know whole lot. Let's say we know a lot about methods, techniques, strategies, didactics . . . It is nice. And I took the path of literature and pedagogy, articulating both things, and of course, the linguistic field, I like a lot like the whole linguistic field, those three. But then what is English, French, and other languages like Latin and Greek, that we are also taught? those are languages that I learned a little, and in fact, if I am frank to you, I did not visualize myself teaching them, because my livelihood has always been to teach my language by means of the oral traditions.

Palabrear to Challenge the Colonial Silences and Allow for Pluriverses in the Colombian ELT

The fact that this study is located from a Global South does not only represent the unification of territoriality against eurocentrism; it rather expresses that my research study is located on a pluriverse, a world made of many worlds (Escobar, 2017). The act of a positioning the selves to counter the colonial silences, has taken scholars to join the indigenous, the peasants, and the afro-latin communities to construct conscious political symbolisms such as the situated territoriality resulting from the adoption of the term *Abya Yala*. This name comes from the Panama's Cuna language, and means *land in full maturity* or *flowering land* the name that original populations gave to the Americas (Walsh, 2014). Escobar (2017) has acknowledged, in that regard, the more inclusive *Abya Yala/Afro/Latin-America*, which (though not fully accountable of other identity axes like gender, generation, rural and urban living, social class, sexuality, and spirituality) denotes an identity construction that, grounded in conscious positioning, problematizes even further the naturalized Latin America.

Similarly, I have adopted a specific identity position to call myself a *solidary* or a *militant* scholar; so that to see myself as such, throughtout my research endeavors I have made deliberate and consistent efforts to counter the extractivist approach and avoided following traditional methodologies. Additionally, I will to set limits to any potential author's hierarchy while conducting my *Palabrear* research study, by means of yielding to the narrative polyphony, which is a more heterarchical writing in two (or three, or more) hands (Corona, 2007).

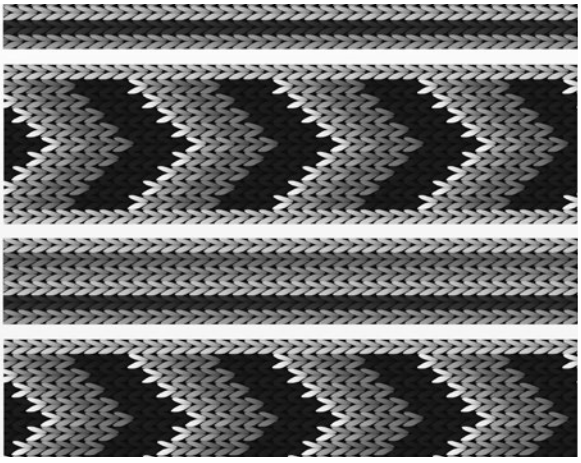
This methodological choice is constructed around the concept of *palabrear* which I have borrowed from Beltrán (2016a)' interaction with the Murui (wuitoto), to refer to a political view towards the intersubjectivity intrinsic to the qualitative studies. Similarly to what has been called the *epistemology of the knowing and the to-be-known subjects* (Vasilachis, 2011)*, palabrear* is a methodological approach that vindicates the ontology over the epistemology; it is, indeed, a pursuit of a more horizontal dialogue between the multiversalities of paradigms, epistemologies, and forms of representing that go beyond binary distinctions (Vasco, 2007).

The act of *palabrear together*, appeals to the conviction that there are histories, narratives, knowledge, comformities and resiliences that make part of the itinerary of the decolonial and inter cultural research (Gómez, 2015). The certainty here is that that traditional paradigms used to validate knowledge on education, ELT, bilingualism, identity, territoriality, alterity, and even research, could be left behind not only because of their vulnerabilities as stepping ground, but also due to a basic principle of rejection to injustice.

Figure 9.1 below represents the isolated dominant grand narratives as isolated threads preceeding the act of *palabrear*. The three threads on this figure are: a) the major narrative of the Colombian ELT; b) my identity as an English teacher and teacher educator; and, c) the narrative of a participant (a Colombian indigenous English-language teacher).

Figure 9.1

Isolated Narrative Threads Preceding the Act of Palabrear



Adapted from Galafassi et al (2018: 10)

Palabrear is a decolonial methodological approach nested in the Global South that is intrinsically counterhegemonic. Contrary to positivistic ethnography and anthropology, which until recently were used to conceptualize *the other* from an *etic* (outsider) perspective but ignored the *emic* indigenous epistemologies thus objectivizing them, *palabrear* as a methodology and ontology that belongs to the murui-muina themselves, promotes the dialogue of intercultural knowledge and compels the rupture of the asymmetries of power. *La palabra* (the word/ the story) is not conceived any more as a mere transmitter of data from the known subjects, but as a performative practice of construction of the selves and their vindications, as depicted in Figures 9.2 and 9.3 (Beltrán, 2016b).

Palabrear is, thus, an alternative to the monological and colonizing standards used as frameworks in the production of knwoledge. The resulting pluritopic hermeneutics opposes the idea of one single universal historical culture with new meanings, and instead proposes the pluriversality or "the determination of meaning to multiple possibilities even within the same historical horizon" (Alcoff, 2007, p. 89). These hermeneutics and pluriversality work as the conceptual reference that offers hope in the pursuit of freeing the representation of the colonized *others* from the burden of hegemonic Eurocentric concepualizations.

