Decolonial Discourses in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*: Transgressing Cultural and Linguistic Borders

Luiza de Oliveira Lanari*

Abstract

This article aims to, drawing on Decolonial Studies and Sociolinguistics, analyze how bilingual subjects are conceived in the novel *Americanah*, written in 2013 by the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The decolonial concepts of territoriality presented by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, as well as Walter Mignolo's "languaging/bilanguaging" and Gloria Anzaldúa's fluid epistemological practices embedded in linguistic choices are deeply associated with the notion of translanguaging. This concept, defined by Ofélia Garcia and Li Wei as a linguistic phenomenon in which all an individual's linguistic repertoire is used to conceive meaning, is an important element in shaping the main character's subjectivity and a tool of resistance regarding processes of cultural assimilation and linguistic oppression. Therefore, it is regarded as a product of semiotic processes of meaning-making, and thus dependable on intersections experienced by bilingual subjects. In this sense, translanguaging is a vital element to the maintenance of cultural subjectivities by promoting hybrid bilingual subjectivities. The article is organized in a bibliographic review, followed by an analysis on how the concepts mentioned before are represented in the novel.

Keywords: decoloniality; translanguaging; subjectivities.

* Luiza Lanari é mestre em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa pela UFMG e especialista em Educação Bilíngue e Plurilíngue pelo Instituto Singularidades. Possui experiência com coordenação pedagógica e docência em Educação Básica e Ensino Superior. Atualmente, é doutoranda em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa pela UFMG e docente da disciplina "Literaturas em Contextos Bilíngues e Plurilíngues" do Curso de Especialização em Educação Bilíngue e Plurilíngue da PUC Minas Virtual. Orcid: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2557-0224.

Cadernos CESPUC de Pesquisa. Série Ensaios. n.47, 1º Sem./2025, p. 34-53.
e-ISSN: 2358-3231 (OJS). Recebido em: 29/09/2025. Aceito em: 25/11/2025.

Discursos decoloniais em *Americanah*, de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: transgredindo fronteiras linguísticas e culturais

Resumo

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar processos nos quais subjetividades bilíngues são elaboradas na obra *Americanah*, publicada em 2013 pela escritora nigeriana Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, tendo como referência os Estudos Decoloniais e a Sociolinguística. Por meio de conceitos relevantes para os dois campos de estudo, como a noção de territorialidade, de Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "*languaging/bilanguaging*" de Walter Mignolo, e práticas epistemológicas que desafiem relações de poder imbricadas em escolhas linguísticas, propostas por Gloria Anzaldúa, a translinguagem será analisada. Esse fenômeno linguístico, elaborado por Ofélia García e Li Wei, que pressupõe que o uso de todo repertório linguístico de um sujeito bilíngue é utilizado para a construção de significados, é um conceito relevante para a compreensão de como subjetividades bilíngues podem servir como ferramenta de resistência perante processos de assimilação cultural. O bilinguismo pode ser considerado, portanto, resultado de processos semióticos de construção de significados e parte das interseções de vivências que constituem um sujeito bilíngue. Dessa forma, práticas translíngues são vitais para a manutenção de aspectos culturais e memórias de comunidades marginalizadas, pois reforçam aspectos decoloniais relacionados à concepção de subjetividades bilíngues híbridas. Como metodologia de pesquisa, o artigo utiliza revisão bibliográfica desses conceitos, seguida de análise crítica dos modos como eles são representados na obra de Adichie.

Palavras-chave: decolonialidade; translinguagem; subjetividades.

Cadernos CESPUC de Pesquisa. Série Ensaios. n.47, 1º Sem./2025, p. 34-53.
e-ISSN: 2358-3231 (OJS). Recebido em: 29/09/2025. Aceito em: 25/11/2025.

Introduction

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes in his work *Decolonizing the Mind*: The Politics of Language in African Literature his process of language acquisition, specifically English. When claiming that "[...] language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces in the Africa of the twentieth century" (Thiong'o, 1986, p. 4), he exposes that the issue of language goes beyond language itself; it represents the cultural, political and economic domination of imperial enterprises operating in his community. Through his personal accounts on how English became part of his experience, Thiong'o exposes how colonialism and processes of territorialization – and deterritorialization, in turn – have occurred in African countries:

> And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture [...] English became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language, it was the language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference. (Thiong'o, 1986, p. 11).

