

# CRITICAL RACE AND DECOLONIAL THEORY INTERSECTIONS TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT OF ELT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

INTERSECCIONES DE LAS TEORÍAS DECOLONIAL Y CRÍTICA DE LA RAZA PARA ENTENDER  
EL CONTEXTO DE LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS EN EL SUR GLOBAL

INTERSEÇÕES DAS TEORIAS DECOLONIAL E CRÍTICA DA RAÇA PARA ENTENDER O CONTEXTO  
DO ENSINO DO INGLÊS NO SUL GLOBAL

INTERSECTIONS DES THÉORIES DÉCOLONIALE ET CRITIQUE DE LA RACE POUR COMPRENDRE  
LE CONTEXTE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT D'ANGLAIS AU SUD GLOBAL

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## ABSTRACT

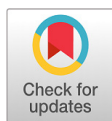
Critical race theory (CRT) questions social practices that have perpetuated discrimination and social inequality. Decolonial studies coincide with these efforts to deracialise ELT practices, explaining racialisation as dominant structures constituted in whiteness-centred practices that situate some in disadvantage (usually non-white) while privileging others (usually white). In the context of English language teaching (ELT), that colonisation/racialisation can take the form of some hierarchisation of English native speakers from the Global North while otherising non-native speakers of English and native speakers of English from the Global South. Therefore, coloniality/racialisation are useful terms to explain practices that value foreign over local identities alienating regional/local views and languages. In this article, the links between CRT and decolonial theories are explored and colonisation/racialisation of ELT are approached through the analysis of macro and micro practices developed in two public universities, one in Colombia and one in Brazil. The aim is to disrupt those practices by making evident decolonisation/deracialisation efforts in undergraduate and graduate students' proposals.

**Keywords:** critical race theory; CRT; decoloniality; deracialisation; decolonisation; ELT.

## RESUMEN

La teoría crítica de la raza (TCR) cuestiona las prácticas sociales que han perpetuado la discriminación y la desigualdad social. Los estudios decoloniales coinciden con estas iniciativas de derracialización de las prácticas de enseñanza del inglés, y explican la racialización como estructuras dominantes constituidas en prácticas

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centradas en la blanquitud, que ponen a algunos en desventaja (no blancos, por lo general) y privilegian a otros (blancos, por lo general). En el contexto de la enseñanza del inglés, dicha colonización/racialización puede adoptar la forma de cierta jerarquización de los hablantes nativos de inglés originarios del Norte global mientras alteriza a los hablantes de inglés no nativos y a los hablantes nativos de inglés originarios del Sur global. Por consiguiente, los términos colonialidad/racialización son útiles para explicar las prácticas que valoran las identidades extranjeras sobre las locales, dejando al margen los puntos de vista y los idiomas regionales/locales. En este artículo, se exploran los vínculos entre la TCR y las teorías decoloniales, y se aborda la colonización o racialización de la enseñanza del inglés mediante el análisis de prácticas macro y micro desarrolladas en dos universidades públicas, una en Colombia y otra en Brasil. El objetivo es la disrupción de dichas prácticas destacando las iniciativas de decolonización y desracialización en propuestas de trabajo de estudiantes de pregrado y posgrado.

**Palabras clave:** teoría crítica de la raza; TCR; decolonialidad; desracialización; decolonización, enseñanza del inglés.

## RESUMO

A teoria racial crítica (TRC) desafia as práticas sociais que perpetuaram a discriminação e a desigualdade social. Os estudos decoloniais concordam com estas iniciativas de desracialização das práticas de ensino da língua inglesa, e explicam a racialização como estruturas dominantes constituídas em práticas centradas na branquura, que prejudicam alguns (geralmente não brancos) enquanto privilegiam outros (geralmente brancos). No contexto do ensino da língua inglesa, tal colonização/racialização pode tomar a forma de uma certa hierarquização dos falantes nativos de inglês originários do Norte global, enquanto que afasta os falantes não-nativos de inglês e os falantes nativos de inglês originários do Sul global. Consequentemente, a colonialidade/racialização é útil para explicar práticas que valorizam as identidades estrangeiras sobre as locais, deixando de lado os pontos de vista e idiomas regionais/locais. Este artigo explora as ligações entre a TRC e as teorias decoloniais, e aborda a colonização ou racialização do ensino da língua inglesa, analisando as macro e micro práticas desenvolvidas em duas universidades públicas, uma na Colômbia e a outra no Brasil. O objetivo é interromper essas práticas, revelando as iniciativas de descolonização e desracialização nas propostas de trabalho de estudantes de graduação e pós-graduação.

