

THEORETICAL ESSAY

Internationalization of Brazilian higher education and the linguistic construction of the educational commons



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EDITED BY

- Marina Mello de Menezes Felix de Souza (UFOB)
- Lucas Araujo Chagas (UEMS)
- Luis Eduardo Wexell Machado (UNA)

EVALUATED BY

- Denise Weiss (UFJF)
- Bruno Silva (UNM)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

- Leonardo Alves
Conceptualization;
Methodology; Writing – original draft; Writing – analysis and editing.
- Cristine Görski Severo
Conceptualization;
Methodology; Writing – original draft; Writing – analysis and editing.

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Leonardo ALVES

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC)

Cristine Görski SEVERO

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC)

ABSTRACT

The internationalization of higher education in Brazil presents itself as a promise of openness and the democratization of knowledge, yet its practices carry deep historical and linguistic hierarchies. This theoretical essay aims to critically analyze this process from a glottopolitical perspective, highlighting how university rankings, mobility policies, and the hegemony of English reinforce structural asymmetries between the Global North and the Global South. The research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in bibliographic review. The results indicate that Brazilian internationalization remains predominantly reactive, guided by external calls and metrics, without consolidating autonomous long-term strategies. This dynamic reproduces the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano, 2020), displacing local epistemologies into zones of invisibility and naturalizing the centrality of the North as scientific elite (Santos; Meneses, 2013; Santos, 2019). Furthermore, the predominance of English Medium Instruction compromises both linguistic plurality and pedagogical quality, configuring mechanisms of exclusion and epistemicide. In contrast, alternatives such as solidarity-based internationalization, as advocated by UNESCO regional conferences and South-South networks, point to a horizon of epistemological justice and the valorization of epistemic diversity. It is concluded that interna-

tionalization will only have emancipatory meaning if recognized as a political practice oriented toward the construction of a plural and dialogical educational commons, understood as a shared space of knowledge production structured by conditions of recognition, listening, and epistemic legitimacy.

RESUMO

A internacionalização da educação superior no Brasil tem sido apresentada como promessa de abertura e democratização do conhecimento, mas suas práticas revelam-se atravessadas por hierarquias históricas e linguísticas. O ensaio teórico tem como objetivo analisar criticamente esse processo a partir de uma perspectiva glotopolítica, evidenciando como rankings universitários, políticas de mobilidade e a hegemonia do inglês reforçam assimetrias estruturais entre Norte e Sul. A pesquisa adota uma abordagem qualitativa, fundamentada em revisão bibliográfica. Os resultados indicam que a internacionalização brasileira permanece predominantemente reativa, orientada por editais e métricas externas, sem consolidar estratégias autônomas de longo prazo. Essa dinâmica reproduz a colonialidade do saber (Quijano, 2020), deslocando epistemologias locais para zonas de invisibilidade e naturalizando a centralidade do Norte como elite científica (Santos; Meneses, 2013; Santos, 2019). Além disso, o predomínio do *English Medium Instruction* compromete tanto a pluralidade linguística quanto a qualidade pedagógica, configurando mecanismos de exclusão e epistemicídio. Em contrapartida, alternativas como a internacionalização solidária, defendida por conferências regionais da UNESCO e por redes Sul-Sul, apontam para a possibilidade de um horizonte de justiça epistemológica e de valorização da diversidade epistêmica. Conclui-se que a internacionalização só terá sentido emancipatório se reconhecida como prática política voltada à construção de um comum educativo plural e dialógico, entendido como um espaço compartilhado de produção do conhecimento, estruturado por condições de reconhecimento, escuta e legitimidade epistêmica.

KEYWORDS

Coloniality of knowledge. Educational Commons. Cosmopolitics of language. Glottopolitics. Internationalization.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Colonialidade do saber. Comum educativo. Cosmopolítica da linguagem. Glotopolítica. Internacionalização.

ABSTRACT FOR A NON-SPECIALIZED AUDIENCE

The internationalization of higher education is often presented as a pathway to opening borders and expanding opportunities. In Brazil, this idea is frequently seen as a promise of democratizing knowledge. In practice, however, it often reinforces historical inequalities. Universities are pressured to follow global rankings, adopt English as the primary academic language, and send students predominantly to institutions in the Global North. This pressure renders local knowledge invisible and keeps the country in a position of dependency. This essay shows that internationalization goes beyond the mobility of students and faculty. It is also a political dispute: it defines which voices can be heard and which forms of knowledge are considered legitimate. The predominant use of English, for instance, hinders the circulation of ideas produced in Portuguese or other local languages. On the other hand, alternative experiences already exist. Regional networks and South-South initiatives have advocated for a solidarity-based internationalization, grounded in cooperation and dialogue rather than competition alone. It is concluded that internationalization will only have emancipatory meaning if it values the diversity of knowledge and recognizes education as an educational commons – that is, a shared space in which different languages and perspectives can produce knowledge legitimately, without a single language or a single center defining what counts as science.

Introduction

The internationalization of higher education, frequently presented as a promise of openness and the democratization of knowledge, reveals itself, in practice, to be traversed by power relations that reproduce historical hierarchies. Since the origins of modern universities amid European expansion, a logic of epistemic centralization has consolidated, defining which forms of knowledge could circulate as science (Santos; Meneses, 2013). This Eurocentric matrix has been updated through global rankings, proficiency examinations, and mobility policies that reinforce the centrality of the Global North in the knowledge world-economy (Tauchen *et al.*, 2018). Alongside this logic of epistemic centralization, uni-

versities face the challenges posed by academic capitalism, which has increasingly transformed spaces of knowledge into spaces of consumption. In this regard, Santos (2011) and Connell (2019) enumerate a series of elements that characterize the commodification of universities following a privatizing model, such as: (i) the subordination of infrastructure, remuneration, materials, scholarships, retention policies, and research investment to market valuation; (ii) ranking standards aligned with the logic of productivism and quantification; (iii) the productivist logic imposing itself over humanistic, cultural, local, and public interest concerns; (iv) a conception of lifelong education as education for the market; (v) autonomy understood as flexibility to adapt to the market; (vi) the propagation of an ideology of education centered on the individual-consumer; and (vii) direct or indirect charges for access to and permanence in the university.