The settlement of foreign schools in colonized countries has established a cultural standard in which formal education would be given in French, Portuguese or English, regarding as inferior, in this sense, local languages and, consequently, cultures.

Thiong'o's account is indeed one among many; the territorialization of languages has affected many colonized countries in Africa. The establishment of mainstream languages has disregarded and contributed to the eradication of many local and native languages. The territorialization mentioned by Thiong'o occurs not only regarding language, but also knowledge; establishing that mission schools would be a better fit for colonized countries means that the way of organizing and producing knowledge coming from colonizers are hierarchically superior.

The claim for a decolonial perspective on language has contributed extensively to the area of Sociolinguistics, as the studies of discourses reveal how colonial logics and knowledge operate within language in order to reinforce structures of power. Maria Noel Miguez Passada builds

on the arguments of Thiong'o and provides a theoretical framework in the article "Discourse Analysis by a Decolonial Perspective" to discuss how power relations embedded in language influence how people understand reality and construct their notions of what is considered valuable or not concerning culture:

> With language, reality is created, which accounts for the societal framework of the moment as a synthesis of the social-historical totality that is singled out in the communication processes displayed by the subjects in discursivity. Throughout this process, subjectivity becomes a constitutive part, and therefore, the analysis of discourses that is mediated by decoloniality enables us to recognize subjects in their space, historical time, becoming, taking into account that from the epistemological point of view, a break with the colonial logics of the speeches and their interpretations. (Passada, 2019, p. 7).

Coloniality, thus, influences language in the sense of regarding or disregarding cultures, but also in relation to how people construct representations of the world, of knowledge and of themselves. A decolonial perspective on how subjectivities are built in this arena, where power relations are negotiated, presents the possibility of challenging mainstream notions of language and cultures, and provides a diversity of knowledge that includes various productions from the Global South, that is, from countries that are dependent politically and economically to countries from the Global North (Santos; Meneses, 2009).

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2013 novel *Americanah*, processes of territorialization and deterritorialization occur in many ways. In the novel, language is an important tool in the critical formation of its main character, Ifemelu; born in Lagos, Nigeria, Ifemelu acquires a visa and is encouraged by her boyfriend, Obinze, and her Aunt Uju to go to the United States in order to go to college. Her experience in the United States is marked by sexual violence, depression and the attempt to fit into American society and exposes the many instances in which colonialization is embedded in the migrant experience of African peoples. The present study aims, then, to analyze how a theoretical framework from Decolonial Studies and Sociolinguistics contribute to understanding how power relations are inserted in the linguistic choices of the main characters of *Americanah*,

more specifically claiming that the translanguaging phenomenon provides resources for Ifemelu to subvert the oppressions she suffers after moving to the United States. The article includes a conceptual foundation on the notions of "languaging/bilanguaging" and fluid epistemological practices, as well as translanguaging, followed by an analysis on the instances in which they are portrayed in the novel.

1. Decoloniality in *Americanah*

In the spectrum of decolonial studies, Walter Mignolo (2000) develops in the book *Local Histories, Global Designs*: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking the issue of decoloniality by proposing to resist the structures of knowledge from the Global North, developing what he defines as "border-thinking", that is, epistemologies that include marginalized knowledge in the discussion. To subvert ideologies embedded in dominant linguistic and cultural practices, the scholar advocates for what he defines as "languaging/bilanguaging":

> In order to do so, it is necessary to think languaging beyond languages: the moment "before" language (not, of course, in a history of language from the paleolithic to the present, but in everyday linguistic practices), when the discursive alienation of what (in language) we call "consciousness" has not yet been articulated in the discursive structure of power; and the moment "after" language, when languaging (and, in this case, bilanguaging) becomes a process of "conscientization" (à la Freire) as liberation of colonial and national (official, hegemonic) discourses and epistemologies. (Mignolo, 2000, p. 269-270).