**Palavras chave:** teoria crítica da raça; TCR; decolonialidade; desracialização; decolonização; ensino do inglês.

## RÉSUMÉ

La théorie critique de la race (TCR) met en question les pratiques sociales qui ont perpétué la discrimination et l'inégalité sociale. Les études décoloniales rejoignent ces initiatives de déracialisation des pratiques d'enseignement d'anglais, et expliquent la racialisation comme des structures dominantes constituées de pratiques centrées sur la blancheur, qui désavantagent quelques-uns (généralement non-blancs) tout en privilégiant des autres (généralement blancs). Dans le contexte de l'enseignement de l'anglais, cette colonisation/racialisation peut prendre la forme d'une certaine hiérarchisation des anglophones natifs originaires du Nord global, tandis qu'elle aliène les anglophones non natifs et les anglophones natifs originaires du Sud global. Par conséquent, la colonialité et la racialisation sont utiles pour expliquer les pratiques qui valorisent les identités étrangères au

détriment des identités locales en mettant de côté les points de vue et les langues régionales/locales. Cet article explore les liens entre la TCR et les théories décoloniales, et aborde la question de la colonisation ou de la racialisation de l'enseignement de l'anglais en analysant les macro et micro pratiques développées dans deux universités publiques, l'une en Colombie et l'autre au Brésil. L'objectif est de perturber ces pratiques en mettant en évidence les initiatives de décolonialisation et de déracialisation dans les propositions de travail des étudiants de premier et de deuxième cycle.

**Mots clefs :** théorie critique de la race; TCR; décolonialité; déracialisation; décolonisation; enseignement de l'anglais.

## Introduction

Not decolonially declared but departing from the same rationality, critical race theory (CRT) has questioned social practices that have perpetuated discrimination and social inequality in different social spheres. Education, as one of those spheres, has received from CRT research elements to understand institutionalised racism and its impact in social practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). English language teaching (ELT) has started late this inquiry, since usually race and English teaching often appear not to be associated (Kubota & Lin, 2006) despite efforts to decolonize ELT by questioning issues linked to the identity of English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) teachers (Archanjo et al., 2019) and students (Simoneli & Finardi, 2020), to principles and challenges of English as a lingua franca in ELT (Sifakis, 2019), and to the introduction of English in primary education in Colombia (De Mejía, 2019), as well as to global citizenship education (Piccin & Finardi, 2019), agency in language policy planning (Finardi & Guimarães, 2019), the role of English in the Global South in internationalisation programs (Chiappa & Finardi, 2021), discourses (Piccin & Finardi, 2021), and in the revelation of the locus of enunciation (Diniz de Figueiredo & Martinez, 2021).

Several claims done by analysts of coloniality in ELT (such as Soto-Molina, 2018), confirm that the claims of decolonial theory benefit from the assumptions of CRT, especially in what concerns the logics of *whiteness-centred* practices in education. As such, both theories invite us to question educational practices that permanently value foreign over local identities, alienating regional/local views and languages and cultures, producing a hierarchisation while undervaluing other language speakers and cultures, and other practices thus, *otherising* educational actors —in this case, Latin American actors and their cultures.

Without the aim to declare that these CRT and colonial theories pursue the same goals or that they

are completely equivalent to decoloniality in ELT, we decided to use their shared principles as we find this joint useful to interrogate racialised/colonised views of ELT and we can also elucidate decolonising practices. In particular, we set out to do that by directing our look at the practices developed in two public universities, one in Colombia and another in Brazil. In so doing we reveal evidence of how, through race awareness, unwitting colonisation/racialisation in ELT have been resisted by undergraduate and graduate students through their graduation project proposals. As ELT professors, we consider these contributions to ELT are enlightening and constitute a valuable lesson to ELT actors to visualise not only dominant discourses that constitute submissive identities but also to see how one can position as agent of social practices to foster decolonial attitudes that question/disrupt racialised/colonised practices.

## Critical Race Theory: Coloniality Connections to ELT

CRT is a social theory that, according to its name, started by questioning the social construction of race and its biological, social, economic and political effects in social practice. The theory started to be well known because it allowed to unmask unnoticed discriminatory practices that appear to be part of structural racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Critical race theorists argue that, during the Illustration, biologists classified human groups phenotypically producing a social construction of race which gave room to an unfair division (Banton, 2001; Bernasconi, 2001). Although the social construction of race as discriminatory is pointed out earlier in history, from the lens adopted in this paper it is believed to be reinforced and formalized in the scientific discourse during the Enlightenment. Backed on those ideas, CRT was initially useful to clearly identify cases of injustice and discriminatory practices that were not easily perceived. This theory expanded to countries and areas in which education was seen as a key space to determine that structural racism constitute not only the ideology of institutions, but

it also influenced individuals and specific social practices (Gillborn, 2006, 2010, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Leonardo, 2002). This evolution developed an understanding of the complexity of the system in terms of the historical narrative in which the individuals are immersed and the features that this involves for their own constitution belonging to the groups where they feel identified (Bonilla-Medina, 2018).

Although critical race theory questioned the foundations of typifying people in categories of race directly related to skin colour, it extrapolated that idea to understand social practices that interrelated other types of features, most of the times, indirectly. Whiteness as an evolution of CRT, emerged and developed as a theory in itself with particular characteristics. This theory advanced the argument that colour was only one of the referents that produced racialisation (that is, the unequal hierarchisation among groups or individuals), so, it was necessary to go beyond the discussion of social justice in affected groups and display an interest for uncovering other types of situated interrelationships (Murji & Solomos, 2005). In this train of thought, whiteness as a theory aims to understand the development of whiteness-centred practices. In other words, practices that reveal Eurocentric epistemologies constituting subjects, which would maintain power relationships oppressing individuals while maintaining others' privilege (Bonnet, 2000; Clarke & Garner, 2009).

