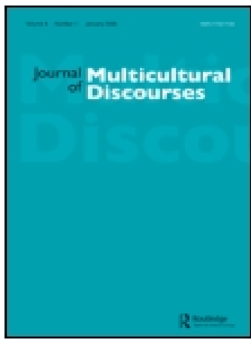

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EDITORIAL

Latin-American discourse studies: state of the art and new perspectives

Introduction

Beyond obvious differences, Latin American, Asian and African countries share a similar history of colonisation, complex economic and social situations and human rights violations. In this context, the paper seeks to reflect on the influence of westernisation and academic colonialism on Latin American discourse studies. It will start with a brief history of the globalisation processes that took place on the continent in the modern age. This will be followed by a review of Latin American linguistic and discourse studies, focusing on Critical Discourse Analysis. Suggestions will then be offered concerning the development of critical thinking *vis-à-vis* researchers' own academic practices. A new paradigm for Latin American discourse studies will be put forward, involving dialogue with the Western tradition as well as with Shi-xu's (2009) 'new paradigm', which brings together scholars from other backgrounds.

Five centuries: same old story[1]

Much has been written about westernisation and Western colonialism. The subject has been approached by various disciplines, linguistics being in general reluctant to deal with it and take a critical view of its own colonial practices. In Latin America, this attitude might be traced back to the different ways in which intellectuals have reacted to 'postcolonialism'[2], which have been described by Castro-Gómez and Mendieta (1998) and Pajuelo Teves (2001: 9):

> (a) a receptive, optimist view, which sees postcolonial theory as an opportunity and a useful model to develop a distinctively Latin American postcolonial reflection (Coronil, Mignolo, Mendieta, Castro-Gómez, Moreiras, Klor de Alva, Von der Walde, etc.), and (b) a negative, pessimist one, according to which postcolonialism, as a variety of post-modernism that caters to metropolitan needs and opposes Latin American thinking, cannot lead to knowledge renewal in Latin America (Moraña, Achúgar, Richard, etc.).

Mignolo claims that postcolonial critique has been followed and deepened by post-Western thought, which has taken various forms in different parts of the world. Castro-Gómez and Mendietta (1998) point to three basic trends: (a) European and American postmodernism (Arendt, Lyottard, Vattimo, Baudrillard, Jameson); (b) Indian postcolonialism (Guha, Bhabha, Spivak and other minor studies) and the post-orientalism conceived by Said and others in the former North European colonies of Asia and Africa; and (c) post-Western thought, developed in the former Spanish and Portuguese colonies of Latin America and the Caribbean (Mignolo,

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Coronil, Dussel, Quijano, Lander, Escobar, Castro-Gómez, among others). It should be noticed, however, that Latin American scholars and intellectuals have been influenced all along by the Eurocentric and Anglo-Saxon tradition that has pervaded modern education systems.

If we accept that westernisation began with the Enlightenment, the 18th century would also mark the start of the hegemonic process metaphorically called globalisation: colonial neoliberalism would be a more accurate description. It has been maintained, however, that globalisation processes date back to Hellenistic times, with the Roman Empire and the European colonisation of the Americas as key moments.

Two capitalist hegemonic processes have taken place in modern times. The first one (1870–1914), which reached Argentina a decade later, ended with World War I. It was characterised by Prussian militarism, economic liberalism and the adoption of French as a cultural language and English as a *lingua franca*, coinciding with the consolidation of the new Latin American nation-states. The second and current globalisation began at the end of WWII, using English as both its cultural language and *lingua franca*. Inspired by neoliberalism, it has sought to downsize the state, replacing the 'welfare state' with a 'happiness' state of individual satisfaction. It has embraced the nihilistic postmodern philosophy associated with late capitalism, being marked by so-called ethnic wars that have been fought against the background of the Cold War[3].