In the Brazilian context, the internationalization of higher education has been structured in a manner strongly tied to the dominant model of the Global North, particularly regarding academic mobility and market interests. Programs such as *Ciência Sem Fronteiras* and Capes-PrInt exemplify this movement, directing students and researchers primarily toward North Atlantic universities, reinforcing asymmetric flows and a logic of dependency (Morosini, 2021). Although regional initiatives, such as UNESCO's Regional Conferences on Higher Education (CRES), propose a solidarity-based conception of internationalization and the valorization of Latin American integration, Brazilian practice still focuses on responding to external calls and reproducing Eurocentric standards of excellence (Morosini, 2021).

Alongside the question of mobility oriented toward the Global North, we highlight a glottopolitical problem: the predominance of English as the language of teaching and scientific publication, consolidated by devices such as English Medium Instruction (EMI), represents a choice that regulates who can speak and under what terms that speech is recognized as legitimate (Studer, 2022). In this regard, Pradier, Céspedes, and Larivière (2025), in a recent article, assessed the linguistic landscape of international publications and found that 95.4% of publications in the Web of Science and 92.6% of those in Scopus are in English; that 97.4% of articles on coronavirus in a given study were written in that language; that, in journals indexed in selective index databases (SCI/SSCI), between 80 and 90% of journals are in English; and that, in the humanities and social sciences, although there is greater variation, English predominates in many cases.

This linguistic hegemony of English reinforces the centrality of the Global North in the knowledge world-economy, erasing local epistemologies and reducing the plurality of voices to an appearance of dialogue in which only the North holds authority to validate statements and forms of knowledge (Santos, 2019; Quijano, 2020). The Global South, in turn, is left in the position of raw material supplier, reproducing an extractivist model of knowledge production (Makoni *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, this scenario compromises pedagogical quality itself, as faculty who teach in an additional language lose part of the spontaneity and critical depth they would have in their mother tongue, directly affecting student formation.

For this reason, we understand that discussing internationalization requires recovering its political character. It is not merely a matter of moving bodies or offering curricula in English, but of

expanding the conditions for voice, recognizing that languages and the policies surrounding them do not exist outside power relations but are constituted by them. As Severo (2013) argues, understanding language policy – including universities as spaces that institutionalize language policies – implies recognizing the agency of subalternized subjects and communities, whose critical and creative actions challenge the authoritarian and legitimizing constructions of prestige groups. The central question, therefore, is not whether we should internationalize, but how to do so: whether as a mechanism for reaffirming colonial hegemonies or as a practice of cognitive justice, capable of opening space for plural and insurgent epistemologies. The challenge is to transform internationalization from a global monologue into an effectively dialogical field, in which universities of the South appear not only as recipients but also as legitimate producers of knowledge.

We understand that internationalization policies must be guided by a commitment to the educational commons, in which higher education affirms itself as a shared good, oriented toward the plural production and circulation of knowledge. This notion goes beyond the abstract defense of the public good and distances itself from the conception of education as a commodity subjected to competitive metrics and neoliberal logics (Santos, 2011; Connell, 2019). The educational commons refers to the concrete conditions of visibility, listening, and recognition of subjects, languages, and epistemologies in the university space, being constructed through democratic language practices (Severo, 2013; Severo, 2023; Makoni; Pennycook, 2007). Moreover, it is oriented by the demands, questions, and problems that traverse common life, assuming the university as a space of social implication and public responsibility. This formulation dialogues with the Freirean critique of the banking model of education, understanding knowledge as a dialogical and emancipatory practice, rather than as a deposit or vertical transmission of content (Freire, 2023). In the field of higher education internationalization, the educational commons also articulate with the need for decolonization of universities, particularly in the Global South, in the face of the epistemic, linguistic, and institutional hegemony of the North (Santos; Meneses, 2013; Makoni *et al.*, 2022; Morosini, 2021).

We argue that the internationalization of higher education must be committed to strengthening South-South solidarity networks through emancipatory proposals and actions, thereby reinforcing its commitment to the public sector and to the commons. To this end, we understand that the linguistic-political debate is central, as languages operate as relevant indices of social, ethnic, and cultural inclusion and representation. To discuss these issues, the theoretical essay is organized into the following sections: (i) Internationalization as reproduction of epistemic and linguistic coloniality, in which we situate the question from a political and critical perspective; (ii) Linguistic coloniality, epistemicide, and the denial of dialogue: internationalization as epistemic monologism and English Medium Instruction as the erasure of linguistic diversity; and (iii) Internationalization, the educational commons, and the cosmopolitics of language, in which we defend a common and emancipatory project of linguistic education, guided by a cosmopolitical perspective on language.