The notion of bilanguaging proposed by Mignolo is an act of confronting the hierarchies of knowledge, in which an individual, by understanding how discourse perpetuates structures of power, consciously uses language in order to subvert hegemonies. Gloria Anzaldúa, in the work *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, agrees with Mignolo's claims that it is necessary to erase the cultural and linguistic division in contexts of immigration and defends the importance of a fluid epistemological practice:

> For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves – a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 55).

Bilanguaging, for Anzaldúa, represents merging all linguistic choices in order to build hybrid subjectivities that encompass all the complexities involved in speaking and living in English and Spanish. Rather than one language or another, she disregards the linguistic boundaries and advocates for a common linguistic repertoire.

Aneta Pavlenko and Adrian Blackledge expand Anzaldúa and Mignolo's arguments in *Bilingual Minds*: Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts by bringing the issue of subjectivities to the discussion; by arguing that linguistic choices in multilingual contexts cannot be separated from politics, she connects linguistic ideologies to subjectivities. Languages, for Pavlenko and Blackledge, represent discourses that are situated in specific times and places, and that carry with them particular values:

"Ongoing social, economic, and political changes affect these constellations, modifying identity options offered to individuals at a given moment in history and ideologies that legitimize and value particular identities more than others" (Pavlenko; Blackledge, 2004, p. 1-2). The historical and spatial configurations of a determined context represent power relations that are embedded in them, and dictate, in a sense, a framework for interactions and subjectivities that are considered mainstream in this particular context. Language, in this sense, can be regarded as a tool for conceptualizing subjectivities that conform, in the case of assimilation, or defy, in the case of bilanguaging ideologies. Bilingual subjectivities are, then, "interactional accomplishment[s], produced and negotiated in discourse" (Pavlenko; Blackledge, 2004, p. 13).

A decolonial perspective is explored in the novel through Adichie's criticism regarding stereotypical views of African peoples. This notion, exposed in the beginning of the novel when Ifemelu goes to a hair salon in order to braid her hair, presents racist views that are commonly spread in countries such as the United States and how Ifemelu is able to critically analyze them after deciding to go back to Nigeria. Racist and stereotypical portrayals of African peoples are developed when Kelsey, an "aggressively friendly" (Adichie, 2013, p. 232) white woman, enters Mariama's salon to braid her hair. Here, Adichie displays a critique to American's sense of entitlement towards other cultures. Kelsey's cultural appropriation is criticized as she exposes a prejudicial and preconceived idea of how people from African countries should behave:

> She asked where Mariama was from, how long she had been in America, if she had children, how her business was doing. "Business is up and down but we try," Mariama said. "But you couldn't even have this business back in your country, right? Isn't it wonderful that you get to come to the US and now your kids can have a better life?" Mariama looked surprised. "Yes." "Are women allowed to vote in your country?" Kelsey asked. A longer pause from Mariama. "Yes." (Adichie, 2013, p. 232).

Kelsey's assumptions concerning Mariama, the owner of the salon, emphasizes not only a prejudice towards Africans, considered uncivilized and undeveloped, but also a sense of property, as if she, by being representative of American culture, should be treated in gratitude because her country has offered Mariama other possibilities rather than the ones she had at home.

Kelsey's sense of being qualified to talk to Africans about their cultures is strengthened as she approaches Ifemelu and mentions that she is about to visit African countries in the fall. In this episode, colonizing perspectives on African experiences are explored as Kelsey patronizingly criticizes Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, one of the most well-known allegories of African colonization, claiming that it does not portray contemporary Africa. Ifemelu, in turn, criticizes the book Kelsey is reading, claiming that it presents a European view of Africans, which displeases the white woman, who neglects any possibility that Ifemelu, as well as Mariama,

is able to produce knowledge that goes beyond agreeing with her. Kelsey's interest in the novel about an African man whose dream is to become European represents a colonizing portrayal of African peoples, as if going to Europe and other imperialist countries would be the goal to aspire to.