Justification for domestic colonialism has been provided by the dichotomy between civilisation and barbarism formulated by Argentine writer and statesman D.F. Sarmiento in 1845 which, according to Mignolo (1998: 33–34), belongs to the Latin American cultural canon. Contemporary intellectuals from colonised countries viewed culture as the product of the civilising process: considering the local culture from the standpoint of European civilisation, they decried what they perceived as barbarism. This might be seen as a first discursive attempt to stress difference and therefore underpin homogenising and marginalising processes that have since constituted two sides of the same coin.

Thus, in the years of the first globalisation Latin America turned its eyes towards Europe, particularly to France and England, the United States having attracted its attention during the second. As an educationist, Sarmiento led the drive to set up public schools aimed at reproducing the colonial model still in place in the Argentine education system. The Native American inhabitants of the continent, deprived of their lands and rights, were in many cases hunted down and annihilated. Admiration for European culture has always gone hand in hand with contempt towards local traditions and currents of thought (Mayan, Inca and Aztec, among others) as well as with the stigmatisation of indigenous and mixed-blood groups, which have been associated with backwardness, poverty and crime. This has resulted in racist attitudes towards countries with larger indigenous populations, such as Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru.

Although Spanish, Portuguese and Italian settlers arrived in great numbers, encouraged by immigration policies, they were not seen as part of the Europe worshiped by the local *élites*. Only recently have Spain and Portugal started to be perceived as fully European: in the not so distant past, the fact that their citizens had chosen to establish themselves in these countries merely made them 'more Latin American'. In Argentina, however, descendants of Latin European immigrants make up a large part of the population and Spain is still considered the mother country. Respect and affection[4] have sometimes clouded judgement and made a critical

approach to certain cultural and academic practices difficult. The 12 October holiday, for example, which marks Columbus's arrival in the New World, is officially called 'Race Day' as a tribute to this Spanish heritage. The last decade, nevertheless, has seen an increase in public awareness of the true nature of the so-called discovery of the Americas, as well as of the racist overtones of its celebration.

Conquest and colonisation can take different forms: we cannot equate the Raj with the British occupation of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands, Columbus's travels, neoliberal colonialism or colonial relations within countries. Although they share similar goals, colonised countries and individuals react in different ways, and therefore a theory of westernisation should take into account both the common features and those that are peculiar to each case. The colonised and the non-colonised should be seen in a continuum rather than as opposites.

Latin American academe and westernisation

Looking to the West

Latin American scholars have played an active role in the westernisation of their countries, looking for inspiration to England and France and later to the United States, even though they have also suffered its consequences. Studying at American or European universities has always been a source of prestige, their local counterparts being usually rated much lower. In fact the historical importance of colonisation cannot be denied, although current trends of thought tend to view it in a different light. It is not therefore our intention to do away with the past, but rather to reflect on our academic practices in order to generate a new paradigm for Latin American discourse studies.

Just as the first globalisation was characterised by admiration for the Prussian army, the second has not escaped the influence of National Socialism. Although the origins and political persuasions of Latin American dictatorships have varied, the military rulers that seized power in the 1970s shared certain common features. During that decade, political persecution drove many university teachers into exile. They were replaced by others that supported government policies, with the ensuing loss of academic reputation on the part of higher education institutions.

Before that time, Spanish scholarship exerted a significant influence on the research conducted on this continent. A change took place in the 1970s, when Latin American sociolinguistic studies drew on Labovian theory, replicating the original American model in Spanish. The rise of positivism and structuralism on the one hand, and of variationism and philology on the other, left its imprint not only on linguistics but also on the way in which science and academic life were understood. Although the underpinning theory and methodology had not been devised to approach the local phenomena, such investigations revealed the way in which Spanish was used in the region, as well as the similarities and differences between dialects. Indigenous tongues were also explored.

The following decade saw the return of democracy as well as the dissemination of Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis (DA and CDA, respectively) as a result of Teun van Dijk's travels. Having watched Latin America from Europe, he crossed the ocean and presented his theory and methodology to a new audience. In judging what might appear at first sight as just another attempt at intellectual 'colonisation', we should bear in mind that it was not usual for non-Spanish scholars to visit our

countries at the time. It was he who first suggested that we could come together and form a group independent from European academe, an inspirational thought for many of us, regardless of the criticism that might be levelled at certain aspects of his work. Leaving behind the Labovian model, DA emerged as a new sociolinguistic approach with a strong social and political commitment, opening the way to the new interpretive movement that followed positivism.