1. Internationalization as Reproduction of Epistemic and Linguistic Coloniality

The internationalization of higher education, despite being frequently presented as a universal opportunity, carries deep marks of coloniality, linguistic imperialism, and concentration of resources in the Global North (Connell, 2019). Universities, since their genesis, were shaped by European projects of expanding knowledge and power, linked to colonial trajectories and the consolidation of nation-states (Santos; Meneses, 2013). The first modern universities – exemplified by Paris, Bologna, and Oxford – emerged as fundamental cogs in a European historical project of consolidating power and intellectual authority. These institutions defined what would be considered legitimate knowledge and, in doing so, crystallized Eurocentric epistemologies that silenced, subalternized, or rendered invisible local, indigenous, and non-Western forms of knowledge (Makoni *et al.*, 2022). Over the centuries, this historical foundation was not overcome; on the contrary, it was updated. Throughout the twentieth century, academic internationalization began to organize itself around rankings, funding agencies, and mobility programs that reproduced, at new scales, the same logic of Global North centrality (Connell, 2019; Santos, 2011). Thus, the circulation of students, faculty, and researchers continued to operate asymmetrically, consolidating a higher education world-system that privileges South-North trajectories and concentrates resources, prestige, and epistemic power in historical poles of hegemony (Tauchen *et al.*, 2018).

Furthermore, the hegemony of English and the global mechanisms for evaluating universities reinforce this framework of subordination (Pradier; Céspedes; Larivière, 2025). Guilherme and Picoli (2020) highlight the centrality of the English language in the production and circulation of scientific knowledge, to the point of being accused of linguistic imperialism, and the weight of international rankings, which privilege publications in that language and operate as filters of academic legitimation. Added to this, neoliberal regulatory devices – rankings, metrics, and classificatory disputes – constitute a form of soft power that naturalizes competition and imposes on Southern institutions a regime of permanent self-regulation, in which academic value is measured by proximity to external Northern standards. One of the most perverse effects of this neoliberal logic is the transformation of researchers and students into consumers, as problematized by Almudras (2022), in an article published in the magazine *Piauí*, entitled “It looks like revolution, but it’s just neoliberalism.”¹ In that text, the author problematizes how the market, the individualizing ethic, and the spirit of consumerism became the basis for directing the cognitive and normative model of social life, transforming universities into supermarkets, knowledge into a product, and researchers and students into consumers. In this logic, those who decide what they consume (which texts to read), how much they consume (how many texts to read), for how long they consume (how many classes to take), and how they consume (how classes should be) are the consumers themselves.

¹ In the original: “Parece revolução, mas é só neoliberalismo”

Thus, beyond the colonality of knowledge, Quijano (2020) identifies the colonality of being, which traverses the subjective constitution of subjects. The disqualification of languages and utterances falls not only upon ideas, but upon the very bodies that enunciate them. Researchers from the South, even when highly qualified, are frequently positioned as peripheral if they do not master the linguistic and rhetorical standards of the North. The internationalized university, in this context, institutes a system of selective recognition – whoever does not speak “in the correct language” or “in the correct manner” is automatically perceived as less competent, less scientific, less universal. The erasure, therefore, is simultaneously epistemic and ontological, as it deauthorizes voices and identities. The impact of the hegemony of the English language on academic subjects is profound, as discussed by Studer (2022) and Iñíguez and Ahumada (2014): when faculty and researchers are compelled to teach or present research in a language in which they are not fully proficient, that practice is weakened, as communicative fluency, interpretive depth, and the critical edge that derives from the bond between language, experience, and thought are lost. For example, Fishman (2000) shows that the choice of languages in given situations – regulated by factors such as group, situation, and topic – crystallizes the unequal distribution of functions among codes. Thus, when English monopolizes scientific spheres, what is at stake is not merely the selection of a language, but the imposition of a global hierarchy of legitimacy. In this framework, academic internationalization produces a double silencing: that of excluded languages and that of the subjects who carry them.

We thus demonstrate that neoliberal dynamics produce a series of erasures, among them epistemic and linguistic ones, as Santos (2019) warns, by disqualifying or rendering invisible epistemologies, methodologies, and ontologies of the South, produced, in many cases, in non-hegemonic languages. What is internationalized, in this way, is the imposition of a model of science, language, and university aligned with modern Western rationality. As Santos and Meneses (2013) propose, breaking with this logic requires thinking an ecology of knowledges (and of languages), and of university practices that recognize the validity of other forms of knowledge production and circulation – not as exotic objects to be studied, but as autonomous epistemes fundamental to the construction of a global educational commons.

In view of this, it is crucial to highlight that the construction of this global educational commons does not occur through the homogenization of knowledge, but through the recognition of differences and the plurality of ways of knowing and existing, which includes the plurality of ways of communicating and producing knowledge. This recognition implies affirming that the subjects of internationalized education, beyond being bearers of technical or linguistic competencies, are politically situated historical beings, whose voices carry world projects and struggles for recognition. As Freire (2023) argues, educating is, above all, a political act – in the sense of a commitment to the emancipation of subjects and to the transformation of unjust social structures.

The internationalization of education, within this horizon, needs to be conceived as a process of expanding institutional borders and student mobility, but also as a practice of freedom (Severo; Barbosa, 2025). This demands a critique of the epistemological structures that marginalize non-hegemonic forms of knowledge and an engagement with forms of internationalization that help over-

come what Freire (2023) identifies as the culture of silence – the condition in which subjects are deprived of narrating the world from within themselves. We understand, together with Santos (2011) and Connell (2019), that internationalizing must allow different epistemologies to circulate, dialogue, and contest meanings, rather than being absorbed or erased by dominant models of science and the university. It is a matter of recognizing internationalized education as a field of dispute and creation of new possibilities, in which the South does not appear as a space to be integrated, but as a legitimate site of knowledge production. And, in this process, the linguistic question is indispensable, as it operates as an index of social, cultural, and political representation.

