

LANGUAGE AND DECOLONISATION

An Interdisciplinary Approach



EDITED BY FINEX NDHLOVU
AND SABELO J. NDLOVU-GATSHENI

ROUTLEDGE

LANGUAGE AND DECOLONISATION

Language and Decolonisation is the first collection to bring together views from across scholarly communities that are committed to the agenda of decolonising knowledge in language study. Edited by leading figures in the field, the chapters offer new insights on how ‘decolonising’ can be adopted as a methodology for charting the next steps in solving practical language-related problems in educational and related social policy areas. Divided into two sections, the book covers the coloniality of language, the materiality of culture and colonial scripts, the decolonisation imperative, multilingualism discourse and decolonisation, and decolonising languages in public discourse. With 20 chapters authored by experts from across the globe, this pioneering collection is an essential reference and resource for advanced students, scholars, and researchers of language and culture, sociolinguistics, decolonial studies, racial studies, and related areas.

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*Edited by Finex Ndhlovu and
Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni*

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and for your searing contributions to the discourse on
decolonising and the decolonial project at planetary level.*



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FOREWORD

I have worked and lived in Mozambique and South Africa for more than three decades, privileged witness to the promises and traumas of changing landscapes of post-independence/post-apartheid. Although rich with yet untapped enormous potential of humanity and resourcefulness, both countries face formidable challenges. Mozambique especially, nearly 50 years after independence, has a depressing scorecard when it comes to inequality and the failed hopes of a tired people: it occupies 180th place out of 189 countries on the UN index of Human Development, has a mere 84 doctors per million inhabitants, an average age expectancy of 60 years, an adult illiteracy rate of 45%, and 56.6% of the population live on less than 1.9 USD per day. In the face of these numbers, the Mozambican philosopher Severino Ngoenha (1993) asks, “What role can philosophy play in building better futures?”. While acknowledging the undeniable importance of architects, engineers, doctors, and teachers for lives and livelihoods, Ngoenha argues a strong case for philosophy as a no lesser imperative. Philosophical deliberation can offer valuable input on the meaning of democratic schooling, the significance of urban architecture and public spaces for participatory democracy, and contribute to inclusive ethical registers in medical practice. These are all contributions that put the *human* center stage and lay the groundwork for greater freedom and transformation. Given the interdisciplinarity of Ngoenha’s philosophical conversations, I suspect that he, like me, would also welcome the timely contribution of new interdisciplinary conversations on language and decolonization. It is in acts of ‘language’ (broadly conceived) that aspirations for democratic education, participatory democracy, and the pursuit of material and spiritual well-being can be

achieved. It is in language that liberatory and empowering encounters are managed, where registers of love, hope, and care may craft inclusive, open communities and where new genres of the human can be elaborated and enacted (Fanon, 2008; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Importantly, new interdisciplinary conversations on language and decolonization take an added urgency as language has for centuries been fine-honed to one of the most efficient technologies in the ever-upgraded arsenal of coloniality, a veritable death machine to oppress, ostracize, and dehumanize. Constructs and practices of language have gone hand in glove with the liberal-modernist-enlightenment thought of colonialism, enabling the coding of a politics of difference and identity into the minds and bodies of speakers and undergirding the carnivorous exploitation of people and expropriation of lands that have left the world at the brink of planetary catastrophe.

A particular imperative for conversations on language and decolonization is to address how to unseat Sylvia Wynter's MAN, the White Bourgeois Male, as the only pretender to the Human. MAN is an intolerant and ungenerous interlocutor whose *modus operandi* is to turn a deaf ear to the voices of different Others, to grudgingly grant them a modicum of (imperfect) humanity – if at all – while refusing relationality and constraining agency. Fanon (2008: 22, 84, 86, 87) describes in visceral detail the carnal effects of language as a technology of racialization in how it etches Blackness onto the body as a “racial epidermal schema”; cutting him off from the other and from the self as something existing only “through white eyes” (“my body was given back to me, sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning”, an essence of a visible appearance”) leading to a perception of self as divided. He calls such a condition *fissiparity*, creatively borrowing a medical term for “dissection under a microscope”, to express a “breaking apart”. Fanon was writing in the 1950s, but colonialism continues to ‘break apart’, surreptitiously burrowing itself ever deeper into our minds and bodies, and finding ever new ways to do this. Achille Mbembe talks today of a *techno-molecular* colonialism, one that promotes a predictive notion of the human as algorithmic data sets tailored to markets. Techno-molecular colonialism complements the labor of exploited and expropriated bodies with at-source extraction of our physiologies (diets, medical histories), genetic footprints (DNA Ancestry), tastes and habits (social media), spinning its web “underneath and beyond the skin”, sucking up the enzymes that connect bodies to the world to spew back at us. In terms of Nancy Fraser's (2022) “cannibal capitalism”, the market now has us literally consuming ourselves – at least our techno-molecular profiles as scripted in the algorithm.

