Problematizing ELT education in Colombia: Contradictions and possibilities

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Globalization and the emergence of emancipatory discourses

For many scholars, globalization is not a new phenomenon. Some state that for the western world, it started with the expansion of the Roman Empire. We could say that in Colombia globalization became visible with the initiation of the first neoliberal government led by César Gaviria. After that period, public policies in education were grounded in globalization (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013). Globalization as a complex phenomenon can be understood in a continuum where in one pole all its positive effects can be pointed out while in the other pole all the negative effects show up with all sorts of things in between. The discourses on the positive effects revolve about "global village, development, knowledge, communication, access, technology", etc. On the negative pole of the continuum we find discourses on "homogenization, acculturation, gaps, neoliberalism, marketization", etc. Understanding globalization as a continuum allows us to think of it as both contradictions and possibilities. In this chapter, I would like to use globalization as a window to examine the field of ELT education in Colombia from a critical perspective while exploring some possibilities that research might bring to contribute to its development from a glocal[19] perspective. In doing this, I start by presenting binary ways in which two authors, coming from different fields (Fazio Vengoa is a historian and Bauman is a sociologist) represent globalization. I will use these representations to place, problematize, and offer possibilities for issues in ELT education in Colombia.

In discussing how globalization has been represented, Fazio Vengoa (2011) finds two main ways; on the one hand, it is represented as the not belonging; as a phenomenon that has eroded the common practices we were used to. The very nature of globalization as homogeneous regardless of the territory, time, and space generates in the individual a sense of disorientation, new scripts and new sets of practices. On the other hand, globalization has been represented as a new way of being and living in the world, in which the

19 Here it is relevant to point out the use of the word "glocally" as a way to acknowledge that this construction is not entirely local or global, but has been the product of a (asymmetrical) dialogue between the two.

individuals participate in similar ways in global events and practices due to their synchronization and homogenization; in words of Fazio Vengoa "new elements of a daily global life are emerging"[20] (Fazio Vengoa, 2011: 101) for example, during the Oscar´s ceremony, individuals of all around the world connect through social media to comment and be part of this affair.

In yet another binary representation of globalization, Bauman (2010) uses the metaphor of "the tourist and the wanderer". He anchored it on his idea that we all are in constant motion. Some perform physical motion (travel, moving) while others perform a kind of virtual or mental motion (changing TV channels, surfing the web, interacting with others by means of different screens). Tourists and wanderers experience globalization in very different (and unequal) ways; multiple social devices operate to assign boundaries and rights to either one. For tourists, globalization presents itself as the non-places (airports, malls, hotels, coffee shops, restaurants, multinational corporations' offices, etc.) where the geographical territory does not make any difference because wherever the tourist is, they will find the same things and the same way of doing things. The tourist is used to certain practices and is welcomed wherever they go. This is not the case for the wanderer. Devices like visas, passports, or money become the ways in which they can be singled out, scrutinized, criminalized, and rejected. Here globalization is hostile to the wanderer; they do travel as a choice, rather they are forced to keep on moving, States cannot secure their permanence anywhere and because capitalism does not depend on geographical space for cheap labor, there is no need to receive migrant workers, hence they are forced to be in constant movement, almost like escaping from one place to another.

These two panoramas of globalization serve as a framework to explore its relationship with the way in which the ELT profession has been constructed glocally, and to argue that globalization brings threats but also possibilities. Taking Fazio Vengoa´s first reprentation, one could argue that the effect of globalization in the ELT field on countries of the periphery or the expanding circle (to use Kachru´s denomination) brings along disorientation. In the history of the teaching of English in Colombia, I identify at least in two critical moments. The first one emerges with the issue of Law 115, which mandated the teaching of, at least, one foreign language in elementary schools. Up to that point, English was taught in secondary schools, by teachers who received their "training" to teach adolescents and adults. For many years, elementary school teaching was conducted by *Normalistas*[21] and their preparation included the development of skills in all subject matters except English.