According to the set of notions developed by CRT, more specifically by whiteness theorists, race is a multidimensional issue that comprehends not only physical definitions but also, economic factors, social conditions and cultures that characterise individuals within specific contexts. In this vein, and in the light of English language teaching and learning (ELT), race is intertwined in language, community, and culture exchanges in the domain of ELT. In this aspect, racialisation is understood as unfair discriminatory practices emerging from

the multiple relationships involved in language exchange and use (Bonilla-Medina et al., 2021).

Concerning education, understanding race implies a holistic view of practice, viewing practice as the micro-realisation of ideologies, worldviews, and epistemologies. In other words, racialised structures in English language teaching are embedded in the systemic social organisation and, as such, are embedded in educational institutions at macro levels, where symbolic power is at play in educational and linguistic policies. An example is how certain populations are invisibilised and homogenising views on native speakers are perpetuated. At a meso-level, we can observe them as stereotyped views deployed in daily social practices which affect educational practice, such as social media interaction, outside of educational contexts, where ideas, practices and identities are asymmetrically hierarchised to the detriment of others. Finally, at a micro level, when particular pedagogical language practices are materialised in the reproduction of racialisation. For example, when the educational objectives are situated in the ideal white (native speaker, foreign, intellectual, civilised, intelligent) and the evaluation and educational follow up is associated with the difficulty that individuals have to reach that ideal (Bonilla-Medina & Cruz-Arcila, 2021).

As we have seen so far, CRT has helped made racialisation visible in education, and this relation between racialised practices and English language teaching (ELT) has recently been explored by academics such as Kubota and Lin (2006). Despite these efforts and to the best of our knowledge, deracialising English practices has not been extensively explored and could gain from contributions in that area. Attempts of doing that have been developed, for instance, by Mena and García (2020) or Flores and Rosa (2015) though their views already exchange and borrow concepts entangled in CRT and decolonial theories. In any case, we see that CRT and decolonial theory share various arguments when analysing racialised/

colonial ELT. In order to explore that, we will now relate the principles of CRT and the definition of racialisation in ELT with the main discussions of decolonial theory and colonial practices. Hopefully, the views espoused by these theories prove useful in these discussions illustrated by efforts to decolonise/deracialise ELT made by undergraduate and graduate students in their proposals as expressions of resistance.

### Coloniality/Racialisation Prints in ELT

Coloniality is the continuation of colonialism today, as well as the dark and necessary side of modernity (Mignolo, 2000) linked to the history of the West (Bhabha, 1996), since there would be no Enlightenment or Western rationality with its modern narratives of State, culture, art, and science without the “Other” created by the colonial possession. As pointed out by Ballestrin (2017), coloniality is the inseparable and constitutive part of modernity which, according to decolonial thinker Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007), divides the world in abyssal lines.

Considering that coloniality and modernity are intertwined, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) sees modern Western thinking as a form of abyssal thought produced by the alterity (Mignolo, 2000) that relates to the creation and invisibilisation of the ‘other’, located on the other side of the abyssal lines, in the dark. Colonialism inaugurated two distinct worlds separated by abyssal lines: On the one hand, metropolitan, visible, developed societies and, on the other, colonial, invisible, subaltern societies.

In the dyad produced by colonial thought/racism/abyssal lines, the metropolis/ the coloniser and its values and knowledge are valid and universal, while the societies and knowledges located on the other side of the abyssal lines are invisible, subaltern and suffer colonial violence. Modern/colonial thought is, therefore, abyssal and racist as it makes the other invisible, unknowable, obscure. Decolonial thought and efforts invite us to bring the invisible to light, as we will attempt to do with racialised views in

ELT in this article, in the hopes of disrupting these racialised practices by making them evident.

For decolonial thinkers linked to the Latin American tradition and locus of enunciation, among whom is Aníbal Quijano (2007), coloniality is deeply intertwined with racism, since the exploited, dominated, and discriminated against were the subjects of the ‘races’, ‘ethnicities’ or ‘nations’ of the colonized populations that constituted Europe as a world power, beginning with the invasion of the Americas. As such, Quijano and other Latin American decolonial thinkers (e.g. Mignolo and Castro-Gómez, to name but two) see race/racism as a form of social classification in the onset of colonialism/modernity that is part of enduring coloniality today.

The role of the language in the Global South and in ELT has been discussed by many authors (e.g. Finardi, 2019, Menezes de Souza, 2019, Jordão, 2014), addressing issues of participation, representation, ideologies, and epistemologies that accompany decolonial calls for a more critical view of that language and its role in education in general and in teacher education in particular. Some of the conclusions drawn appeal to see that English has continued colonisation by submitting subjects through the desire for progress and global competition. Findings also reveal footprints of coloniality/racism in relation to teacher education and identity (Archanjo et al., 2019), the view of native versus non-native speakers (Simoneli & Finardi, 2020) and English as a lingua franca, a medium of education and language policy (Sifakis, 2019, De Mejía, 2019).