Furthermore, Adichie presents in *Americanah* criticism of how Americans view Africans through Ifemelu's first experiences in the United States. The woman suffers a symbolic violence from Elena, her roommate, after complaining that her dog ate her bacon, the girl replies "You better not kill my dog with voodoo" (Adichie, 2013, p. 187). Her essentialist view of African religions limited to voodoo expresses not only her prejudice towards African peoples, but also her religious intolerance and racism towards the young woman. Also, the episode in which Ifemelu meets her boss Kimberly shows how patronizing views of African peoples can be embedded in a seeming interest in African cultures. Kimberly's interest in the meaning of Ifemelu's name, claiming that she "love[s] multicultural names because they have such wonderful meanings, from wonderful cultures" (Adichie, 2013, p. 180), together with her overfriendliness and excessive flattery over black people, symbolizes a veiled prejudice. The issue is developed further when Kimberly talks about her perception of Ifemelu's background in Nigeria:

> "Ginika said you left Nigeria because college professors are always on strike there?" Kimberly asked [...] "Horrible, what's going on in African countries." "How are you finding the US so far?" [...] "I'm sure back home you ate a lot of wonderful organic food and vegetables, but you're going to see it's different here." (Adichie, 2013, p. 181-182).

Here, once again Kimberly's assumption that Ifemelu would eat organic food back in Nigeria represents an implicit racism, in which natural (meaning undeveloped) and tribal characteristics are associated with African countries. Rather than actively listening to Ifemelu, she prefers believing in her biased narrative of what African countries should look like. Her volunteer work in Africa, together with these already-made narratives, enforces a colonial white savior complex as well as lack of interest in actively learning about African cultures.

Moreover, decoloniality is explored in *Americanah* through the lenses of exoticism when Ifemelu describes her relationship with Curt,

Kimberly's cousin. Her first interracial relationship is marked by all of their differences; whereas she is a black Nigerian woman trying to study and provide for herself, Curt is a rich, white American man who has everything figured out for him. The notion of exoticism is explored when Ifemelu describes her first encounter with Curt's mother:

> He was her adventurer who would bring back exotic species – he had dated a Japanese girl, a Venezuelan girl – but would, with time, settle down properly. She would tolerate anybody he liked, but she felt no obligation for affection. "I'm Republican, our whole family is. We are very anti-welfare but we did very much support civil rights. I just want you to know the kind of Republicans we are," she told Ifemelu when they first met, as though it was the most important thing to get out of the way. "And would you like to know what kind of Republican I am?" Ifemelu asked. (Adichie, 2013, p. 244-245).

Ifemelu is seen by her mother-in-law as a token of Curt's cultural enterprises; the fact that Curt's mother tolerates rather than accepts her symbolizes how she disregards the seriousness of the relationship. The need for Curt's mother to explain what kind of republican she is symbolizes an attempt to justify that she is able to abide with her, but not to actually connect emotionally and welcome her in the family. Ifemelu's critical response to her mother-in-law marks, in turn, the beginning of a process of awareness and self-assertion as a black immigrant woman in the States.

Finally, Adichie explores the issues of cultural assimilation in *Americanah* when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria after living in the States. Being ironically addressed by her friends and family as "Americanah" (Adichie, 2013, p. 475) and "Madam America" (Adichie, 2013, p. 490), she decides to move back to Nigeria in order to work as an editor for a magazine named Zoe. People's reaction when she announces that she is going back is filled with caution and wariness about if she would be able to "cope" (Adichie, 2013, p.19) with Nigeria. The notion of American and European cultural domination is enforced by her comments on the work conducted by the Nigerian magazine:

> Most of your readers can't go into the market and buy broccoli because we don't have it in Nigeria, so why does this month's Zoe have a recipe for cream of broccoli soup?" "Yes, yes," Aunty Onenu said, slowly. She seemed astonished […] In the car, Ranyinudo said, "Talking to your new boss like that, ha! If you had not come from America, she would have fired you immediately." (Adichie, 2013, p. 484).