20 The translation is mine.

21 Normalistas attended high school with a major in teaching. "Escuelas Normales" were founded by Francisco de Paula Santader in 1882 (Restrepo Gómez, 2010).

Later on, *Normalistas* were slowly replaced by *licenciados*[22]. Although the first School of Education created in Tunja in 1933 stated foreign languages as one of the specializations demanded in the Decree 301 (Herrera, 1993; Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013; Parra Báez, 2014), *teacher training* programs for elementary school did not keep this requirement, therefore they did not prepare teachers to teach English. Consequently, Law 115 posed an enormous challenge to elementary school teachers because they did not have the preparation to take over this task. As documented by Guerrero and Quintero (2015), even today elementary school teachers feel overwhelmed by this assignment and go through great lengths to make up for their shortcomings.

The other critical moment, in my opinion, was the introduction of the National Bilingualism Program[23] (whose name has mutated several times during the last thirteen years, but which has essentially the same purpose: promoting the teaching of English in Colombia). Although the teaching of English was introduced in the school curriculum after the Second War World (de Mejía, 2005), the breakthrough happened in 2004 with the launch of the National Bilingualism Project. The major disorientation here comes from the lack of clarity of what "bilingualism" means in this context. Several Colombian scholars have questioned this lack of definition (Cárdenas, 2009, 2010; de Mejía, 2002, 2005; Guerrero, 2010, 2012; Guerrero and Quintero, 2009; Ordoñez, 2011; Sánchez & Obando, 2008; Usma, 2009); meanwhile universities and schools do what they can to comply with policies requirements relying on their own understandings of bilingualism (Cf. Lozada and Guerrero in press). As teachers or school administrators, we have adopted terminology, beliefs, practices, methodologies, and the like, that are produced in the inner circle countries (using again Kachru´s taxonomy) and which do not necessarily apply to this context. Not even now do we know if we should refer to English as a Foreign Language, Second Language, or Additional Language. This lack of clarity does have implications in ELT education for both, pre-service and in-service teaching, in terms of the general approaches towards teaching, in terms of proficiency in the L2, in terms of what is expected from an English teacher, to mention just a few.

Continuing with Fazio Vengoa´s second representation, what he describes as the new ways of being and living the world, has brought English Language teachers lots of tensions that stem from our subjectivity (tensions are not necessarily negative, I will come back to this when I discuss the possibilities

22 *Licenciados* obtain a teaching degree from any university that has a School of Education.

23 For practical reasons, I will refer to all the initiatives from the Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (2004), Programa de Fortalecimiento al Desarrollo de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera (2010), Ley de Bilingüismo 1651 (2013), Programa Colombia Bilingüe (2014), Programa Nacional de inglés Colombia Very Well (2015) to Colombia Bilingüe (2016) under the same label of "Bilingual Program".

brought by globalization). In a study conducted by Gómez & Guerrero (in press), the researchers found that Colombian English teachers' subjectivities are complex, and they oscillate between acceptance and rejection. Globalization has generated in English teachers a hybrid identity that we find it very hard to acknowledge or get acknowledged by others. We hold internal debates on what variety of English to speak (and limit ourselves to British or American); how to go about teaching, and who we should please (parents, government, school administrators, students, or ourselves) (Guerrero and Meadows, 2015); also covert and overt language policies play a role in the way we shape our subjectivities and how we play our identities. With globalization there is no one single "center" but multiple centers from which different ways of understanding the world are originated and shaped (Fazio Vengoa, 2011). These new ways of being destabilize ELT education because it forces teacher educators to acknowledge hybridity; the education of pre-service and in-service teachers can not continue being offered in a pre-packed-one-size-fits-all but should be design giving room for the multiple variables that make up our identities: gender, ideology, race, beliefs, social practices, and so on and so forth.