The coloniality of language has kept good pace with techno-molecular colonialism, reproducing the same types of dehumanization and disempowerment through language as bolts and chains colonialism. To talk with a Bot

is to be disciplined to ‘heel’; it’s to walk the talk of the AI Master. Bots limit and determine what and how we can answer; they engage us as algorithmic predictions, deciding what ‘voice’ they want to hear, forcing us to stay on script, replacing our agency with algorithmic destiny. This is dialogue, set to strict rules of propositional sequence rather than the rhizomatic give and take of a conversation.

New conversations on language and decolonization must ultimately be about re-humanization (Ramose, 2020; Mashazi and Oostendorp, 2024); to (re)capture our humanity, we need to recapture language. The Afro-Caribbean philosopher and writer Sylvia Wynter, engages Fanon’s cry for “new language” for a “new man” in her plea for a new Science of the Word. This would be a science of the storied human, the *homo narrans*, a teller of stories, a genre of the human that is a hybrid mix of *bio* and *mythoi* – an interdisciplinary “rhythmic interplay between nature and narrative” (McKitttrick et al., 2018: 867). It is an approach to the human offering an escape from Darwinian determinism and its racial conversations. Chilean neurobiologist Humberto Maturana and colleagues (e.g., Maturana Romesin and Verden-Zoller, 2009) offer one such alternative genre of the human, a *homo sapiens amans*. The ‘loving’ lineage of the Sapien is tightly tied to a concept of language as evolving out of and with ‘love’ as a condition of its emergence. As an integral part of our biology as loving and sharing hominids, we live in and co-exist and sustain ourselves and others through language (Bock and Stroud, 2021). Language for Maturana is fundamentally about co-ordination, a social-interactional performance of recognizing and engaging the other in acts of what he calls *language-ing*, that is, *consensual recursive coordinations of coordination* (rather than about *language* as symbolic communication). We co-evolve with language, or rather *conversation*, as part of our biosphere. For Maturana, conversation is a particular ontological category, a bipartite act, a *braiding* of emotionality and languaging. Conversations cluster into cultures. Maturana makes the point that if we want to change our world, we must change our conversations.

Three rich and overlapping contemporary cultures of conversations of relevance to language in rehumanization are postcolonialism, indigeneity, and decolonality. Another conversation that engages each of the voices in points of productive convergence is *Linguistic Citizenship* (Stroud, 2001, 2023; Heugh et al., 2021). Born in the intellectual spaces of southern Africa, it sits at the confluence of these seams, engaging by necessity, the question of language and the human in-community in the daily urgencies of deeply unequal societies. As with many of the chapters in the present volume, Linguistic Citizenship emerged out of the practicalities and vulnerabilities of the linguistic everyday, grounded in people’s dreams and hopes for a better life, those suffering the injustices of epistemic violence and

material scarcity, where language is at the very nexus of vulnerability in institutionalized public spheres that remain geared to coloniality (Chimbutane, 2011, 2018; Heugh, 2017, 2020; Stroud and Kerfoot, 2021; Williams and Stroud, 2013). Linguistic Citizenship comprises those alternative conversations that take place on the margins of the institutional, often in close synergies with other acts/movements seeking social and political justice. It is about how speakers address and recuperate the lost semiotics of historically marginalized linguistic agency and voices by using, practicing, performing, and thinking with and through language(s) (more broadly semiotic material) as both *targets* for change and simultaneously *mediums* for the transformation of self and others. In acts of linguistic citizenship, speakers craft new emergent political subjectivities of speaker-hood with the potential to create new constituencies of otherwise. In acts of Linguistic Citizenship, speakers attempt to bring languages into recognition on their own terms and in ways that may ultimately serve to transform historical structures of inequity by (re)establishing audibility of different voices and agencies together with the material means that sustain them. Linguistic citizenship entertains a Fanonian concept of language¹ (Mpendukana and Stroud, 2023) and embraces Maturana's call to develop "different conversations". Central is the recognition that to be human is to be in continual *emergence* and that *becoming other* requires an ethics of interlocation that engages 'voice' and recognizes others in co-constructed agency. This is a story of the human in terms of ethico-political *relationality*, one replacing the Darwinian human of cut-throat competition, hierarchy, male patriarchy, and autonomy (Maturana's *homo sapiens arrogans*; Wynter's MAN) with the loving and caring human (Maturana's *homo Sapiens amans*). In this, Linguistic Citizenship is a concept that "adds ideality to the world" by "opening up possibilities for utopian imaginaries" (Grosz, 2011: 79).