While Van Dijk has exercised a strong influence in certain Latin American countries, French writers (Kristeva, Charodeau, Ducrot, Plainten) have held sway in others. By and large, Brazil, Chile and Venezuela have followed French theories, whereas Colombia, Mexico and Argentina have been more open to Anglo-Saxon ideas. This has resulted in ideological stances grounded, on the one hand, in Foucault's, Althusser's or, in Brazil, Pecheux's contributions, and, on the other, in authors such as Habermas, Adorno, Gramsci, Hobsbawm, Sklair and Jameson. The common Marxist or neo-Marxist roots, however, meant a major shift in Latin American academe, which had traditionally constituted an *élite* group linked to different, in some cases right-wing, ideologies. In this respect, the emergence of DA and CDA led to an awakening of social consciousness.

The Latin American Discourse Analysis Association, created in 1995 as a consequence of van Dijk's visit, provided a meeting place for scholars that seemed to have taken a long time to realize that independence and freedom from colonial domination were possible. Our task is still daunting, since it is in this region that neoliberalism has carried out its most daring economic experiments. As Fairclough (2006: 36) writes, 'Transformation of cultures and cultural relations is neither an end in itself nor a feasible preliminary to struggles over other relations (economic, political, etc.).' As Latin American intellectuals, we should never forget our political and socioeconomic context and the limitations it places on every aspect of our lives, including the academic dimension. It is, after all, engagement with the political, economic and social that has, if anything, defined our paradigm and enhanced the critical production of those that apply it.

This flourishing of Latin American research has been also encouraged by exchange programmes that enable teachers to travel on the continent and abroad. The tacit divide remains in place, however, between those that have been unable to get out of their own countries and their 'enlightened' counterparts educated in Europe and the US. The local still bears the stamp of barbarism, backwardness, disorder, intellectual and class inferiority. A doctor's degree awarded by a British or Spanish university carries more prestige than one conferred by an Argentine or a Venezuelan one, and at least half of the scholars taking part in the plenary sessions of Latin American Conferences are European or American. In these cases, colonialism is not only imposed but also experienced as beneficial by its subjects, a fact of which due notice should be taken in comparing them with other situations.

The application of European and American theories and models to Latin American cases poses another serious problem. Matters such as Latin American Spanish usage, doctor patient communication in Jujuy (Argentina) or Bogotá (Colombia), the Venezuelan media, Peruvian or Paraguayan TV shows are approached from these perspectives. The poor are similarly studied from the standpoint of middle class belief systems, or even seen as a 'different culture', as if they were not born equal to other human beings.

A comparison between *Discourse & Society*, the *Latin American Review of Discourse Studies* and the *Ibero-American Review of Discourse and Society* has yielded

interesting results concerning research topics. Most of the papers published since 1990 in the first one, a representative European CDA journal with a wide Latin American readership, focus on mass media analysis. They are followed by articles about political discourse, gender issues and sexuality (including AIDS, doctor patient relationship and sexual abuse). Far fewer studies explore business and legal discourse and still fewer memory and history (Pardo & Lorenzo-Dus, 2010, 253–270).

Most of the papers in the *Latin American Review of Discourse Studies*, a journal brought out annually or biannually by the Latin American Association of Discourse Studies since 2001, examine media and methodology topics. Although the number of issues published is too small to enable a macro-classification of the subjects, we have detected certain recurring themes. Some of them, such as women's, political and educational discourse and verbal interaction, can also be found in European journals, while others are more peculiar to the continent, like the meaning of the term 'people' in popular discourse or analysis of 'shanty-town cumbia'. The *Ibero-American Review of Discourse and Society*, published between 1999 and 2001, discusses mainly topics of general interest, such as media analysis, political discourse and feminism. Other subjects, more typically regional, include the discourse of the poor, discrimination against Latin Americans and repression (Pardo & Lorenzo-Dus, 2010, 253–270).