The critiques proposed by Guilherme and Picoli (2020), Almudras (2022), Connell (2019), and Santos (2011) help to expose the neoliberal face of internationalization, which articulates itself with global market logics. In this scenario, the circulation of students and faculty becomes a strategic component of an international system of competition in which education is a commodity. The promise of “internationalization for all” coexists with selective practices that privilege South-North flows, reinforcing the concentration of resources, prestige, and the capacity to define research agendas in universities. This framework reproduces historical inequalities in the distribution of knowledge and consolidates a narrative in which excellence is always elsewhere, while the South is assigned the role of recipient, dependent, and learner.

With this in mind, we understand that it becomes necessary to question whether the centralization of academic opportunities, financial resources, and scientific prestige within Global North institutions truly contributes to the construction of a global educational and linguistic commons. Just as the concentration of wealth, the concentration of knowledge, and the instruments of epistemic consecration – such as international rankings, high-impact publications in English, and linguistic certifications – tend to reinforce historical inequalities, consolidating a geopolitics of knowledge that subordinates the Global South to Euro-North American epistemology. If mobility flows, criteria of excellence, and prestige languages continue to be defined by Northern interests, what is globalized is not knowledge in its diversity, but a hegemonic model of university, science, and language. An example of this is that, in the Brazilian context, the COBRADI 2021/CAPES report illustrates that approximately 94% of scholarships paid by CAPES in international cooperation calls with mobility for Brazilians abroad (E03 modalities) are assigned to destinations considered “developed,” while only 1.5% of them are directed to countries of the Global South (Schleicher, 2022).

Thus, it is urgent to think of internationalization as a project of cognitive justice and to abandon the perspective of “epistemological trickle-down” (Bauman, 2015). Such a project requires breaking with the logic of model exportation and creating institutional ecologies in which knowledges produced in the South – in their languages, territories, and traditions – are recognized as voices that tension, expand, and transform the very horizon of global knowledge. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the construction of a global educational commons does not presuppose the elimination of differences, but rather the creation of spaces where they are recognized as constitutive of knowledge production. The subjects involved in this process are historical and political subjects,

marked by collective trajectories, embedded in their own epistemological ecosystems, whose voices express plural ways of conceiving education, science, and justice.

If we want internationalization that transcends the circulation of people and the fulfillment of institutional metrics, we must recognize it as a field of political and epistemic dispute. Thus, university language policies – understood as educational policies – cannot be conceived as neutral planning gestures, but as practices inscribed in world projects. Severo and Barbosa (2025) affirm that linguistic education is a deeply political act, profoundly linked to the emancipation of subjects. In the field of language policies, this means shifting the emphasis from a discourse of managerial multilingualism toward a critique of the epistemic and linguistic coloniality that shapes both curricula and internationalization practices.

Such a formulation demands the recognition of the subjective and historical dimension of language, in contrast to models of internationalization that reduce language to an instrumental tool of competitiveness. To this end, it is also necessary to question the adoption of English as the guiding language of the internationalization process. English Medium Instruction (EMI) reconfigures the university space by imposing a model of knowledge circulation in which the English language is naturalized as the universal vehicle of rationality. As Pennycook (2007) observes, English as an international language is less an empirical reality than an invention sustained by institutional practices that confer ontological density upon it. This invention articulates itself with the coloniality of power described by Quijano (2020), as it reinscribes the South in a peripheral role: speaking, researching, and publishing according to Northern codes. Thus, EMI serves as a symbolic infrastructure that transforms internationalization into a process of epistemic assimilation, in which linguistic diversity is tolerated only as peripheral folklore, never as a legitimate matrix to produce theory. Furthermore, it delimits local knowledge to circulate only when previously formatted in English and adjusted to Eurocentric logics, so that the very promise of international dialogue becomes an authorized monologue. We will address the question of EMI in the following section, attending to the impacts of this language policy.

2. Linguistic Coloniality, Epistemicide, and the Denial of Dialogue: Internationalization as Epistemic Monologism and English Medium Instruction as the Erasure of Linguistic Diversity

In debates on the internationalization of higher education, concrete experiences reveal how coloniality infiltrates university practices through curricular language. Gamar (2022), analyzing a US technical college installed in an Arab country, shows that English does not operate merely as a medium of instruction, but as a technocratic device of legitimation: the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum, transplanted almost without adaptation from the Global North, imposes a

rationality based on competencies, efficiency, and task prescription, oriented toward the production of human capital. This model, which privileges operational verbs and measurable outcomes, marginalizes the sociopolitical, ethical, and cultural dimensions of education, reducing students to “labor resources” rather than subjects of critical agency. In other words, it is not “merely” a matter of the use of English, but of a vocabulary and modes of expression that come to be shaped by neoliberal, instrumental, and pragmatic interests.

Similarly, Kenyan researcher Khasandi-Telewa (2022) examines the tensions surrounding the use of mother tongues in Kenyan universities, showing that the issue goes beyond the simple coexistence of codes on campus. According to her, a contradiction is evident between the Kenyan Constitution of 2010, which guarantees every citizen the right to use the language of their choice, and institutional policies, such as that of Laikipia University, which, since 2013, have explicitly prohibited the use of local languages under the argument of combating tribalism (Khasandi-Telewa, 2022). One should note that Kenya recognizes two official languages, English and Swahili. This paradox reveals how university language policies can operate against the democratic legal framework itself, restricting rights in the name of a supposed national cohesion. More than a dispute over communicative preferences, it is a struggle over who can speak, in what language, and under what conditions that speech act is recognized as legitimate.