Linguistic Citizenship enters into conversation with postcolonialism by asking how we can think of language differently with the ruined seeds (Santos, 2018) sown despite liberal modernity. In so doing, it seeks to revive the promise of an equitable fellowship once brought to life in the post-independent struggles of Nehru, Césaire, Senghor, Machel, Biko, Magoba, and more. It engages indigeneity as a (contested) *relational* engagement with the colonial encounter (cf. Stroud and Kerfoot, 2021). Here, it focuses on the dynamic thinking and actions of people whose daily engagements with the injustices of dispossession craft worlds of resistance in discourses of multiple and multilayered, co-existing temporalities in southern multilingualisms and registers of *logos*, *pátos*, and *ethos* (Heugh, 2017). Linguistic Citizenship shares with decoloniality the ambition to go beyond straight jacketing by universal monologues in search of more pluriversal and counterhegemonic imaginaries of language and citizenship (Ndhlovu and Makalela, 2021).

The current volume is a timely and enticing collection that situates its approach to language in “the sociohistorical complexity of colonialities and regimes of dehumanization, racialization and subjugation” (Ndhlovu and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, this volume). The rich case studies cover a variety of genres, from legal and educational policy texts to Aboriginal ‘yarning’; from contexts as diverse as First Nations Australia to imperial Russia. These are truly interdisciplinary conversations that bring language into the quotidian concerns that have meaning in people’s lives, bringing critical theory to bear on matters of the everyday, highlighting problems but also promising potential in rethought language. The question of what it would mean to decolonize “from within the belly of the empire” (Ndhlovu and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, this volume) reminds us that decolonization needs to be a truly planetary endeavor (Ngoenha, 2007), one that, as the editors perspicuously underscore, engages “the imperatives of conviviality, interdependencies, collaboration, and co-creation” (Ndhlovu and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, this volume) as the decolonizing Global Souths and Global Norths increasingly align.

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Note

- 1 Fanon refers to the colonized subject as “reinventing his own language woven with rejected desires” (Fanon, 2008), and in a letter to his publisher, expresses a deep belief in the power of words to transform as opposed to language misrecognized as signification without body.

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1

INTRODUCTION

Reframing the Struggle for New Decolonial Futures

Finex Ndhlovu and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Setting the Scene

The foundational issue in colonialism has been the struggle over ownership of the planet Earth and whose *nomos* governs humanity. This means that the colonialists/imperialists were pushed by the will to power and the quest to conquer and establish mastery over the planet Earth and all that inhabited and constituted it. This is why the unfolding of modern colonialism driven by Europeans resulted in the establishment of a transcendental model of power that is called coloniality. Carl Schmitt (2003: 42) termed the rise to planetary dominance of Europe from the fifteenth century onward the “second *nomos* of the earth”. Inevitably, this colonial/imperialist intention and push for planetary dominance provoked resistance and struggles that were and are collectively constitutive of decolonisation/decoloniality. This decolonisation/decoloniality has been fundamentally against what James M. Blaut (1993: 181) termed the “colonizer’s model of the world”, which put Europe at the centre of the world and peripherised the rest. This is why one finds such scholars as Ibekwe Chinweizu (1975: 221) writing about how Europe divided humanity on the planet Earth into “the West and the rest of us”. Therefore, the central imperative of decolonisation/decoloniality has been to resist the colonial/imperialist paradigm of difference and to lay the foundation for a new logic of the Earth as a shared home of everyone – inclusive of humans and non-humans (other selves).