Relevant to our discipline as all these subjects and many others may be, CDA entails a special commitment to dealing with the major social problems of each country. Latin American researchers, nevertheless, take their subject-matter often unreflectingly from European studies, leaving out a wide range of vital local issues. Among them we could mention: the discourse of the poor; the discourse of outpatient treatment of psychiatric cases; media discourse on illegal drugs, human trafficking and media discrimination; the discourse about military dictatorship, the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo[5], human rights, the Malvinas/Falklands war, the Colombian civil war and other armed conflicts; and the discursive treatment of corruption, lack of access to education, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, alcoholism and drug addiction.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in European CDA literature, where little attention has been paid to the Cold War, ethnic wars, the Gulf War, the housing problem, unemployment, discrimination against Europeans, the right-wing turn in Italy, the Franco regime, or British foreign relations and colonialism. This leads to the suspicion that even critically educated scholars might not be altogether impervious to the influence of neoliberalism. On the other hand, it is worth noticing that there are very few Latin American DA and CDA journals, sustained with great sacrifice through the honorary work of their staff. In economically more developed countries (to avoid the hierarchical connotations of the first-world third-world metaphor), by contrast, hundreds of them are available at any university.

What has happened to us?

This question might be approached by focusing on the kinds of research encouraged or sponsored by Latin American Universities. We could also answer it from the point of view of the scholars' own way of life and its traditional detachment from their 'objects' of study. Latin American intellectuals appear in the collective imagery as secluded individuals that spend their time reading, teaching and thinking, rather than as active participants in the field. They are not perceived as involved in the daily life of a shanty town, hospital, mental institution, newspaper or TV channel. A direct

consequence of the westernisation of our countries, this state of disconnection hardly meets our continent's requirements. Whether or not intellectuals in the developed world can actually afford to indulge in conceptual games, we are certainly pressed by everyday needs that cannot wait for merely theoretical solutions. Not only are the places in which we carry out our research often inadequate but most of us must also struggle to provide for ourselves and our families.

Tempting as the idea of conducting CDA from the comfort of our desks might appear, there is nothing like field work to drive theoretical and methodological development. Hard as it might seem to work in a place we do not experience as our own, watching and taking part in a joint construction, it is being with others and sharing their situation that push research forward. Even though this contact will always be mediated by cultural, socioeconomic and personal differences, its importance cannot be overstated. Half-hearted commitment would only serve the interests of neoliberalism, defeating our own purpose.

There is still another way to answer the question. Most of the literature we read and of the models and methods we follow have originated in Europe and America and therefore cannot lead to a real understanding of Latin American discursive phenomena. It is thus imperative that we produce our own theory, ethnography and methodology, a process that of course cannot take place overnight. In the meantime, we must carefully adjust those that we use to our own needs. Furthermore, in approaching our Latin American colleagues' work, we should consider their worldview as well as their idea of academic life. Since our young discipline is only now in a position to start thinking about itself, it might be useful to devote future conferences to the discussion of our own academic practices.

A dialogue with the East

What is it then that we Latin American CDA practitioners could contribute to a dialogue with the Asian and African paradigms? Peoples' culture and way of thinking can be compared to their mother tongue. There is no such thing as a 'pure', unmixed language: language, just as life itself, is a changing phenomenon, with a history and genius of its own, which cannot be repressed, as linguistic imperialism has repeatedly attempted to do, without killing it. Likewise, we neither must nor can stop being who we are, but we can offer our own particular way of being to broaden the scope for choice.

Unlike Asian intellectuals, we do not have alternative philosophies such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism or Shinto. Little has remained of Mayan, Aztec, Inca, Mapuche, Toba and other worldviews, and, in any case, an exploration of what being Latin American means today would lie beyond the purpose of this paper. Suffice it to say that a Latin American is but a Westerner with certain peculiarities. Looking towards Asia and Africa now, however, we are beginning to perceive common experiences where we used to see only differences. This shared background might lead to new paradigms of dialogue that would enhance both our mutual understanding and our discursive studies, provided that we learn the lessons from our colonial past and reach a balanced judgement about it.