Ifemelu's experience in the United States has allowed her to have her opinions validated by her boss; her knowledge is considered superior to Zoe's Nigerian employees. Her suggestions show the need to start underestimating cultural, economic and political productions of Nigeria to the detriment of countries from the global north and how foreign values are deemed superior in Nigeria societal configuration and subvert the epistemic violence displayed through the emphasis of the magazine content. Ifemelu's criticism on the coloniality of knowledge is also presented by her description of the Nigerpolitan group. Described by Doris, her coworker who has lived in New York, as "[...] just a bunch of people who have recently moved back, some from England, but mostly from the US? Really low-key, just like sharing experiences and networking" (Adichie, 2013, p. 499), Ifemelu regards them as "[..] the sanctified, the returnees, back home with an extra gleaming layer" (Adichie, 2013, p. 502). The feeling of superiority of the club members is expressed when Ifemelu attends the meeting:

> The Nigerpolitan Club meeting: a small cluster of people drinking champagne in paper cups, at the poolside of a home in Osborne Estate, chic people [...] Their voices blurred with foreign accents. You can't find a decent smoothie in this city! Oh my God, were you at that conference? What this country needs is an active civil society. (Adichie, 2013, p. 501).

The people's behavior and criticism towards Nigerian culture enforces traditional views of European and North-American cultures as culturally, economically and politically superior to Nigerian. The networking and opportunities mentioned by Ifemelu's coworker symbolize the attempt to maintain cultural aspects from the Global North restrained in this privileged group.

To conclude, the novel *Americanah* presents processes in which cultural territorialization and deterritorialization occur in the immigrant experience of its main character Ifemelu. Aspects such as stereotypical

views on Africans as uncivilized, uneducated and exotic are explored, as well as the sense of entitlement of Americans when interacting with other cultures and the assimilation of Nigerian returnees after living in the United States; Adichie's criticism offers, then, the possibility of defying the cultural borders Ifemelu experiences first in the States and after returning to Nigeria as she becomes gradually aware of the oppressions she suffers. In the next section of this article, the ways in which Ifemelu uses language to defy the oppressions she bears will be discussed in light of a Sociolinguistic phenomenon that resonates Mignolo's and Anzaldúa's sense of hybridity of languages, entitled "translanguaging".

2. Translanguaging as a tool of cultural and linguistic resistance

Traditional studies concerning bilingualism and bilingual education tend to focus on the relation between two languages as separate spheres in a speaker's brain, that are turned in and turned off according to the purpose and context of communication. These spheres, in turn, sometimes overlap one another, in a phenomenon entitled "code-switching". Carol Myers-Scotton, in the work *Multiple Voices*: An Introduction to Bilingualism, provides a general conceptualization of the term, claiming that it refers to "[...] the use of two language varieties in the same conversation" (Myers-Scotton, 2006, p. 239). According to the author, code-switching can occur in different stances of communication, and can be inter-sentential or intra-sentential. The first case – inter-sentential code-switching – occurs when both languages are used in different sentences during communication, for example full sentences that are uttered in English followed by sentences in Swahili. Here, the switching of codes occurs outside sentence structures. The second case – intra-sentential or intra-clause code-switching – occurs within the boundaries of the clause, including elements of both languages in the sentence structure, for example when a speaker includes a word or grammatical structure from Swahili in a sentence structured mainly in English.

Ofelia García (2008) offers in her work *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century*: a Global Perspective an important contribution to the understanding of code-switching within bilingual experiences as she claims it to be a sophisticated linguistic skill that requires a speaker's ability to distinguish whether a specific code has a social meaning and if contributes to interpersonal relations:

> It assumes that when two or more codes are available, selecting a particular one is marked in the environment of the other that is not marked […] Through experiencing language in this community, speakers develop a sense of which code implies a renegotiation of rights and obligations between participants. (García, 2008, p. 61).

However, the scholar questions the sole focus of code-switching to the notion of language as a code, disassociated from the whole experience of bilingual subjects; similarly, she also questions the traditional conceptualizations of bilingualism provided in the dominant literature of the field that deal with languages as separate entities during communicative acts. For her, bilingualism is made of hybrid linguistic practices:

> A more heteroglossic conception of bilingualism recognizes its adjustments as it shifts and bounces. Bilingualism is not simply linear but dynamic, drawing from the different contexts in which it develops and functions. More than ever, categories such as first language (L1) and second language (L2), base and guest languages, host and borrowing languages, are not in any way useful […] because the world's globalization is increasingly calling on people to interact with others in ways that defy traditional categories. (García, 2008, p. 63).