The panorama analyzed by Khasandi-Telewa (2022) goes further: drawing on an integrationist perspective, she questions the very notion of “mother tongue” as a fixed and stable entity, revisiting Makoni and Pennycook (2007) to show that many African languages were “invented” and standardized in the colonial context, converted into tools of classification and control. The study shows that, in practice, students and teachers draw on multiple linguistic resources in everyday interactions that cannot be reduced to the logic of discrete languages. To speak of “mother tongue,” in this context, is not merely to adopt an identity label, but to enter an arena of dispute between hegemonic conceptions of language (as an entity to be counted and policed) and emancipatory conceptions of language as situated practice – what some authors call languaging (Harris, 1981; Makoni; Pennycook, 2007) and which approximates, in educational terms, the notions of translanguaging (García, 2009).

Another example from an African context is the work of Mugaddam and Alkhair (2022), who analyze how linguistic programs in Sudanese universities remain structured by colonial epistemologies that conceive of language as a fixed, enumerable code reducible to Western normative categories. In these curricula, the centrality of linguistic competence predominates (inspired by Chomskyan generativism and the figure of the native speaker), while critical, sociopolitical, and cultural aspects are marginalized, and Sudanese languages are treated only in terms of nameability and quantification. This framework evidences how linguistics in Sudan still reproduces colonial and Eurocentric myths, restricting the agency of universities in the face of their own linguistic and cultural diversity, and reinforces the need for an epistemological decolonization capable of recognizing local knowledges and, further, overcoming the limits of linguistic scientism.

We highlight that the hegemony of English has affected not only peripheral or minority languages but also those that historically occupied a central position in the production of scientific

knowledge, such as German and French. According to Ammon (2001), until the first decades of the twentieth century, these languages figured, alongside English, as reference languages in the international circulation of research, conferences, and journals. The progressive displacement of German and French, particularly after the Second World War, reveals that not even established academic traditions with strong historical prestige are immune to the concentrating logic of the global scientific system that consolidated itself in the context of Bretton Woods. Ammon (2001) further states that this process produced concrete effects: the limitation of the use of German in specialized domains within the national territory itself, the deceleration of terminological modernization, the disincentive to publish in journals of lesser international reach, and the increase in editorial costs to compete in a market dominated by Anglophone standards. The result is the consolidation of a scientific monolingualism that impoverishes epistemic diversity and naturalizes the equivalence between academic excellence and the capacity to produce in English, rendering situated knowledges invisible and restricting the plurality of ways of thinking and communicating science.

These tensions involving institutional language policies also appear in the Brazilian context, as Morosini (2021) demonstrates by analyzing the *Ciência sem Fronteiras* and Capes-PrInt programs, both of which are primarily oriented toward mobility to the Global North, thereby reinforcing historical dependencies. However, it is important to highlight the existence of counter-discourses and emancipatory practices: Morosini (2021) recalls that UNESCO's Regional Conferences on Higher Education in Latin America (CRES) have advanced a solidarity-based internationalization, understood as a practice of regional integration and cooperation. This idea resonates with Souza, Cossa, and Rodrigues (2024), who propose a South-South internationalization articulated through networks such as the Right to Education in the Global South (REGS), in which science is conceived as a public good and human right. These horizons suggest that breaking with epistemic monologism does not mean rejecting internationalization, but reconstructing it as a practice of connection, rooted in the plurality of voices and epistemologies of the South.

In this regard, it is worth revisiting the critique of the concept of language by Makoni and Pennycook (2007), who show how the very categories of “language” and “mother tongue” are not natural givens, but historical inventions forged in colonial and nationalist contexts. By naming, delimiting, and enumerating linguistic varieties as if they were autonomous entities, a metadiscursive regime was instituted that transformed heterogeneous practices into “languages” susceptible to being policed, ranked, evaluated, and hierarchized. This process produced profound material effects: it oriented educational policies, structured linguistic censuses, and legitimized epistemic violences that still today shape who is recognized as a subject of knowledge. To speak of “mother tongue,” therefore, is to mobilize a category constructed within this colonial logic of linguistic accounting, which erases translingual practices and reifies language as a stable object. Rather than simply pluralizing the framework – from monolingualism to an enumerable “multilingualism” – Makoni and Pennycook (2007) defend the need for a gesture of *disinvention*, that is, of questioning the very ontology of “language” as a thing, opening space for communicative practices that escape the limits imposed by grammars and dictionaries.

Still within the analysis of the political dimension of languages, Pennycook (2007) argues that there is no stable linguistic entity called “international English;” what exists is the repetition of institutional practices that make it appear real. By reorganizing curricula, bibliographies, and criteria of excellence around English, EMI crystallizes the fiction that English is neutral, universal, and necessary, transforming a historical contingency tied to colonialism into a global pedagogical foundation. Every course taught in English directly reinscribes the belief that there is only legitimate science when mediated by that language. By suppressing the constitutive dialogicity of language (Bakhtin, 1997) and imposing a monological model, internationalization operates as a vector of epistemicide (Santos, 2019), erasing local epistemes and the pedagogical power that emerges from the plurality of voices.

In this sense, internationalization updates a device that organizes academic flows and regulates the very form of enunciating the world. We understand that, as a criterion of legitimacy, of academic intelligibility, and the medium of instruction, English functions as a glottopolitical operator that shapes regimes of scientific acceptability. The reduction of internationalization to a practice of adopting English as the language of instruction is strongly criticized by Studer (2022), at the risk of reinforcing cognitive and pedagogical inequalities. His EMI teacher competence framework shows that teaching in an additional language implies more than linguistic proficiency: it requires developing a sociocultural competence capable of mediating content in a critical and situated manner (Studer, 2022). Non-native faculty, upon migrating to English, frequently see their didactic performance compromised – they lose spontaneity, richness of examples, and cultural nuances they would command in their mother tongue, which can lead to conceptual impoverishment and lower student engagement. For Studer (2022), this pedagogical loss evidences that EMI is, in itself, a language policy that reconfigures the conditions of knowledge production, transforming language into a filter for academic legitimacy.