The use of this methodology does not mean having to answer pre-fabricated questions by the researcher, but rather a focus on listening that instills in the researcher the need to reformulate, ground, and/or generate new questions that need to be situated within the contexture (Vasco, 2007). It also implicates an inherent acknowledgement of the need to listen to *the others*, the border-being, and embrace their epistemic rights and their epistemic priveleges to construct a collective weaving that re-creates the world by means of *la palabra*, as said by indigenous leader Harold Rincón (cited in Beltrán, 2016a).

The goal when applying *palabrear* as a methodology involves being able to narrate the injustice of the epistemic extractivism and its practices, which are addressed by Chilisa (2012) as:

- Adscribing a primitive, barbaric identity to colonized societies and considering them as incapable of producing useful knowledge.
- Denying other knowledge systems incljding philosophy, academic, pedagogy, methodology.
- Unwilling to consider epistemologies (mainly the Western one) as situational and suitable to particular geographic locations (Mignolo, 2000; Alcoff, 2007).

- Excluding and dismissing as irrelevant the knowledge embedded in the cultural experiences of the people.
- Appropriating indigenous knowledge systems without acknowleding copyrights of the producers of this knowledge.
- Adopting a deficitary perspective (focusing on what they lack instead of what they have); deficiency maintains power in the hands of the ones that control academic knowledge.
- Allowing the filter of gatekeepers of knowledge over what can be said or published.

As an outsider participating in this research study, my chances to build relationality with the participants can only be framed whitin the ethnography of solidarity (Vasco, 2007), propelled by the pursuit of similar interests that demand an empathetic and heterarchical (Castro-Gomez & Grossfoguel, 2007) intersubjectivity. *Palabrear*, then, should not just be another methodology, but a collective attempt to rescue the human encounters resulting from decolonizing ethnographic research. *Palabrear* is more than the act of representing reality, it is a verb that weaves the thoughts, the actions, the reconstructions, the transformations with *la palabra*. The act of *palabrear* conveys an interpersonal relationality that is being constructed around the time spent together, which means being able to meet, share food, share thoughts, share life projects.

Harold Rincón, an indigenous leader participating in Beltrán's study (2016a p. 47) defines *palabrear* below[59] (the translation is mine):

> *Palabrear* comes out of the use of the *palabra* as a verb. *La palabra*, for the Murui-Muna (who are peoples of sweet yuka, coca, and tobaco) has a meaning that is related to the sacred, the word that was pronounced by the padre creador (which some could associate to God) to create what is perceived daily in their surrounding: organisms, natures . . . life. The elders speak of *la palabra de la palabra*, which is the creating *palabra*. This means that it is not that the word was thought by the man, because that *palabra* was in the world before the man arrived . . . that is the origin of things. And *palabrear* is the exercise that drives us back to her. Therefore, *mambear* is a challenge. A challenge that involves the mambe and the ambil as vehicles that lead us to the *palabra* of origin. One can *mambear* alone, but one can also *mambear* in company because it is also a matter of all consrtructing together. What I mean is that *palabrear* is synonymous with *mambear*: to reflect, think, say and organize ideas and face everyday challenges. We understand that the *mambear* is a

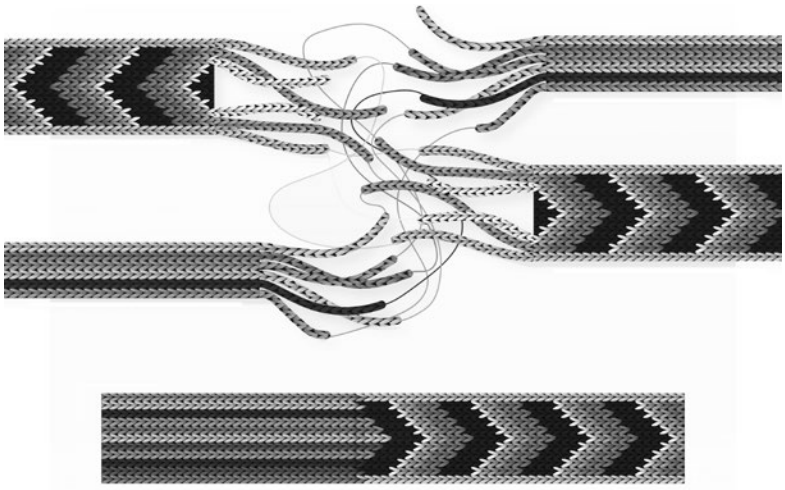
59 My own translation

> ritual-challenge where one speaks and listens; the basket is woven through the exchange of ideas and opinions. And I want to say that as a methodology for the purposes of your work and ours, the *mambear* with us was the most concrete thing he could have done, because our thinking is doing and our doing is thinking. But remember that in the *mambeadero* we do not tell lies. Everything is as it flows . . . the word is the soul-voice of reflection and listening, understanding and discernment. In addition, it obeys to a cultural and geographical context, typical of our culture of the *mambear* of the Murui-Muina.