For Garcia, the process of language acquisition and development in bilingual contexts occur not with language as a whole, but in different facets that are influenced by and in turn influence one's mother tongue in a continuum. She defends a new concept, "translanguaging", to refer to these hybrid linguistic practices that, though include code-switching, are not restricted to them. Translanguaging suggests, in this sense, a shift of perspective on how languages are organized during communication in bilingual contexts: "[r]ather than focusing on the language itself […],

the concept of translanguaging makes obvious that there are no clear-cut boundaries between the languages of bilinguals. What we have is a languaging continuum that is accessed" (García, 2008, p. 58).

Li Wei (2018) corroborates with Garcia's criticism of code-switching and its limitations in defining bilingualism through the relations of difference amongst languages. In the article "Translanguaging as a Practical Theory of Language", the scholar highlights that:

> For me, translanguaging has never intended to replace code-switching or any other term, although it challenges the code view of language. It does not deny the existence of named languages, but stresses that languages are historically, politically, and ideologically defined entities. It defines the multilingual as someone who is aware of the existence of the political entities of named languages and has an ability to make use of the structural features of some of them that they have acquired. It is a research perspective that challenges conventional approaches to multilingualism. (Wei, 2018, p. 27).

Wei defends that the act of dealing with language as encapsulated entities has a strong ideological character, reflecting power relations as mentioned by Thiong'o earlier in this article.

For Wei, the concept of translanguaging refers to a practice and a process: a practice in which multiple languages and language varieties are used dynamically; and "[...] a process of language construction that goes beyond language(s)" (Wei, 2018, p. 15), including multimodal elements, such as life experiences of its speakers, context of enunciation, etc. To strengthen his claim in the relevance of translanguaging to understanding how bilingualism operates, Wei provides the concept of "languaging", term that refers, in the same way as Garcia, to languages as unstable concepts, being continual and influenced by aspects such as feelings, experiences, history, memory, subjectivity and culture. By claiming that "[w]e think beyond the boundaries of named languages in the language of thought" (Wei, 2018, p. 19), Wei defends that languaging is a process that includes semiotic elements that contribute to the meaning-making process, including sounds, gestures, facial and body expressions, etc. He advocates that translanguaging practices occur in a translanguaging space, which is

similar to Edward Soja's (1996) notion of third space, where epistemological practices and geographical boundaries are defied.

In *Americanah*, translanguaging is explored as Ifemelu becomes aware of the cultural oppressions she suffers and decides to subvert them, claiming for a hybrid subjectivity that encompasses both her experiences in Nigeria and the United States. For that, her linguistic choices are important for asserting herself. In the novel, the epistemic and cultural domination is subverted by Ifemelu when she begins combining different variations of English she has contact with; in this sense, her blog, named "Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (those formerly known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black", is a digital space in which she analyses and voices her discomforts about not only being an immigrant in the United States, but also being black. In the post "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What do WASPs Aspire to?" Ifemelu uses digital language to provide an analysis on how colonial relations intersect with other aspects, such as race, when she describes a debate that takes place during a class. While discussing civil rights, one of the visiting professors claims that "The blacks have not suffered like the Jews" (Adichie, 2013, p. 253). This comparison between black and Jewish peoples is described as the "oppression Olympics" (Adichie, 2013, p. 253) by Ifemelu, as if there is a contest to see who is more marginalized in American society. She provides an analysis about this event in her blog:

> But there IS an oppression Olympics going on. American racial minorities – blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Jews – all get shit from white folks, different kinds of shit, but shit still. Each secretly believes that it gets the worst shit. So, no, there is no United League of the Oppressed. However, all the others think they're better than blacks because, well, they're not black. Take Lili, for example, the coffee-skinned, black-haired and Spanish-speaking woman who cleaned my aunt's house in a New England town. She had a great hauteur. She was disrespectful, cleaned poorly, made demands. My aunt believed Lili didn't like working for black people. Before she finally fired her, my aunt said, "Stupid woman, she thinks she's white". So, whiteness is the thing to aspire to. (Adichie, 2013, p. 253-254).

Ifemelu uses the digital sphere and online language to create, with her posts, an overview on ways of how colonial oppressions intersect one another, especially when race is added to the analysis; black people, and especially black women, tend to occupy a lower position in a North-American social hierarchy. These oppressions experienced in immigrants' everyday life can be, in turn, not only internalized, but also perpetrated by minority groups.