Inevitably, the decolonisation/decoloniality struggles initiated and advanced by those who have been pushed to the periphery, the dominated, and the exploited have to embrace diverse grammars of liberation

and multiple formations. As a struggle, it had to be driven and propelled through various ‘turns’. With specific reference to the field of languages as a terrain of struggles over linguistic rights and against the coloniality of language, some such ‘turns’ that have received differing levels of uptake include “social, somatic, sensory, ecological, performative, discursive, spatial, material, ontological, practice-based turns” (Morgan et al., 2019: viii). ‘Translanguaging’ (García & Kleyn, 2016) and ‘metrolingualism’ (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015) are among the latest additions to the long list of contemporary turns in the field. Since colonialism/coloniality left no aspect of modern life not subjected to its transcendental model of power, the diverse languages of the peoples were not spared the hammer of subjection. Languages not only became hierarchised, but others suffered what Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (2009: 7–9) termed “linguicides” and yet others experienced “linguifam”.

However, if there is a domain in which colonialism failed in its mission, it was in the language domain. Linguicides only became a reality when they were backgrounded by genocides. Where genocides failed, linguicides failed, too. Only linguifam, that is, peripherisation and pushing out of official communication, the indigenous languages succeeded. It is, therefore, not surprising that in pursuit of linguistic liberation, a crucial foundational premise shared by these turns is the call for unbounding language from its position as an object of study and situating it in the sociohistorical complexity of colonialities and regimes of dehumanisation, racialisation, and subjugation. As the study of language and society continues to evolve, current scholarship is increasingly drawing on approaches that stress the importance of thinking otherwise, learning to unlearn, and theorising from the Southern and Indigenous standpoints to decentre the overbearing hegemony of colonial models and approaches.

A more contemporary turn of particular importance to the field is the ‘decolonial turn’. This is a summary term for those formerly marginalised, culturally-specific understandings of knowledge and the associated discourses on knowledge production. The ‘decolonial turn’ seeks not only a change in the contents of conversation but also a change in the limits and conditions of conversations (Mignolo, 2000) about languages, cultural identities, and regimes of knowledge. It is “an-other thought” that seeks to inaugurate “an-other logic”, “an-other language”, and “an-other thinking” (Mignolo, 2011: 56) through interrogating hegemonic epistemologies, such as those inherited from the colonial view of the world.

The argument is that mainstream understandings of languages and cultures that have prevailed for a long time are attached to a set of unpromising associations with language as an enumerable object (as opposed to language as a process or medium of cognition). Such understandings of languages

and cultures are sustained by flawed and misleading commonsense assumptions: that the things we call languages and cultures today are of a natural kind; that they have always been there. Yet, as critical social science scholars have long argued, languages and cultures are social constructs that sustain the dominant ideologies of the time. For this reason, some scholars have gone as far as characterising languages and cultures as invented categories that need to be disinvented (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007); and as semiotic artefacts of colonial archives of knowledge that betray coloniality of language (Ndhlovu, 2020) and coloniality of culture (Quijano, 2000).

This book advances a compelling need to re-think, for example, the supposed universal relevance of established approaches to the study of language and society. We need to re-examine mainstream discourses, praxes, and applications of language to fully understand how languages are regarded differently in various contexts and timespans. Alternative approaches and methodologies that open a promising avenue for re-evaluating colonial ideologies of language must address at least the following five questions: What role did the Euro-modernist colonial order of the world play in inventing current mainstream ideologies of language and cultures? What would the ongoing global push for decolonisation look like when seen through the lens of critical sociolinguistic approaches? Might it be possible to develop new vocabularies and new grammars to advance counter-narratives, counter-imaginaries, and counter-hegemonic strategies we can use to push back the frontiers of colonial matrices of power that underpin dominant ideologies of languages and cultures? How might the precolonial and Indigenous archives of knowledge contribute to the co-creation of an alternative anti-colonial and anti-conventional body of thought on languages and cultures? And how might we operationalise ‘decolonising’ as a methodology and approach in our field?

This collection of chapters addresses these and related questions to canvass new directions in the study of language and decolonisation. Through stressing the interdisciplinary and unifying potential of insights from diverse cultural and knowledge traditions, the volume contributes new points of method, theory, and interpretation. The book is a timely and relevant intervention that fosters interdisciplinary dialogues aimed at unsettling the global coloniality of language and concomitant discourses around different mutations of domination, control, and the exercising of power over colonised human populations and their mental universes. The collection is organised into two parts with seventeen main chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. Part One lays out and explicates theories, concepts, and debates that are taken up in Part Two, which focuses on critical reflections, empirical studies, and applications. The contributions (i) adopt a historical approach to global coloniality that dates to at least the last 500 years; and (ii) utilise

‘decolonising’ as a methodology and approach to their analyses. Combined and individually, all chapters search for fruitful pathways for exploring the next steps in decolonising language and associated meta-discourses as well as their application in diverse social, political, and educational contexts.