To decolonize scholarly knowledge, Kubota gives three recommendations:

- (i) to validate concepts and accounts other than those imposed by Euro-American scholarship; (ii) to scrutinize our citation practices, in order to make sure that we are not simply citing the work of those who are often credited as superior academics (i.e. male scholars in the Global North); and (iii) to be critically self-reflexive, to as to ensure that our work is coherent to ethical

standards (e.g. the way in which we treat students and colleagues in our workplaces). (Kubota, 2020, p. 2)

She adds a fourth recommendation to challenge *abyssal thinking*. It is an invitation for scholars to acknowledge the limits of their claims by revealing their locus of enunciation, presenting their research in ways that question the universality of white Eurocentric knowledge.

Diniz de Figueiredo and Martinez (2021) contribute to the discussion initiated by Kubota to confront *epistemological racism* to decolonize scholarly knowledge. Accepting Diniz de Figueiredo and Martinez' (2021) appeal, we decided to explore the relationship between CRT and decolonial theories in our attempt to decolonize/deracialise ELT by revealing our locus of enunciation in Colombia and in Brazil.

### Colonized ELT Leveraged by Internationalization in Brazil

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Before describing our locus of enunciation in a federal university in Brazil, it is important to bear in mind that we use the coloniality concept of Global North/Global South, which is relational and geopolitical rather than geographical. Having said that, we should note that while Brazil is part of the Global South, it can be seen as representing the 'Global North' of Latin America for other countries in Latin America and Africa. In that perspective, the federal university to which we refer here is a public institution located in north-eastern Brazil, which could be considered the Global North of that country.

The institution where the ELT final project was proposed is a medium-sized university for Brazilian standards with slightly over 20,000 and 4,000 undergraduate and graduate students, respectively, and 1,700 faculty members. As part of the national network of federal higher education institutions in Brazil, one of the aspects we want to highlight has been the effort to follow inductive internationalisation calls and programs

launched by the Brazilian government, such as Science without Borders (Chiappa & Finardi, 2021) or Languages without Borders (Finardi & Archanjo, 2018).

From the previously stated view, Finardi et al. (2020) saw that those agreements of internationalisation are closely related with language policies in this Brazilian institution, so they compared them with another university in the Global North (USA) concluding that the Brazilian university shows a colonised view and practice, where the internationalisation of higher education is often equated with the use of English as the 'only' academic lingua franca.

Finardi and Guimarães (2019) analysed local agency in the creation of a language policy in the Brazilian university, concluding that the institutional policy was dictated in a top-down fashion which left little room for local agency, voice and decolonisation. In the same year, Guimarães and Finardi (2019), also analysing language practices and policies at that university, concluded that there were signs of racism/coloniality, in that there was no room for other languages apart from English and no mention was made in the institutional language policy document to local languages, such as indigenous languages or the Brazilian sign language.

In 2021, Finardi et al. analysed glocalisation and internationalisation processes entangled with institutional language policies contrasting evidence from a university in Spain and the above-mentioned university in Brazil, and found that English had a prominent role in those institutions, with Spanish and Portuguese being undervalued in relation to the use of English.

Taken together, the results of the aforementioned studies carried out at the Brazilian university suggest that the process of internationalisation has induced language policies in a top-down fashion revealing a strong colonial legacy expressed in the view of English as the most (and perhaps the

only) important foreign/international language in academic exchanges with international institutions. Another evidence of the role of English in ELT in the Brazilian institution is that other foreign languages, like Spanish, French and Italian are offered in a dual degree, such as Portuguese-Spanish, whereas English is the only full degree offered for future foreign language teachers thus placing English hierarchically above other foreign (and even national) languages.

Considering that, in this context, most international students come from the Global South, more specifically from Latin America or Africa, and are Spanish or Portuguese speakers, the institutional pressure for teachers and programs to offer courses in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) rather than in Spanish or Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) evidences a colonial footprint and an effort to otherise their views on the language and values to reach ideal goals of a desired only-English language. Besides, this choice of languages may be taken as evidence that the Brazilian university wants to attract international students coming from the global north, disregarding the international population from the Global South as if the term 'international students' referred to those coming from the Global North, only rather than from other non-Brazilian universities (Martinez, 2021).

### **Racialised ELT in Colombia and Colonial Links**

Following the same line of discussion in terms of a geopolitical conception, both Colombia and Brazil have regions and particular places that can relatively be considered as part of the Global South or the Global North, This has an incidence this to their social, cultural, and even political recognition and representations. From a CRT perspective, the largest cities of the country are usually associated with civilisation and progress, and therefore they receive more benefits in terms of governmental resources and services (Cruz-Arcila, 2017). As discussed previously, this anticipates the racialisation which is pervasive across all levels of society in the country, and

which gives way to the creation of symbolic and material spatial barriers.

The Colombian university to which we refer here is located in Bogotá, the capital city, a place where metropolis and privilege is contained in the main imaginaries of Colombian population. Despite belonging to this idealised city, being a public institution, this University also represents a paradox in those ideal imaginaries, since its student population comes from low socioeconomic levels, something prevalent in a great part of the country (Bogotá, Alcaldía Mayor, 2004). This university has about 22.000 undergraduate students, 1.400 graduate students, and 3.000 faculty members. Thus, it is very similar, in size and geopolitical location, to the Brazilian university and it is also ethnically characterised as pluricultural and diverse as in the Brazilian case.