Palabrear is a creating act; it is described by Beltrán (2016a) as weaving (Figure 9.2), which means doing-constructing the palabra dialogically (ideas, questions, interpretations). It demands from the the entire research projects recognition of being the *hermano menor* (younger brother) who listens to aprehend the *palabra*. Listening is to weave the word all together, thus re-creating it to the rhythm of the earth, and for the benefit of all. *Palabrear* is, therefore, not any given method, but the manner of surviving as culture. *Palabrear* leads to coexistence among human beings, and coexistence between human beings and the environment with which we live, as well as coexistence of multiple universes of thought on the same planet, and respect to the pluriverse (Figure 9.3) and the relational interaction with the earth for the benefit of all (Beltrán, 2016a).

Figure 9.2

Palabrear as the Performative Act of Finding Alternative Spaces

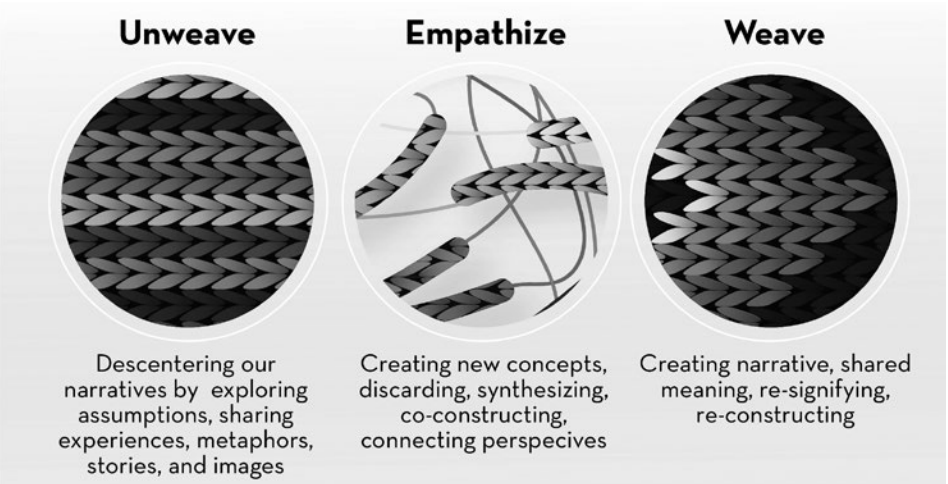


Adapted from Galafassi et al (2018: 10)

A serious challenge for this research study is to avoid the mono-presence of the researcher, attempting instead to arrive to a co-presence where the researcher needs to avoid acting as the authority who translates the social interactions into his/her own perspectives. This *anomaly* on the inquiry of this study, might atract academic gatekeepers interested in being the ones who *purify* the exotic knowledge to make it fit into the canons of the *normal* own society. Therefore, co-researchers must commit to all efforts involved in avoiding such type of *exorcism* of indigenous knowledge (Kaltmeier, 2012) with the purpose to prevent that this study ends up objectivizing *the other* in a re-enactment of colonialism. This objectification would be a brazen act of epistemic violence.

Figure 9.3

Palabrear as the Act of a Collective Weaving of Meaning



Adapted from Galafassi et al (2018: 10)

It is essential to resort to self-reflection on the issue of author-ity as a researcher, and to the member checking and the co-authoring. Besides, if a PhD thesis and the resulting dissemination articles are focused on contributing to the ELT field, should it include any artifacts or practices other than those inscribed within the pursued equal basis for the indigenous teachers who are participants in this study and their communities? The intention is to go against the totalizing approaches to knowledge, and defend the *in-between- spaces*; this purpose should allow to read from the marigns, from the limits of the formally constituted discourses, thus mulitplying the possibilities of reading, recognizing the existing (formerly invisbilized) practices, and expanding

the spheres of action of both traditions of knowledge by means of dialogue (Masiello, 2001).

Conclusion

To conclude, *palabrear* is, I must admit, a conflux of *a priori* intentions to align with the nature of decolonial projects I believe in. The nature of the project itself, however, is still uncertain and will be fully established upon the basis of more solid contacts with the indigenous EFL teachers participating in the study. Dialogue will be the key piece here, as it is, actually, the space for the narratives and the voices to encounter. Ultimately our voices will not be only a resource but also a performance where the authenticity of the dialogue will come to be what empower us all. (Rufer, 2012).

The construction of a collective voice will constitute not only a methodology itself, regardless of how distant from the canon of research methodology it seems, but also, as an act of protesting against the grand narratives, thus finding alternative spaces and allowing for the intercultural and collective healing. Such expectations related my research study are aligned with the act of participating on decolonial initiatives from the nest of what is considered a given premise of the Modernity (the construction of a homogenizing discourse about bilingualism). The contradiction of being decolonial, while being English-language teachers can be embraced from the alternative spaces, from the border-beings, from the border epistemologies. In is in this regard where I, as a researcher, as well as the participants on this research study, will have promising opportunities to reflect about which epistemic obediences and disobediences constitute our ontologies, thus helping pave the path to a more decolonial ELT field in Colombia.

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