Summing up, the disorientation here has to do with the fact that all the sudden teachers are assigned a task they are not prepared for; they do not know how to face the demands of new policies rooted in globalization; the world as they knew has changed forever. Added to this global panorama, with so many ways of being and living in the world, it seems that mainstream English Teaching Education programs in Colombia are stuck in the past, where only one-way vision of the world is privileged and perpetuated. Sayer (2012) states that in SLA discourses the learner has been de-racialized and de-gendered; the same can be said of English Language Teachers; in an analysis presented by Castañeda Trujillo (2017) of twenty two study plans of Colombian ELT *teacher training* programs he found that these study plans are constructed to perpetuate an aseptic view of the world dictated by dominant groups.

I will now switch to Bauman´s metaphor: the tourist and the wanderer. In Bauman´s words, the tourist is the one who obtains all the benefits of globalization, where for the wanderer globalization is hostile. In ELT and ELT education, the "tourist" has been embodied by discourses and practices of the inner circle countries (Kachru, 1992). According to Phillipson (1992) the "center" dictates what the periphery should learn and how. During a conference held in 1961 in Makerere, Uganda, several tenets where established; tenets that have been extremely influential in the way ELT education has taken shape all over the world. These tenets are: 1) English is best taught monolingually; 2) The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker; 3) The earlier English is taught, the better the results; 4) If other languages are used much, standards

of English will drop. Phillipson (1992) goes on to scrutinize each one of them to show them as fallacies. Unfortunately, even today TESOL training and the supposedly "best practices" continue shaping the teaching practices of the periphery (Sayer, 2012).

In a similar take, Pennycook (1998) traces the colonial legacy of English and shows how it has been constructed from the center as superior in all aspects. In supporting his point, he illustrates the construction of the self and the other by means of dichotomies where English and the so-called "native speakers" of English are equated to "Eurocentrism, cultured, industrious, adult, masculine, and clean". In TESOL, the identity position of English teachers has been, at least, partially defined in reference to an idealized image of a native speaker (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009) In this sense we could say that the **tourists** in the field of ELT are first of all native speakers of English, who, by default, have the right linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1996) and are therefore allowed to move freely around the world to teach the language. In many countries of the periphery, it is not even necessary to hold a college degree. Personally, I met a doorman in Aruba who told me he had been an English teacher at a private school in Cali. I also met a British who used to be a plumber in Great Britain but is now working as an English teacher in a private school in Bogotá. Gómez (2017), through a collection of narratives, illustrates that this situation is very common in the country. By the same token, materials, massively produced by the countries of the center, depict a westernized view of the world. Textbooks, audios, workbooks, websites, etc. are designed to offer learners the very same experience anywhere in the world (Canagaragh, 1999). Except very little differences, the same textbook used in China should serve to teach in Colombia, hidden in what Pennycook (2007) calls the myth of English as an International Language (EIL). The homogenization of the world promoted by English textbooks is very comfortable for privileged students who can afford international exchanges; the same content they cover here is covered somewhere in the world and so the tourist experience is served.

In contrast, the **wanderers** are non-native speakers of English teachers who learned the language in their countries of origin (of the periphery) and their accents (no matter how hard they try to hide it) "betray" them. As reported by de Mejía (2002), in private schools, Colombian teachers of English earn less than their foreign counterparts but have far more obligations and responsibilities. The *Programa de Formadores Nativos*[24] set by the Ministry of Education has contributed to spread the idea that foreigners are better teachers

24 Programa de Formadores Nativos is an innitiative of the Ministry of Education in which volunteers from around the world are recruited to come to Colombia to support the teaching of English. I must clarify here that most of these voluteers are not born in the countries of the center (United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia or New Zeland) and do not necessarily hold degrees in ELT.

than Colombian ones. This means, that even in our own country, Colombian teachers of English receive the wanderer treatment. For non-privileged learners (much of the Colombian population) the situation is no different since they do not have the same access to resources and experiences. Places, practices, and possibilities portrayed in teaching materials will hardly become real for them; there is an invisible border (Bauman, 2010) that prevents underprivileged learners to experience firsthand what is a given for privileged ones.

