

REVIEW

Queer: insult, movements and linguistics

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ABSTRACT

This review presents the main issues debated during the roundtable discussion *Linguística Aplicada a partir de paradigmas queer* (Applied Linguistics from queer paradigms), held in Abralín ao Vivo course. For this purpose, I present a brief contextualization about the queer paradigms trajectory as an anti-essentialist criticism of the normalization of gender, sexuality and its intersectionalities. Then, these discussions outline a theoretical and analytical scope of the current phase of Queer Linguistics and its main research interests. Finally, I present the effects of possible approximations of queer paradigms and transgressive and undisciplinatory perspectives of Applied Linguistics. The professors Elizabeth Sara Lewis (UNIRIO), Luciana Rocha (Colégio Pedro II) and Iran Melo (UFRPE) participated in the discussion, and the mediation was carried out by the professors Adriana Carvalho (UFRRJ) and Paula Szundy (UFRJ).



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RESUMO

Esta resenha crítica apresenta as principais questões debatidas durante a mesa “Linguística Aplicada a partir de paradigmas *queer*”, realizada no curso do “Abralín ao Vivo”. Para tanto, apresento uma breve contextualização acerca da trajetória dos paradigmas *queer*, enquanto crítica antiessencialista às normalizações de gênero, sexualidade e suas interseccionalidades. Em seguida, as discussões delineiam um escopo teórico-analítico da atual fase da Linguística *Queer* e seus principais interesses de pesquisa. Por fim, são apresentados os efeitos das aproximações possíveis entre paradigmas *queer* e perspectivas transgressivas e indisciplinárias de Linguística Aplicada. Participaram da discussão as professoras Elizabeth Sara Lewis (UNIRIO), Luciana Rocha (Colégio Pedro II) e Iran Melo (UFRPE), e a mediação foi realizada pelas professoras Adriana Carvalho (UFRRJ) e Paula Szundy (UFRJ).

KEYWORDS

Queer Linguistics. Applied Linguistics. Queer Theories.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Linguística *Queer*. Linguística Aplicada. Teorias *Queer*.

Queer paradigms: insult, movements and theories

From a very brief historical point of view, queer theories correspond to a set of critical transdisciplinary studies on the processes of social normalization - especially in terms of gender and sexuality - originating in the United States, in the late 1980s. Its emergence occurs in the face of an academic translation of the political struggles against the assimilation of traditional gay and lesbian movements to heterosexual normativity and against the production of a regime of *abjection* and social abandonment to which dissident sex and gender people have been subjected in the context of the HIV epidemic, the *gay plague*, during the conservative government of Ronald Regan (MISKOLCI, 2012).

In these studies, the effects of a complex assemblage between positions on subject, discourse, power, body and sexuality, arising particularly from lesbian feminisms and from post-structuralist philosophies, such as those of Foucauldian and Butlerian origins. The centrality of these theories lies in the criticism to the regimes of normalization of sexuality that support, in positions of power (normality), heterosexual sexual and gender identities, relegating their dissent to inferior positions (abnormality), subject to different forms of violence. Thus, gender and sexuality, more than fixed, natural and stable identities, ontological properties of the subjects, come to be taken as effects of power, socio-cultural and historical, produced through the reiteration of diffuse discourses of heterosexuality as a political and compulsory regime, that is, from a heteronormative matrix based on the regulatory fiction of the coherence among sex, gender and desire (BUTLER, 2017).

Queer, in terms of an Anglophone etymology, maintains meaningful relations with "eccentric", "strange", "odd". Only after the famous events that involved the condemnation and imprisonment of the British writer Oscar Wilde, accused of homosexual practices, such term would come to be used as a type of insult, markedly homophobic (BORBA, 2019). It is through the performative appropriation of this insult, thus twisting its semantics, that the aforementioned American social movements, contesting a hegemonic homosexual identity, will entitle themselves, under the effect of political engagement, as queer movements.

Therefore, more than the lexical label of a recognizable identity, the "queer", incorporated in the nomination of Queer Theories (QT) and Queer Linguistics (QL), corresponds to the multidirectional index of a myriad of insulting translocal meaning processes, both performative and politically

appropriated, so it seems more interesting, as Borba (2019) argues, instead of reconstructing an etymological trajectory of the term, imagining a non-linear history of repetitions, modifications and contortions of meaning that makes a possible satisfactory translation into Portuguese a complex task.