The Colombian university is also concerned to develop a curriculum with an international focus and this has also brought an interest on foreign languages (usually English) to facilitate international exchanges (Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, 2019, 2021). Some evidence of these preoccupations materialised in the creation of an Inter-Institutional Desk Agreement (Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, 1994) that has been centred on internationalisation in recent times. This focus, also gave rise to a language centre (ILUD, as per its initials in Spanish) in 2001, parallel to the implementation of a language policy that includes a second/additional language as part of the compulsory curriculum for undergraduate students (Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, 2010).

Interestingly, unlike the Brazilian case, the Colombian language/internationalisation policy does not openly manifest any affiliation to English as an international language or as a lingua franca. On the contrary, both the inter-institutional desk and ILUD policy documents show an aim to increase the production and dissemination of knowledge through multiple languages,



at least in theory. These statements involved in the description of the policies may be seen as discourses influenced by what Bonilla-Medina (2018) has pointed out as a contradiction between macro discourses of pluralism in the country and a global international effort for standardisation/universalisation (whiteness-centred approaches/colonisation).

This aspect takes us back to the need to analyse the discursive racialised constructions that have been developed at the macro level and the way they constitute discriminatory practices/abyssal thinking) at the micro level. In this line of thought, although institutional policies seem to integrate a view of plurilingualism in education, it appears that practices are broadly influenced by national policies of bilingualism which can be understood as the need to learn a foreign language (usually English) besides the national language (Spanish) disregarding the many other possibilities for L1 and L2 in the country (De Mejía, 2019).

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Departing from that idea, it is then necessary to see how critical race theory/decolonial lenses help to reflect on the main issues that have mirrored racialisation/coloniality in Colombian bilingual policies as well as how these may have produced discrimination, otherisation or alienation and other unfair practices at university settings.

In the first place, much criticism has been raised by local scholars on the grounds that national bilingual policies show a reductionist view of bilingualism (focused on English-Spanish only) (Guerrero, 2008), a subsidiary role of local knowledge (knowledge centred on foreign cultures and native speakers) (Gonzalez, 2007), and contradictory discourses of social impact (apparent coverage of policies that show benefits to population despite they reach only a few privileged segments) (Cruz-Arcila, 2017). As discussed above, this criticism, aligned with other criticism from decolonial theory and CRT, show how ELT is framed in discriminatory practices at macro levels, so that the university practice produces

marginalisation of individuals. This is because educational goals and language policies are stated with the ideal of the dominant culture.

As argued by Corso, (1993 cited in Gillborn, 2010), by providing privilege to [English] dominant cultures, educational goals reaffirm borderlines in poles: rich and poor, black and white, foreign and local, international and national, Spanish and English, native and non-native speakers and so on. Obviously, following Entwistle (2001), these ideas embedded in policies develop practices at micro levels that contribute to the production and reproduction of those binaries in such a way that imaginaries and practice divide the world between moral opposites of good and bad.

This leads to say that, as CRTs would state, it is not strange that learners and even teachers end up discriminating and self-discriminating by judging themselves as incapable (Apple, 1995), similarly to what decolonial thinkers would call the constitution of subaltern subjectivity.

Thus, according to the theories discussed here, although the Colombian university is not a private university, it is influenced by the national bilingual policy ideologies that appear to foster multilingualism and pluriculturalism, while, in practice, professors and students otherise themselves (accommodate to alien views of themselves) to highlight English over other languages producing and reproducing racialised/colonised practices. Of course, this accommodation goes with a view that language (in this case, English) represents a gate to progress and internationalisation (IPP, 2021) expressed in the anxiety and the need to test language proficiency through international certifications (Guerrero & Quintero, 2009) or the common European framework standards used as a referent in conversations with professors and teachers when they are asked about the goals of learning a language. For example, a shared inquiry exercise showed that English teachers continuously refer to the importance of helping learners to move from B1 to B2 levels as one of

their most significant missions (Bonilla-Medina & Rubio-Cancino, 2020). Additionally, as highlighted in other critical studies (see for example, Bonilla-Medina, 2008, Núñez-Pardo, 2020), English textbooks promote stereotyping and racialisation which in turn essentialise (make rigid and immutable) the identities of English learners and speakers in asymmetrical relationships.

The abovementioned materialisations of educational practices show that racialisation/coloniality based on whiteness-centred views at macro levels of education produce racialised educational practices at micro levels and the environment in which educational actors work are likely to perpetuate unwittingly discriminatory practices and construct submissive subjects. Nevertheless, for the rest of this article, we will address instances in which, as professors, we have appreciated that graduate and undergraduate students display agency and resist (deracialise/decolonise) those oppressive relationships through their own projects, texts and proposals.

### **Decolonial/Deracialising Practices Developed in Two Public Universities**

We will start by providing three cases from Colombia and will complement with a case in Brazil to illustrate our discussion.