By and large it would seem that globalization has contributed to enhance the gap between the haves and have-nots. But as I stated above, I think globalization has opened the door for possibilities to resist and change practices in ELT education in Colombia. Bauman (2010: 8) states: "The causes of the division are the same that promote the uniformity of the globe"[25]; I would like to use this quote the other way around, stating that the same causes of the homogenization of the world are the very same that bring division. Globalization has allowed local practices and values to be acknowledged and be voiced. It has also allowed us to see that as there are common dominant practices around the world there are common concerns too (Guerrero & Meadows, 2015). If it had not been because of globalization, most of the issues we currently problematize in ELT education would have never been an issue at all.

ELT education in Colombia: achievements and challenges

Teacher education has historically been separated between pre-service and in-service teacher programs. Above there is a reference about the creation of the first *teacher training* programs in Colombia. But, as stated by Cárdenas et al (2012) the interest in the education of in-service teachers in Colombia dates to tmid-90s90s after the development of the COFE (Colombian Framework for English) project, which highlighted the need to offer programs of teacher development for English teachers. Prior to that, interest was only on pre-service teacher education. Since then, in-service teachers have taken part in different initiatives to improve their qualifications, be them graduate programs to obtain master´s degrees, or Teacher Development Programs (González et al 2003).

In 2002 Gónzales et al pointed out that although teacher educators could think they knew what teachers needed and wanted as professionals, their voices were very rarely considered when designing teacher education programs. Later on, in 2008, Gonzáles stated that in Colombia ELT education followed

25 The translation is mine.

two main tendencies which she categorized as top-down and bottom-up. The former tendency groups the courses like the ICELT and the TKT proposed by foreign agencies while the latter tendency grouped regional conferences, publisher's sessions, university-schools collaboration, and university-based programs. According to Cárdenas et al (2012) nowadays teacher education programs have transformed and are more aligned with what teachers not only need but are able to bring to these programs. In other words, teacher education programs have started to acknowledge teachers as "prosumers" that is, as professionals that no only consume knowledge but are also very capable of producing it. The number of articles written by Colombian teachers and published in peer reviewed journals and the increasing participation of school teachers as speakers in national events are a tangible proof of this milestone in ELT education in Colombia.

Colombian teachers and scholars are voicing their concerns and their achievements; they are finding ways to validate their epistemologies (of the South)[26] in a field largely dominated by an Eurocentric view of the world. But despite these important developments in the field of ELT education in our country, there are still many areas that need to be problematized and that are in direct relationship with the aspects discussed above in respect to the effects of globalization (teaching English to children, bilingualism, the native-speaker teacher paradigm, and teaching materials). In her 2007 article, González points out some problematic issues that needed extensive revision and attention in ELT education: the ownership of English, the native speaker teacher supremacy, the value of glocal knowledge, and the apolitical role of the English teacher, to mention just a few. Many of them have been addressed in some graduate programs of the country, in some Teacher Professional Development Programs, in the national teachers 'conference organized by ASOCOPI[27] yearly, in the *Encuentro de Universidades Formadoras de Licenciados en Idiomas*[28], the *Coloquio Internacional sobre Investigación en Lenguas Extranjeras*[29], and other national and regional events. Unfortunately, regardless of all these efforts, it seems that many discourses and practices are very pervasive and refuse to leave our imaginary.

I contend that part of the reason why we attach to the dominant discourses and practices is that ELT education offers very different things to in-service

26 In the sense of de Souza Santos (2009).
27 ASOCOPI stands for Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés (Colombian Asociation of English Teachers), and is the oldest TESOL affiliate association in the world; ASOCOPI was founded 52 years ago.
28 This conference takes place every other year and gathers the schools of Second/Foreign Language teaching of the country; the 11th conference was held in 2016 in Cali, Colombia.
29 This conference is co-organized by Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Universidad Veracruzana (Mexico) and Universidad de Granada (Spain).