Possibilities, dialogues and (un)limits of Queer Linguistics

After the individual presentations by the invited researchers and their current research interests, in response to a first round of questions raised by Adriana Carvalho, the debaters argued around possible definitions for the Queer Linguistics (QL) and the effects of approaches among queer perspectives of gender and sexuality and transgressive and undisciplinary research in Applied Linguistics (AL). In general, one emphasized that QL, in its current phase, as Borba (2015) points out in a reinterpretation of his seminal text for the perspective in Brazil, is dedicated to critically studying heteronormativity, through QL concepts, examining how heteronormative speeches are supported or subverted in situated language practices.

Thus, from the philosophical and political point of view of language as a form of action, according to the performativity theories, it is in QLs interest to make visible the effects of the multiplicity of semiosis and linguistic engineering used by subjects in their daily interactions, in order to produce intelligibility about gender and sexuality - and its intersections (race and class, for example) - in the most diverse scales and modalities of meaning. For this reason, the speakers argue that QL is neither a sub-discipline of Linguistics nor a “new” field of Applied Linguistics, but a theoretical-methodological and ethical-political stance in language studies.

On the other hand, such posture has no rigid disciplinary boundaries or canonized research rituals, so that, in a work in Queer Linguistics, the procedures for generating and analyzing data can be constructed in a syncretic manner, activating theoretical and analytical constructs derived from different approaches: linguistics, textual, interactional, discursive and/or sociolinguistic available in the sociocultural framework of language studies. Thus, I believe that, by considering the social, cultural and historical meanings indexed by the situated uses of specific semiotic resources, *queer* linguists point out the radical contingency of identity performances, challenging deterministic perspectives of language and identity, practiced even within other linguistics who think about gender and sexuality, but maintain essentialist linguistic ideologies, like the one underlying the propositions of a *gay speech*.

Queering Applied Linguistics: research, education and other imaginations

In a second round of provocations made by the mediators to the debaters, it was quite prominent in the discussion that, due to these destabilizations of a fixist discourse about identities, QL has similarities with AL's interdisciplinary and transgressive approaches (MOITA LOPES, 2006). In this sense, one pointed out: a) the emphasis on language as a social practice from a situated and intersubjective perspective; b) the interdisciplinary nature and the strategic absence of pre-defined research methods and procedures; c) the affirmation of the contingent nature of knowledge production, which renounces the narrative of a supposed "privileged reading" of social life; d) the ethical and political dimension of the researches, concerned with the mitigation of human suffering based on listening to the voices of those marginalized subjects.

Aside from the highlighted points, the effects of a targeted view of both QL and AL on education in general and on critical linguistic education in particular have achieved particular emphasis in the debate. As the researchers pointed out, with the flagrant political moment of intense social fascism, strengthened in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and of the systematic attack on public education (expressed in projects such as "Escola Sem Partido" and in the moral offensive produced by the bizarreness of "gender ideology"), the character of disembodiment of pedagogical practices is increasingly evident, denying affective and gendered experiences of students. Thus, such debates end up relegated to the scope of biologist and medicalizing discourses and the reduction of linguistic education to the learning of a linguistic code, an abstract system of signs, which would have nothing to do with the lives and bodies of these people.

As resistance practices inspired by QL and AL in the face of this process, the debaters pointed out some possibilities centered on the transversality of gender and sexuality issues in school curricula, such as human rights issues and confronting the forms of violence, starting from school routines; in the critical use - *queering* - of potential cis-heteronormative identity representations offered by the available didactic materials; in the practice of a critical linguistic education that takes language as a performative sociosemiotic repertoire, that is, from which the subjects act in the world, (de)constructing their performances through tensions and disputes between identities and differences.

Although the recontextualizations produced here do not do justice to the totality of the points discussed in the reviewed thematic table, as is typical of this genre of discourse, its realization revealed a moment of important visibility of the Queer Linguistics practiced in Brazil as a productive epistemological orientation in the construction of intelligibilities about the embodied social life, in terms of the relations among language, gender, sexuality and their intersectionalities.

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