#### **The Colombian University**

To restate, one of our aims in this paper is to show how through intersections of CRT and decolonial theory, we can elucidate experiences that evidence how, through race/coloniality awareness, undergraduate and graduate students have resisted unwitting colonialisation/racialisation on whiteness-centred practices/abyssal thinking in ELT. In doing so, we refer to two graduate and an undergraduate projects that have been developed as a result of the students' research interest with the aim to obtain their degree. Backed on the principles of CRT and decolonial theory, these papers were used as counter-stories to be analysed as ELT

actors' voices so that we could identify their positions towards ELT multiple dimensionality. In this article, we want to stress that our analysis suggests that the students' production contrasts with instrumental traditional views that have already posed as a criticism. In this view, we have seen students' efforts to decolonise/deracialise ELT practices. Considering the scope, length and purpose of this paper, we have chosen some examples which show students' critical positioning towards oppressive whiteness-centred discourses/abyssal thinking and practices particularly attempting to go beyond the micro level of practice. That is, students' work address deracialisation/decoloniality in different areas including micro, meso, and macro levels of educational practices.

The first example is the work of a graduate student who, through reflecting on his own life story, started to find links between his experience as a school student and the common white/colonial beliefs aligned with native speakerism which also states a need to certify English proficiency through standard international certification. The following anecdote repeatedly cited shows some of those initial reflections:

My interest in questioning school disciplinary practices dates back to my childhood and adolescence (...). Along my permanence [in the school], this institution used to award me several grants such as honour rolls and *izadas de bandera* (...) At that time, I could notice how publicly honouring a student was intended to provoke reactions in those who were not in the honorific places: desire of honour. (cited by Forero-Mondragón, 2021, p. 11)

By referring to *public honouring* and the intended reactions in those who were not obtaining those honorific places, the student shows that he already reached an awareness stage, where he could realise how those practices were mediated by dominant discourses (epistemological whiteness) of what is appropriate and what is not. As part of this awareness, he also realised how those same discourses and practices would privilege some individuals while marginalising/obscuring others.

In line with the theories involved in this discussion, those dominant discourses are related to *whiteness-centred discourses and relate with a matrix of power*, thus producing *abyssal thinking*. In the student's voice, even though he was not embodying a *white* imaginary, his awareness showed those conditions appeared to homogenise what he was and what he wanted to be. In other words, his awareness showed him in a process of whitening (aligning with dominant discourse of whiteness based on social and economic status) and, in the words of colonialism, producing otherness as subaltern.

Praising as a way to maintain ones in privilege, while leaving failure behind put the student in whiteness-centred practices or in a matrix of power which impeded the ability to observe the multifaceted reality. This student clearly started to see that honouring his behaviour was an instance of how individuals become submissive to homogenisation unconsciously. From the view of decoloniality, the student subsequently revealed the process in which he started to disrupt that epistemic coloniality in which he was immersed (Diniz De Figueiredo & Martinez, 2021 and Durham-Barnes, 2015). The student realised his position as submissive which he paralleled with the nowadays common belief that, to validate language knowledge, English language speakers have to certify their proficiency by presenting an international exam certification. In this context, he discusses how public academic recognition follow patterns that appear to structure individuals in parameters of "good" expected behaviour, just similar to what happened in his school formation.

As a result of these reflections, this student decided to explore how an international certification for language proficiency becomes a mechanisms that endorses disciplinary power on individuals, thus transforming them into docile subjects (Forero-Mondragón, 2021). In doing so, analysing the discourses produced by well-known international institutions that offer calls to study abroad,

he determined that these institutions contribute to discriminate/racialise/colonise individuals by providing few opportunities to the ones with limited resources, thus sustaining in power to the ones in privilege; in brief, he understood that was a contribution to maintaining racialised/colonised structures (Gillborn, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate (2006).

This student's work functions as disruption of 'normality' and, in the view of Mato (2020), it represents one of the most important stages to develop a decolonial, and thereby, deracialising attitude. This is because this student disrupts the colonial violence that invisibilises his voice as a language speaker and as a language teacher by challenging the English standard discourses and the institutions that reproduce these discourses uncritically. In the words of Soto-Molina (2018), the student's attitude is also decolonial because in English language teaching and learning where practices are already colonised—in the way groups relate to languages, how there are static identities immersed in hierarchies, and in the perpetuation of linguistic imperialism; having one of the ELT members stating their voice to demand social justice is an index of decolonisation/deracialisation. The cited student decolonises/deracialises ELT not only through his own awareness of racialised/colonised discourses and practices, but he also encourages others' decoloniality by making his voice spread in a public thesis.

The next examples show CRT and decolonial theory intertwined in their development, enabling explanations of racialisation at the epistemological level. Some of the particular elements derived from that discussion include: Abyssal thinking, discrimination, and concepts which are common for both theories, such as the construction of otherness or counter-storing, which in a dialogue, shed light on the purpose of this paper, that is, understanding colonial/racialised ELT practices and the role of actors (students) as agents to decolonise/deracialise them. Then, the second example is the

work of two undergraduate students who worked with one of us (the Colombian author) while they were in their ELT practicum and developed their project as a classroom intervention. In search of developing an innovative proposal for English teaching, they decided to focus their attention on helping *disabled*<sup>1</sup> students (blind or deaf children) so that they integrated them with the other children in their English class (Pulido-Bohórquez & Barreto-Lopez, 2019). These student teachers expressed their concern about the challenge teachers usually face in the so-called mixed-ability classrooms and justify the need to produce a project that could shed light on those teachers to be able to deal with the challenges imposed by working with those children. In order to develop this idea, these students basically started by designing special tasks and activities that, from their view, would be appropriate to help *disabled* children learn. Consequently, their work led them to realise that these activities were not enough to ‘include’ those children in the classroom, but that it was necessary to sensitise the ‘other’ students about the difficulties that blind or deaf children may encounter in learning, too. While evolving with their ideas, and understanding inclusion from the viewpoint of social justice, they got familiar with the philosophy of Martha Nussbaum (2011) that helped them realise that just like happens with race and coloniality, inclusion was as a social construct that establishes power relationships positioning some in deficit. In other words, inclusion situates the difference (to white, intelligent, intellectual, and so on) in terms of normality vs. abnormality and able vs. disabled.