teachers and to pre-service teachers. The ELT education for the former has transformed itself to open spaces to re-examine the profession, to problematize the given, to expand the horizons of being an English teacher. These spaces can be seen in the study plans of many of the graduate programs offered in the country; in the theses written as requisites for those programs, and in the scholarly articles and presentations referred to above. Not very much so for the latter, for pre-service teachers; curricula of *licenciatura* programs have a strong emphasis on "grammar instruction"; in other words, these programs have not overcome the Saussurean and/or Chomskyan tradition in which English teachers should limit themselves to teach and judge the grammaticality of a sentence against the norm, that is British English, or Standard American English. In the analysis already cited conducted by Castañeda-Trujillo (2017), it is evident that the study plans of *licenciatura* programs contribute to reproduce the discourses and practices problematized by González (2007); the whole structure of those study plans, the names given to the subject matters, the hierarchical organization of school credits, the linear sequencing, etc., show that attempts to contest, as Pennycook (1998) calls it, the "colonial" legacy of ELT education still has a long way to go.

At the beginning of this chapter, I stated that the homogenizing practices of globalization have awaken the need to acknowledge other ways of "knowing" and of doing things; in this sense, globalization also means looking south (making reference to South as in De Souza Santos´ connotation), bringing multiple voices to the field in order to claim ownership not only over the language we teach and through which we teach, but also over the ways we use to teach it (Kumaravadivelu (2003) would call it "post-method"). The three chapters that follow problematize issues in ELT Education in search for that polyphony and approach their research interests from decolonial perspectives.

While it is true that in-service teachers´ have gradually been gaining ground in terms of their own education needs being listened to, it is equally true that there are other areas –like language policy--in which their intellectual capacity has not been considered. Castañeda-Lodoño (2017) brings this issue to the table. She claims that in-service teachers, in the process of constructing their own professional beings have resorted to different ways of knowing which results in the accumulation of knowledges. She argues that these knowledges need to be dig out and be incorporated in the planning and design of language policy. Castañeda-Londoño frames her argument in the "ecologies of knowledges" of De Sousa Santos (2007) to ground her claim that different ways of knowledge co-exist, and teachers interrelate them in order to make sense of their profession.

Castañeda-Trujillo (2017) and Samacá (2018) take interest in pre-service teachers' education. Very much in the same line of Castañeda-Londoño (2017), but in relation to pre-service teachers, Castañeda-Trujillo (2017) inquiries about the knowledges pre-service teachers might have and might bring to the teaching practicum. As a teacher educator, he is very aware that different knowledges circulate among his students when doing their teaching practicum, but which are not readily visible to either him, the pre-service teachers themselves, or others involved in this component of the ELT education process. Castañeda-Trujillo (2017) finds a good number of studies in Colombia that account for themes related to pre-service teachers, particularly in what has to do with the developing of teaching skills; but none document or tackle what pre-service teachers have to say about their teaching practicum. His research interest aims at tracing the continuities and discontinuities between the colonial logic of the *status quo* and a decolonial perspective; in doing this, he resorts on ecologies of knowledges to promote a dialogical relationship among different types of knowledges.

Samacá´s (2017) chapter is also focused on exploring the teaching practicum but from a different angle. She positions herself within the decolonizing perspective, and from there, her intention is to uncover how pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, and university mentors position themselves pedagogically about the teaching practicum. Samacá (2017) states that the teaching practicum cannot be reduced to observable doings in the classroom, but that it encompasses multiple layers of doing, reflecting, and transforming. She also challenges the colonial construction of the teaching practicum in our *teacher training* programs and makes an argument for the need to adopt a decolonial approach in order to give room for the different ways of knowing that come into play when learning to teach.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I have used the representation two authors make of globalization (Fazio Vengoa and Bauman) and used them as mirrors of some problematic issues in ELT education. I argue that the tensions caused by globalization have proven productive and many changes in our practices have been happening. Scholars and schoolteachers alike are exploring and contributing to the field beyond instrumental approaches. Many more need to be done, particularly in what has to do with pre-service ELT education.

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