Having carried out this analysis and problematization of the hegemony of the English language, with its implications for policies of knowledge production and dissemination, we now explore the possibilities of counter-discourses and emancipatory practices, shedding light on the importance of inclusive language policies for promoting social justice through the educational commons.

3. Internationalization, the Educational Commons, and the Cosmopolitics of Language

Despite the institutional advances of recent decades, Brazilian universities still demonstrate limited capacity to plan autonomous strategies and remain highly vulnerable to external agendas (Neves; Barbosa, 2020). This response pattern is a predominantly reactive process, in which institutions respond to external calls and requirements from international funding bodies without developing their own long-term projects. This institutional vulnerability must be understood within a broader process of commodification of higher education, which weakens the public function of the university and recon-

figures its formative practices. As Alves (2025) argues, neoliberal logic displaces higher education from a project of democratic and socially engaged formation toward criteria of performativity, competitiveness, and adaptation to market demands, thereby contributing to the emptying of its public dimension. In the context of internationalization, such dynamics align with global agendas and metrics that deepen institutional dependency and strain the capacity of Southern universities to pursue autonomous, long-term projects.

University rankings constitute one of the most effective instruments for reproducing global academic hierarchies. Created and controlled by Northern institutions, they (re)produce the very notion of excellence, defining criteria that reflect their historical models of the university. As Morosini (2021) observes, internationalization has been captured by this logic of competition, in which international indicators function as devices of symbolic regulation: they compel Southern institutions to align themselves with external standards under penalty of invisibility – whoever is not on the list is not seen, is not important, does not produce quality science. The contradiction, however, is structural: the same North that establishes the metrics and monopolizes the top positions also commands the economic capital to attract prominent researchers from the South, draining locally originated scientific production and revalidating the centrality of its own universities. In this process, internationalization becomes a prestige trap, in which peripheral universities invest resources to approximate an unattainable model, while the global academic elite continuously reaffirms its status quo and concentrates cognitive capital.

As already mentioned, Ammon (2001) demonstrates that the centrality of English as the language of science has drastically reduced academic production in other languages, including in countries that were historically centers of prestige. In Brazil, the logic is similar: researchers are pressured to publish in internationally indexed English-language journals, while national and regional journals lose relevance in evaluation systems (Neves; Barbosa, 2020). The analysis of public policies also reveals the fragility of this process. Neves and Barbosa (2020) observe that Brazilian universities have been inserted into a rationality of internationalization that privileges quantitative indicators – such as the number of articles published in English or the volume of student mobility – to the detriment of qualitative criteria of social, regional, and cultural impact. The result is an internationalization oriented toward rankings and metrics, which responds more to market logics than to collective projects of cognitive emancipation.

Beyond institutional policies, the hegemony of English in the internationalization of higher education is also sustained by the beliefs constructed and negotiated by students. Studies on the Brazilian university context show that students perceive English as an indispensable linguistic capital for access to material goods, academic recognition, and professional insertion, while simultaneously expressing tensions and ambivalences regarding the cultural and identity hegemony associated with core countries (Mott-Fernandez; Fogaça, 2019). These beliefs oscillate between the desire to master the cultivated standard norm of the native speaker and the valorization of a more pragmatic and intercultural use of the language, revealing an ideological and cultural conflict that accompanies the formative process. It becomes evident in this dynamic that internationalization is imagined, from

the outset of university formation, as linguistically hierarchized, naturalizing English as the privileged pathway to knowledge. We understand that student beliefs cannot be comprehended as individual choices, but as effects of a discursive regime that constructs English as a necessary or indispensable international language, as problematized by Pennycook (1994; 2007). The reproduction of these beliefs reinforces the epistemic monologism of internationalization and tensions the construction of an effectively plural educational commons, in which different languages and epistemologies can circulate with recognition and legitimacy.

As a counter-discourse and set of counter-hegemonic and emancipatory practices, Morosini (2021) proposes thinking about internationalization from a solidarity-based perspective, articulated in regional networks and inspired by CRES/UNESCO. This alternative suggests that Brazil can engage in internationalization processes that strengthen local epistemologies, promote regional cooperation, and give visibility to productions in Portuguese and other languages of the Global South. Such a proposal does not eliminate dialogue with the North, but shifts the axis of dependency toward a more horizontal practice. A series of unavoidable questions then arises: why does academic cooperation insist on restricting itself to the Euro-North American axis, rather than opening itself to African, Asian, or Latin American researchers? Why do indigenous, local, and community knowledges remain excluded from scientific legitimization networks? Are they not distinct epistemologies, or simply non-Eurocentric epistemologies? Why do we insist on valorizing the mobility of doctoral researchers abroad while neglecting to listen to knowledge traditions that, although not certified by colonial standards, produce complex visions of the world?

Some of these questions resonate with the reflections of Santos (2011) and Santos and Menezes (2013), who argue that assuming a counter-hegemonic globalization of the university as a public good means investing in a radical democratization of higher education, capable of reinterpreting the national and transnational dimensions through relations of solidarity and cooperation that build networks for the circulation of new pedagogies and modes of knowledge production. In this process, the public university, the national state, in tune with a solidary globalization, citizens – individually or collectively organized – and national capital emerge as protagonists. For the authors, it is a matter of redefining what counts as a university, beyond conventional higher education, reconquering its legitimacy through free access, affirmative action, and scholarships; through community engagement with an active and solidary role, non-profit, in the construction of social cohesion alongside social movements, companies, governments, and NGOs; and through action-research, understood as the production of knowledge in dialogue with the community. This perspective also includes the ecology of knowledges, based on dialogue between academic and non-academic knowledge, as well as the articulation between the university and the public school in the production and dissemination of pedagogical knowledge, in educational research, and in teacher training. To this end, it is necessary to overcome strictly quantitative methodologies centered on the logic of efficiency, performance, and productivism, in favor of more plural and critical approaches.