As a consequence, these students’ work shifted to attempt to break down myths that were supported under those parameters of normality, not

1 Disable is the word used by the students to address their project in the beginning. The original word was used in order to show how their decolonisation process started from understanding those as discriminatory tags that needed to be changed.

only with their school students, but also with themselves. They cited on their thesis:

Inclusion in education is commonly understood as the integration of people with ‘disabilities’ inside a classroom of ‘mainstream’ students. This implies a non-fully attendance of their needs and perpetuates a ‘normalisation’ goal these students have to reach. In this regard, a misunderstanding of what inclusion, diversity, and differences entail in the classroom might trigger exclusionary practices and social interactions detriment (sic) due to the lack of connection with others’ ways of living and comprehending the world. (Pulido-Bohorquez & Barrero-Lopez, 2019)

Aligned in this discussion, Hemphill and Blakely (2019) sustain that global racism is maintained through the deficit discourse in education and this is how students are imposed identities that, most of the times, deny their repertoires. Although this reflection is explained in the context of ELT the authors’ discussion is comparable to the situation lived by these student teachers in their English classrooms. Equally, the students’ epistemological shift to understand their research problem from different views is comparable with a pluri-lingual and pluri-cultural stance proposed by Hemphill and Blakely as part of a decolonial stance. In this case, a pluri-cultural attitude is compared with understanding multiple perspectives of individuals, such as the ones these students recognised as *diverse-ability* rather than disabled students in their dissertation.

The last example from the Colombian university is Carlota’s in-progress graduate project. She is a female student teacher from the coast of Colombia who was interested in understanding the role of culture in an online EFL setting where she has been an English teacher for several years. As part of one of the writers’ supervision, she explained that participants in this online environment identified with different nationalities. This and the characteristics of the cyberspace led her to think this was intriguing and deserved a formal inquiry. The following excerpt is one of her prior thoughts about it.

what I propose here is accounting for all these different edges of the phenomenon of cross-cultural OCoP

(online communities of practice) so that we get to understand them and their soaring significance for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and applied linguistics field. (Carlota, thesis excerpt, 2022, p. 7)

As seen in her testimony, Carlota aimed to look at cross-cultural communication in an on-line environment to question EFL in ELT, but she was not interested in the instructional and structural view. She wanted to see how that cross-cultural interaction would influence what the participants think or expect from the EFL environment. With the development of her work, she started to realise that the ideas/expectations that she and the students have about English were associated to *big narratives* that are spread through macro *whiteness centred-discourses* (such as the ones on policies of curricular approaches to knowledge) (Ortega, 2021). She saw this worked as a *matrix of power*, as it was also stated by Ortega (2021). She then restated that thinking as follows:

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Critical interculturality is a process that implies ‘acknowledging that difference is built within a colonial structure and matrix of racialised and hierarchical power’ (Walsh, 2009, p. 4) and it can only be achieved if it is constructed bottom-up by the very people who have been historically dominated. ‘It braces and requires the transformation of the structures, institutions and social relationships, and the construction of different conditions of being, thinking, knowing, learning, feeling and living’ (Walsh, 2009, p. 4) (Cited by Carlota in her thesis, 2022, p. 9)

In analysing culture from an instrumental perspective, the student realised that the phenomenon was rather complex and that it was necessary to understand those power relationships that were part of the intercultural exchange. More importantly, she started to understand that in order to disrupt those power relationships (implied in culture rooted in epistemological whiteness) it was also necessary to understand the phenomenon from a bottom-up perspective, that is, from the ones that have been dominated/subalternised (usually non-white).

As a teacher who was part of an institute where, as she explains, these power relationships seemed

to be entangled with the beliefs on native speakers as models of speech, or English as a door to economic strength and progress; she thought she was one of those dominated subjects who did not have a voice to express or question ideas that came out of those beliefs. She explained how she felt a submissive individual as she continuously had to follow structured protocols to approach her students, the contents they brought to lessons and the way she addressed the language goals (see more in Perez-Bonfante, in press). By reflecting on those patterns and inspired by Villegas (2018), she got engaged with an auto-ethnography which, in her view, was an alternative form of research that could help her reflect upon her own role as a teacher in these cross-cultural online environments and reveal, from the inside, how those structures played a role on shaping the views she and her students had about ELT practices.