The following are some of our common features (Shi-xu, 2009):

1. *A history of division between native inhabitants and colonial settlers, giving rise to a racist discourse that opposes local tradition to civilisation*. The indigenous, mixed-blood and Creole population have been discursively excluded from

society, while power and enlightenment have been attributed to the colonisers. Even now the members of the lower classes are called 'blackhead' and 'black', two adjectives that point to physical traits considered characteristic of the original inhabitants of Latin America. This has encouraged the development of a racist, nationalist and exclusionary discourse.

2. *A neocolonial past and present, with variations across the countries.* Thus, Chile, Colombia and Mexico maintain close links with colonial powers, while Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia seek to sever them, at least at the discursive level, and Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Paraguay take an intermediate approach. In Bolivia, the rise to power of the first Native American president on the continent, the Aymara, Evo Morales, provides an interesting example in this respect. This diversity translates into various degrees of discursive endorsement of or resistance to neoliberal policies and stronger or weaker assertions of independence from the developed nations.
3. *A past rife with military dictatorships, human rights violations and crimes against humanity, followed by the extreme neoliberal experiments of the 1990s*, with Argentina as a case in point. This has led, on the one hand, to a passionate advocacy of human rights by certain sectors of society and the government, and, on the other, to extreme nationalist and exclusionary discourse.
4. *A socioeconomic situation characterised by the poverty of large parts of the population, with a considerable gap between rich and poor, low industrial development, serious problems in the health and education areas and widespread corruption.* This has resulted in popular alienation from the political class, which has found its expression in a discourse of mistrust, pessimism and prejudice that contests both government and opposition discourse.
5. *A position of distance from all dominant discourse, including that of social science.* This has led to local attempts to conform to dominant discourse through adulation and flattery, as well as to a low self-esteem discourse that belittles our achievements, comparing them with those of more developed nations that have applied neoliberal recipes.
6. *Mass media empires reproducing European and American news and views through newspapers as well as TV and radio networks.* Not even Bolivia, Venezuela or Ecuador, socially and ideologically the most radical countries in the region, have been able to dismantle them. In 2009, the Argentine president pushed through a media bill aimed at achieving this goal, in the face of strong resistance by media corporations. Their discourse contains a savage criticism of the government rather than a discussion of the issues at stake, twisting the facts and showing the special interests behind it.

Towards a new paradigm for Latin American critical discourse studies

Beyond similarities and differences, we would undoubtedly profit from a dialogue with our Asian and African colleagues, as well as from academic and cultural exchange. Our current links with Europe and the US should be pursued critically, so that we may grow as Latin American researchers and scholars.

A future agenda would entail:

1. Addressing regional concerns through the selection of relevant research subjects.

2. Encouraging the development of theories and methods that fit the Latin American situation.
3. Reading the works of Latin American colleagues, especially those that deal with the problems faced by the continent.
4. Becoming conscious of the value of our universities and stimulating teacher exchange between them.
5. Raising our students' awareness of regional issues and promoting critical thinking.
6. Endeavouring to equip our libraries with international books and journals by encouraging both publishers' sympathy and the generation of the necessary financial resources.
7. Supporting the creation of electronic journals[6].

Expressions of the new paradigm

The contributions gathered in this issue, by Latin American renowned professors and young scholars, provide tangible evidence of the emergence of a new discourse research paradigm. Almost all the authors belong to the *Latin American Association of Discourse Studies*, including its current president, Neyla Pardo Abril (239–251).

In 'A change in focus: from texts in contexts to people in events', Venezuelan academic Adriana Bolívar (213–225), former president of the Association, analyses the influence of European theoretical and methodological views and presents a new multicultural project. She contends that, as a consequence of that shift, 'new research problems arise, different results are obtained, and new or slightly different approaches' appear. Bolívar considers political dialogue categories from an interactional perspective. Her overview of discourse studies sheds light on the theories and methods followed by Latin American practitioners.