One should also note that the conception of emancipatory alliances within universities – and of South-South relations in knowledge production – also integrates the reflections of Connell (2019),

for whom a good university already exists in fragments and needs to be strengthened in the face of the economic, political, and cultural commodification of higher education. It is guided by collective values, not by the individual choices of market consumers, and articulates itself with global social movements (environment, peace, gender and racial equality, economic justice). According to Connell (2019), the central principles that guide a university engaged with the common good and solidarity would be: (i) democracy, in terms of wage equality and conditions, accountability, and shared decision-making; (ii) creativity, as openness to new forms of research and engagement, centered on student agency; (iii) truth, as a commitment to the rigorous production of knowledge, against marketing and privilege; (iv) relevance, understood as active presence in society, with curricula that confront difficult questions and engaged pedagogies that demand time, emotion, and technique from faculty; and (v) sustainability, understood as the survival and flourishing of the institution over the long term, with free circulation of ideas and techniques.

As an example of an emancipatory initiative, Souza, Cossa, and Rodrigues (2024) analyze the Right to Education in the Global South (REGS) network. This initiative articulates universities and social movements from different countries in defense of education as a human right and public good, bringing internationalization closer to a practice of solidarity. In this model, the circulation of knowledge is not the privilege of mobile elites, but a collective right, oriented by values of sharing and mutual recognition. In this sphere, the commons is understood as a political, social, and ethical space of sharing, visibility, and listening, in which language plays a central role by enabling plural relations, interactions, and forms of coexistence (Severo, 2023). The commons is continuously constructed by language practices that articulate singularities, transforming massification into a space of encounter and negotiation. In the context of internationalization, this concept extends to the construction of an academic space where multiple epistemologies can circulate on equal terms. To internationalize means assuming the dispute over the commons as a political horizon, ensuring that historically silenced voices find conditions of visibility and legitimacy in the global field of knowledge.

We reiterate: if internationalization is inevitable in an interconnected world, the central question is not whether we should internationalize, but how. To continue doing so under a monological logic means reinforcing colonial hierarchies. To internationalize under a dialogical logic, on the contrary, demands rethinking evaluation criteria, recognizing plural epistemes, strengthening local languages, and understanding that science is necessarily a space of dispute. In this horizon, it is not a matter of celebrating diversity merely as an ornament, but of recognizing it as the very foundation of knowledge production. In this direction, Severo and Buzato (2023) develop the notion of a cosmopolitics of language that shifts its understanding from a mere human code to a semiotic network in which human and non-human agents interact – living, ancestral, material, and spiritual. This perspective, inspired by the ontological turn and the critique of anthropocentrism, tensions the dictatorship of language understood solely as an exclusive attribute of human rationality. From this vantage point, internationalization ceases to be thought of as global homogenization and comes to be conceived as an opening to radical alterities, in which multiple regimes of meaning coexist, albeit in

tension. The university becomes a space of entanglement and negotiation between worlds, rather than an instance of imposing epistemic monologism.

We understand that it is necessary to propose a cosmopolitical gaze engaged with the educational commons, in the sense given by Iñíguez and Ahumada (2014), of looking at language as a place of encounter between cultures and as a space of connection. Language must constitute a territory of encounter, in which differences are valued, and common meanings are constructed. This gaze makes it possible to imagine internationalization policies that go beyond assistentialism – which views Southern students as lacking Northern resources – and move toward horizontal practices of exchange and co-creation of knowledge.

Finally, we may ask: what would characterize this educational commons? We argue that it is not a matter of a specific language, but of multilingualism – and of the constant negotiations of meaning that emerge in plural contexts – as the condition of possibility of this shared and heterogeneous space. In this sense, we have much to learn from contexts that have been formulating and implementing multilingual public policies, such as African countries that have redefined the very concept of multilingualism. Beyond the mere sum of individualized and named languages, it is a matter of thinking them within “relational social practices that are not always amenable to processes and procedures of enumeration” (Ndhlovu; Makalela, 2021, p. 2), in which the circulation of plural linguistic repertoires is not taken as a problem, but as an educational, cognitive, social, and political resource. From this perspective, “multilingualism must be understood as something that encompasses multiple and diverse views on dialects, language forms and other communicative modes, including symbolic, metaphorical and discursive ones” (Ndhlovu; Makalela, 2021, p. 97). From this *multilingualism-as-the-language-of-the-educational-commons* perspective, pedagogical and educational practices demand reconfigurations that involve solidary and cooperative formation, the recognition of distributed agency, and the construction of intelligibility in multilingual contexts (Severo *et al.*, 2023).

Concluding Remarks

The analysis developed here allows us to affirm that the internationalization of higher education, far from being a neutral or exclusively technical process, constitutes a field of political, linguistic, and epistemic dispute. The predominant practices – anchored in rankings, proficiency examinations, and the advancement of English Medium Instruction – have reinforced the colonial logic of concentrating academic prestige in the Global North, relegating Southern universities and epistemologies to peripheral positions (Morosini, 2021; Studer, 2022; Alves, 2025). The result is the perpetuation of an epistemic monologism in which only certain modes of speaking and producing science are legitimized as universal (Santos, 2019). This monologism is also reproduced at the level of academic beliefs, when English comes to be naturalized as the near-exclusive condition for accessing information and for the recognition of scientific work – a belief reiterated institutionally and projected onto subsequent generations of students (Mott-Fernandez; Fogaça, 2019). In critiquing monolingualism, we maintain

that multilingualism is not merely a linguistic alternative, but the very condition of possibility of the educational commons.