In this new perspective, she found, as Mena and García (2020) and Flores and Rosa (2015), that she would value the students’ experiences and voice rather than just focus on her only view being an outsider. More suggestively, she saw this shift as an opportunity to raise her subaltern voice as a teacher and reveal oppressing experiences she lived that would shape her own view of culture and consequently her views of teaching, learning, and living. Considering Mena and García (2020), this shift that the student developed in her project clearly describes deracialisation and, we add, decolonisation of the language teaching environment, where *counter-stories* (a strategy that has also been adopted by decolonial theory) support alternative views of reality and dismantle big narrative towards a stereotyped English teaching milieu.

### The Brazilian University

In the same decolonial frame but now in the context of the Brazilian university, an undergraduate ELT project which inspired an ongoing MA project will be described in what follows.

Barbara was a student in the English language teaching Practicum Course led by the Brazilian author, which is taught in the last year of the undergraduate ELT degree course in the Brazilian university. During this course, students were invited to reflect about the implications of teaching English as a foreign language in Brazil. One of the requirements for students to graduate in that ELT course was to deliver a monograph at the end of the course, so Barbara approached her professor during the ELT Practicum Course with the request to assist her as the advisor in her final monograph.

In their first meeting to discuss ideas for her monograph, Barbara stated she was unsure she wanted to become an English teacher (because of her experience in ELT) and asked if it was possible, instead of pursuing a practicum, to write about her experience in reading a short story about a native English speaker, who worked as a teacher of English in Japan (Kirkup, 1994). After reading the short story, the professor asked Barbara how she wanted to approach the story in her monograph to which she replied that she wanted to question the myth of native speakers as a guarantee of performing well in teaching English. Barbara's monograph and reflection discussed the concept of 'otherness' in relation to the role of English and literature, as well as teachers' beliefs about the role of native speakerism in ELT.

Barbara's work advanced the proposal that the spread of English did not have to entail a form of colonisation, since culture exchanges and access to information could be used to oppose colonial/racialised purposes. One way to do that was to question the role of English in Brazil either as a foreign or international language (Finardi, 2014) or as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jordão, 2014), thus empowering Brazilian teachers of English to appropriate ELT practices and views in a decolonial way.

In the short story, Richards, an English native speaker teaching Business English in Japan, is convinced that he 'owns' the language standing on *whiteness as property*. As such, Richards does not

think he has to prove himself as a good teacher as he is automatically seen as a good teacher of English, as he has the 'perfect' model of the language, aligned with whiteness-centred discourses. Barbara argues that a good teacher would welcome students' knowledge and effort to speak another language while attempting to understand (the content) rather than just correcting their accent. Thus, Barbara deconstructed the view of Richards as a good teacher simply on the basis of his whiteness and natively English-speaking status.

So as to deepen her understanding of what a good teacher of English is, after graduating Barbara decided to pursue her Master's Degree drawing on decolonial theory to understand the construction of identity and implications for Brazilian teachers of English. Barbara's efforts to decolonise ELT at undergraduate and graduate levels are taken as evidence of micro attempts to decolonise/deracialise ELT in the Brazilian university.

## Conclusions

Throughout the development of this article, CRT along with decolonial theory provided tools to see ELT as a colonised/racialised field, while also constituting a place of struggle. This means acknowledging the need for actors to fight oppressive structures that situate some in disadvantage while favouring others. In the particular cases used as illustration of our point here, we could see how Brazil and Colombia show a similar perspective in terms of ELT colonised/racialised practices that can be questioned, and, within this space, both theories are useful to see that actors usually follow the normalised parameters established by social whiteness-centred practices. However, those theories also help us see how actors become agentive to transform their and their students' realities.

As suggested before, our reflection shows that deracialising/decolonising is not an easy task. In the cases brought to bear in this article, students were able to break the shells of racialised discourses whiteness-centred practices and discourses

to reflect on their roles and decisions in ELT and research. As professors and teacher educators, we were pleased to see that, as promulgated by both theories, structures that have been stiffened through social practices could be weakened or at least questioned through students' resistance and reflection. In the light of these theories, students' contributions also show that students are critical and are willing to help others become critical too (Forero-Mondragón, 2021). Moreover, the micro practices described in this article suggest that awareness does not only depend on being aware of what others do but also on what one does too (Perez-Bonfante, in press; Pulido-Bohórquez & Barreto-Lopez, 2019). As such, the micro-practices brought to bear here show that students are concerned about those myths and big narratives constructed in ELT, and the examples we brought to illustrate our analysis are evidence of students' irreverence in face of whiteness-centred discourses and coloniality representing a contribution towards deracialising/ decolonising ELT practices. Hopefully, this kind of students' work and contribution acts as a trigger to find alternatives to develop epistemologies otherwise in the field of ELT with the aim to achieve social transformation.

Before finishing this article, we want to say that, just like Carlota (our last Colombian informant), our intention in this article represents an effort to foreground graduate and undergraduate's voices. Having said that, our idea of highlighting the commonalities of these two theories goes secondary to providing a platform to reveal those agentic transformations we have witnessed in our work. In line with decolonial efforts, we see ourselves as doing research with rather than about these voices. Our word is humble here in terms of considering our interpretations. We hope that through the continuous reflection we have carried out with these students and the reader, we are able to explain and expand the lessons delivered to the field through the lenses of CRT and decolonial theory.

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