Ifemelu is able, in this sense, to transit between different modalities of the same language together with Igbo and Pidgin English. Marlene Esplin explains the linguistic variety experienced by Ifemelu in the article "The Right Not to Translate: The Linguistic Stakes of Immigration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*" as she claims that,

> The reader's acquaintance with Ifemelu entails a willingness to keep up with her marked linguistic versatility. As a student in Nigeria, Ifemelu exhibits her proficiency in the Igbo spoken in and around her village, the British-inflected English of her secondary school and university, Nigerian English, Pidgin, and the playful language-mixing of her friends and classmates. Once in the US, she attains fluency in the speech habits of both African American and Anglo-American communities, she masters the English of the blogosphere, and she becomes proficient in, though way of, the jargon of higher education. After her return to Nigeria, she boasts her continued grasp of the fast-paced and idiomatic English of Lagos as well as her familiarity with the foreign-inflected speech of Nigerian returnees. With and through Ifemelu, the reader encounters the complex linguistic amalgam that constitutes her language and her world. (Esplin, 2018, p. 3).

Therefore, the digital sphere, together with Ifemelu's experience in her school in Nigeria, with her family at home, in college in the United States and on the internet renders her a linguistic repertoire that merges all of her linguistic backgrounds. It is with the help of her blog that she finally finds her voice and is able to express the diversity of experiences that are part of her linguistic repertoire.

Ifemelu's use of translanguaging as a subversive tool is also shown when she decides to stop faking an American accent, which works in the States as a sign of success — if you do not have one — or as a marker of

preconceptualized subjectivities — in the case of immigrants who are not able to erase their accents in detriment of a mainstream English. This process of linguistic awareness occurs when she breaks up with Curt and decides to change:

> Ifemelu decided to stop faking an American accent on a sunlit day in July, the same day she met Blaine. It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the t, the creamy roll of the r, the sentences starting with "So", and the sliding response of "Oh really", but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of lip, the curling of tongue. If she were in a panic, or terrified, or jerked awake during a fire, she would not remember how to produce those American sounds. (Adichie, 2013, p. 213).

The act of not speaking as an American symbolizes a process in which she starts conceiving a subjectivity that acknowledges her cultural and linguistic experiences as a Nigerian black woman in the States, which eventually causes her to go back to Nigeria.

Moreover, Ifemelu's mediation between her Aunt Uju and her nephew Dike represents a process of claiming translanguaging practices as a tool for maintaining cultural heritage. Ifemelu describes how Aunt Uju uses Igbo in negative situations: "Aunty Uju threatened [Dike] more often. The last time Ifemelu visited, Aunty Uju told him, "I will send you back to Nigeria if you do that again!" speaking Igbo as she did to him only when she was angry, and Ifemelu worried that it would become for him the language of strife" (Adichie, 2013, p. 211). After seeing how her aunt is encouraging her nephew to have a negative relationship with Igbo, Ifemelu starts to use translanguaging in order to associate their mother tongue to familiar settings and to comfortable situations, encouraging him to use the language:

> "Dike, I mechago?" Ifemelu asked.
> "Please don't speak Igbo to him," Aunty Uju said. "Two languages will confuse him."
> "What are you talking about, Aunty? We spoke two languages growing up."
> "This is America. It's different." (Adichie, 2013, p. 134).

Aunt Uju not only suffers linguistic prejudice, but perpetrates it to Dike. For her, being in America means to conceal their mother tongue and accent in order to acquire a myth of a "native-like" English. Ifemelu serves, then, as a model for Dike as a bilingual individual who is able to both assimilate English while at the same time maintaining her background in Igbo.

Ultimately, Ifemelu's translanguaging practices are strengthened by her return to Lagos and contact with her first boyfriend Obinze. Their relationship is described in the novel as marked by the hybridity of languages they use when talking to each other:

> "But I bet I speak Igbo better than you."
> "Impossible," he said, and switched to Igbo. "Ama m atu inu. I even know proverbs."
> "Yes. The basic one everybody knows. A frog does not run in the afternoon for nothing."
> […]
> "How do you know all that?" she asked, impressed. "Many guys won't even speak Igbo, not to mention knowing proverbs." (Adichie, 2013, p. 74).