In the Brazilian case, internationalization still appears as a reactive movement, guided by external calls and requirements, without autonomous long-term projects that articulate the valorization of local languages and situated knowledge production (Neves; Barbosa, 2020). This dynamic reproduces the colonial pattern described by Quijano (2020), in which hierarchies of power and knowledge not only define who can speak but also what can be recognized as science. In this sense, dependency on external agendas naturalizes the idea that excellence resides elsewhere and displaces the Brazilian university toward the role of data provider or academic labor force, without a full voice in the definition of paradigms.

Overcoming this framework entail recognizing internationalization as a glottopolitical practice, marked by choices that are not merely administrative but that define the place of subjects and epistemologies in the world-system (Severo, 2013). It is necessary to go beyond the circulation of bodies or the fulfillment of indicators, recovering the political dimension of internationalization as an expansion of the conditions for voice, listening, and legitimacy for plural knowledges. More than inserting oneself into networks already structured by the North, it is a matter of disputing the very architecture of the international academic field, promoting cognitive and epistemological justice (Santos; Meneses, 2013). Thus, internationalization may cease to be a device for reaffirming hegemonies and become an opportunity for dialogical construction, in which Southern universities appear not merely as recipients but as central producers of knowledge. The challenge is no small one: it demands reconfiguring evaluation criteria, recognizing the centrality of linguistic diversity, and critically confronting the mechanisms of structural exclusion that sustain the colonality of knowledge and neoliberal metrics. Only in this way will it be possible to transform internationalization into an effective space of encounter between epistemologies, capable of pluralizing the voices of science and democratizing the horizons of academic thought.

Additional information

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Editors

Marina Mello de Menezes Felix de Souza

Affiliation: Universidade Federal do Oeste da Bahia (UFOB)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2208-2794>

Lucas Araujo Chagas

Affiliation: Universidade Estadual de Mato Grosso do Sul (UEMS)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2379-9156>

Luis Eduardo Wexell Machado

Affiliation: Universidade Nacional de Assunção (UNA)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2966-245X>

EVALUATION ROUNDS

Evaluator 1: Denise Barros Weiss

Affiliation: Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1713-0947>

Evaluator 2: Bruno Pinto Silva

Affiliation: University of New Mexico

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9933-3037>

EVALUATOR 1

Inicialmente parablenizo pelo foco dado ao tema da internacionalização, tão discutida no âmbito das universidades e, ao mesmo tempo, tão mal compreendida – seja por desconhecimento, seja por interesses profissionais ou institucionais.

Em termos estruturais, considero muito relevante a apresentação de um resumo para não-especialistas. Ele permite a leitores que não são da área o sentimento de que o artigo é legível, já que o resumo acadêmico muitas vezes afasta o leitor, com sua densidade e profusão de termos não explicados. O resumo contém o que deve, exceto por uma referência ao comum escolar, que faz parte do título do artigo. Sugiro acrescentar.

O levantamento das produções acadêmicas trouxe um panorama relevante, organizado em três pontos considerados fulcrais ao se compreender a internacionalização como um processo que precisa ser plural, multidimensional. O que hoje temos é uma conjunção de fatores que levam à iluminação do Norte Global, com o Inglês identificado como a língua da ciência, e um apagamento de tudo o que não se enquadra nesse ambiente.

Gostaria de comentar dois elementos que julgo pertinentes. O primeiro é o conceito de comum educativo. Embora esteja enunciado no título e seja objeto de uma seção, só existe a referência ao conceito na sua última menção. Acredito que seria apropriado que essa informação estivesse logo no princípio do texto.

Como segundo elemento, deixo, como contribuição ao debate, uma referência às crenças dos estudantes quanto à língua considerada relevante para a internacionalização. O inglês é não apenas percebido nas instituições como o único caminho para se alcançar as informações técnicas e o reconhecimento do trabalho, mas essa crença é fortemente reforçada para as próximas gerações de alunos.

EVALUATOR 2

O título do artigo mostra-se preciso e reflete adequadamente a proposta teórica desenvolvida ao longo do manuscrito. Ele abrange de forma clara o desenho do ensaio, articulando a noção de internacionalização com uma perspectiva glotopolítica. O resumo apresenta todos os elementos exigidos e demonstra excelente consistência interna, especialmente no alinhamento entre o objetivo declarado.

A introdução contextualiza de maneira eficaz o problema da chamada “centralização epistêmica” e do “capitalismo acadêmico”, conduzindo o leitor de forma lógica nessa discussão. Destaca-se positivamente o uso de dados recentes (Pradier et al., 2025), que fortalecem o argumento relativo à hegemonia linguística e conferem atualidade à discussão.

No que diz respeito aos métodos e resultados, trata-se de um ensaio teórico fundamentado em revisão bibliográfica. O objetivo é adequadamente cumprido, uma vez que todas as referências citadas encontram-se devidamente listadas.

O manuscrito demonstra alta relevância para a área de Linguística e Educação Superior, cumprindo de forma honesta e bem fundamentada o papel de criticar a colonialidade linguística. A decisão sugerida é de aceite.

AUTHOR'S ANSWER

Prezados,

Agradecemos os comentários referentes ao nosso texto. Todos eles foram muito propositivos e importantes para revisar o documento. Enviamos o arquivo com o texto revisado.

Cordialmente,

Leonardo e Cristine

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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Research Protocol and Pre-Registration

This theoretical essay does not involve empirical data collection or analysis, nor does it involve human or animal participants. Therefore, the adoption of Equator Network reporting guidelines and pre-registration in institutional repositories are not applicable. The work follows ethical and scientific principles pertinent to theoretical and bibliographic review studies.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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