Viviane de Melo Resende's 'Between the European legacy and critical daring: epistemological reflections on Critical Discourse Analysis' (193–212) examines the influence of knowledge colonialism on Latin American scholars. She suggests building up 'a dialogue between the European legacy in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in its interdisciplinary relation with Critical Realism (CR) and epistemological reflection' in order to identify contradictions in the ways in which such a relation has been studied. Her work with the *National Movement of Street Children* of Brazil is connected to the research carried out by the *Latin American Network for the Analysis of the Discourse of People Living in Poverty.*

Argentine writer Matías Soich (271–290) deals with the philosophical aspects of a non-Eurocentric paradigm in 'East and West: some immanent thoughts on paradigmatic intersection'. He introduces two conceptual tools, Chinese Daoism and the Afro-Brazilian *danza de orixás*, in order to explore Western influences on our academic life. A philosophy of immanence is put forward as the appropriate framework 'for paradigmatic dialogue and construction.'

In 'The limits of Discourse Analysis' Martín Menéndez, also from Argentina, discusses academic colonialism and 'marginal linguistics'. Despite taking into account subject, use, context and culture, the latter 'fails most of the time because it takes the point of view of the First World and makes First-World assumptions'. Menéndez proposes Strategic Discourse Analysis as a way out of these constraints. Based on a corpus of scholarly texts from the University of Buenos Aires's Institute

of Philology, he suggests focusing on the speakers' strategic movements as they use language in context.

Three papers tackle the relation between westernization and the press. Chilean author Pedro Santander Molina analyses the influence of Europe and the United States on political communication and media discourse in contexts of social and revolutionary transformation: Hugo Chavez's Venezuela, Evo Morales's Bolivia and Rafael Correa's Ecuador. In his view, interpretation matrixes a priori determine our analyses and thus inhibit autonomous theoretical progress.

In 'Discourse Analysis in Latin America. Colombia: conflict and poverty', Neyla Pardo Abril reflects, from a cognitive and cultural perspective, on the ways in which DA is conducted, as well as on 'the procedures that structure the interpretation of socio-cultural problems, establishing their particularities and implications.' A member of the *Latin American Network for the Analysis of the Discourse of People Living in Poverty*, she explores the ways in which the media construct news stories about the poor. She relates it both to Colombian culture and to the country's armed conflict and its drug-trafficking links.

In 'The Falklands/Malvinas 25 Years on: A Comparative Analysis of Constructions of Heroism on Argentinean and British Factual Television', Pardo and Lorenzo-Dus analyse the discourse of TV documentaries on a painful war between a 'First-World' country and a developing one at a crisis time for both. Dissimilar cultures give rise to different heroism and nationalism discourses in which modernity and postmodernity coexist beyond the boundaries of historical periods.

Conclusions

The road of non-colonialism and epistemic non-violence (Spivak, 1988) is long and hard and, as we refuse to go along with dominant discourse, we are bound to repeat mistakes. We are children of our colonial history and context, yet we are capable of critical thinking and thus can call into question our own anticolonial procedures. We can take a stance against deconstruction attempts that seem to lead too easily to the reiteration of Western notions (Paredes-Canilao, 2006) and reject conceptualisation for its own sake, another remnant of colonial theories so dear to Latin American intellectuals. But our critical thinking must be ready to act if we are to achieve the democratic universality of science, where all may find a place and different paradigms may coexist, where the particular may be seen as both homogeneous and diverse. Within it dichotomy will become one of many possible ways of thinking, never the only one, and the whole of humanity will be represented and understood.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Mónica Descalzi for translating this paper into English.

Notes

1. This is the title of a song by León Gieco, an Argentine pop musician, about the consequences of colonialism for Latin American countries.
2. Postcolonial studies have focused on British Commonwealth countries, which have led to contradictory interpretations by Latin American writers.
3. War and globalisation have always gone hand in hand.

4. Relations between Argentina and Spain have been strained in recent years as a consequence of the former's anti-immigration policies.
5. Both groups represent relatives of the people disappeared under the military regime that ruled Argentina between 1976 and 1983.
6. Latin American academic journals are brought out by universities, as the subscription habit is not widespread enough to tempt publishing houses.

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