Ifemelu and Obinze's connection to Igbo as they use translanguaging symbolizes a connection with their mother tongue, but also with each other. When Ifemelu returns to Lagos, she finds how much Obinze has changed; he is a well-established man with a wife and daughter. Though Obinze likes Kosi, he does not have the same connection with her as he has with Ifemelu; she is the representation of the societal expectations of a Nigerian upper-class wife. Ifemelu's return to Lagos prompts, in this sense, Obinze to also reevaluate his subjectivity as a middle-class entrepreneur in Nigeria. Their conversations digress over the process of assimilation of foreign cultures and languages:

> "When I was babysitting in undergrad, one day I heard myself telling the kid I was babysitting 'You're such a trouper!' Is there another word more American than 'trouper'?"
> Obinze was laughing.
> "That's when I thought, yes, I may have changed a little," she said.
> "You don't have an American accent."
> "I made an effort not to." (Adichie, 2013, p. 534).

Ifemelu's conscious decision to assert that she did not desire to keep an accent that was not part of her subjectivity displays that she is able to critically evaluate how much her experience as an immigrant shaped her subjectivities and how much of herself she had to revoke. The reestablishment of their relationship, shaped through language and how much they transit between Igbo and English, are a symbol of their mosaic of experiences that helped them conceive hybrid subjectivities.

Conclusion

In sum, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presents in *Americanah* a portrayal of all the violences experienced by immigrant communities when going to the United States, adding to the discussion the issue of race and the different variations of the same language, such as Pidgin English, academic English, English from the blogosphere and diverse English accents. Colonizing views on African peoples are explored through traditional stereotypes concerning Africa as a country, underdeveloped, uncivilized and unable to achieve cultural productions of relevance. The portrayal of black immigrant women as exotic is also explored in the novel as Ifemelu is oversexualized and the target of a white male gaze. Ultimately, colonizing views on African countries are exposed not only in the United States, but also in Nigeria, when the main character experiences how colonizing behaviors can be internalized and reproduced by immigrants who decide to go back to their countries.

In this context, Adichie questions epistemological oppressions by providing, through the character of Ifemelu, a portrait of diverse linguistic practices that constitute a mosaic of her subjectivities, valuing both her life experiences in Nigeria and the United States as constitutive of her sense of self. Translanguaging is, in this sense, the tool that she uses to transgress linguistic and hegemonic boundaries, symbolizing, in turn, a transition in which she is able to create a hybrid bilingual subjectivity.

References

ADICHIE, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. London: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2013.

ANZALDÚA, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera*: The New Mestiza. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

BLACKLEDGE, Adrian; CREESE, Angela. Translanguaging in Mobility. *In*: CANAGARAJAH, Suresh (ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Migration and Language*. New York: Routledge, 2017. p. 31-46.

ESPLIN, Marlene. The Right Not to Translate: The Linguistic Stakes of Immigration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. *Research in African Literatures*, v. 49, n. 2, p. 73-86, Summer 2018.

GARCÍA, Ofelia. *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century*: A Global Perspective. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

MIGNOLO, Walter. *Local Histories, Global Designs*: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000.

MYERS-SCOTTON, Carol. *Multiple Voices*: An Introduction to Bilingualism. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

PASSADA, María Noel Míguez. Discourse Analysis by a Decolonial Perspective. *In*: SUCIU, Lavinia (ed.). *Advances in Discourse Analysis*. IntechOpen, 2019. p. 1-14.

PAVLENKO, Aneta; BLACKLEDGE, Adrian (ed.). *Bilingual Minds*: Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2004.

SANTOS, Boaventura Souza; MENESES, Maria Paula (org.). *Epistemologias do Sul*. Coimbra: Edições Almedina SA, 2009.

SOJA, Edward W. *Thirdspace*: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996.

THIONG'O, Ngũgĩ wa. *Decolonizing the Mind*: The Politics of Language in African Literature. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986.

WEI, Li. Translanguaging as a Practical Theory of Language. *Applied Linguistics*, v. 39, n. 1, p. 9-30, 2018.