Concepts, Theories, Debates

Part One consists of seven chapters that introduce, trouble, and elaborate key concepts upon which decolonising projects are predicated. In the following paragraphs, we present a selection of some such key concepts that are seeded throughout the seven chapters. In Chapter 2, Alastair Pennycook and Sinfree Makoni disrupt commonsense understandings of ‘Global Souths’ (in the plural). They clarify that this concept is not straightforward and that it must not be conflated with the geographical south – land south of the equator. Rather, ‘Global Souths’ is a geopolitical idea that excludes regions of relative wealth in the geographical south and includes Indigenous and disenfranchised regions and people of the geographical north. In their analysis, Alastair Pennycook and Sinfree Makoni echo their previous work on this concept (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020) and the views of other decolonial theorists such as Ndhlovu & Makalela (2021); Léglise (2019); Connell (2014); Comaroff & Comaroff (2011); De Sousa Santos (2011). According to De Sousa Santos (2011: 39), the Global South is “a metaphor for human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance that seeks to overcome or minimize such suffering”.

As Isabelle Léglise (2019) advises, such a definition of the Global Souths captures a phenomenon that exists both in the North and in countries of the South. This means instead of following a discourse that might seem to suggest the world is split into two geographical zones, the Global South is to be understood as a metaphorical and epistemological concept (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020) that refers to experiences or conditions of colonial exploitation, exclusion, epistemological extraversion (Hountonji, 1997), and marginalisation that are common to diverse societies at the global scale. These clarifications advance the project of decolonising by prompting us to think deeply about the discourse of universalism, or what Ndhlovu (2023) calls the “coloniality of universalism”, a term that describes how Euro-modernist imperial forces colonised the idea of the “universal” and used it to conquer the knowledges, cultures, and languages of everyone else around the world. Through colonialism, the very essence of what it means to be human and to know was reduced to a parochial construct of Euro-modernity. It is this colonised idea of universalism and that of Global Souths which must be redeemed. As Pennycook and Makoni suggest (this volume), a redeemed

concept of Global Souths must be the rallying point from which diverse networks of local academic and non-academic communities fighting for social, educational, and cognitive justice converge to exchange ideas, experiences, and strategies for charting common global futures (Ndhlovu, 2023: 3).

Felix Banda and Kelvin Mambwe (Chapter Three) propose repurposing translanguaging as an analytical lens for disrupting and levelling linguistic hierarchies of power that are embedded in language policies. Although translanguaging was pioneered in contexts that are epistemologically Northern, it has all the hallmarks of a progressive and liberatory perspective that is aligned with the agendas of decolonising. With its call to look at language not as a bounded entity but as speakers' repertoires, translanguaging is consistent with the anti-foundational and anti-conventional stance of social science scholarship that advances the decolonial perspective. Banda and Mambwe (this volume) suggest further elaboration of the decolonial perspective to disavow the formalised one-language epistemic system and vertical structuring of languages where imperial languages such as English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese occupy the top tiers of the hierarchy with languages of former colonial outposts consigned to the bottom.

Another key concept introduced in Part One is that of 'linguistic' encirclement. In Chapter Four, Finex Ndhlovu and Edwin Chris Odhiambo take up, broaden, and repurpose the concept of 'linguistic encirclement' that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o pioneered in the 1980s. Wa Thiong'o (1986) introduced this concept to describe how Africans were colonised and territorialised through the deployment of European languages in ways that invented balkanised African identities based on colonial heritages. The consequence was imposed and alien nomenclature such as Francophone Africa, Anglophone Africa, Lusophone Africa, all being identifications and definitions informed by imposed languages. Ndhlovu and Odhiambo extend the critique of linguistic encirclement, making it one of the key decolonial grammars for speaking about invented categories of languages that have an encircling effect on identity imaginings, educational policies, and other social policy agendas. They argue that invented language and identity categories continue to advance the Euro-modernist cognitive empire by consigning people into enclaves and hierarchies of humanity that would enhance colonial exploitation, domination, and control.

Encirclement affects people's praxes, their agency, their thinking, their independence, their autonomy, their creativity, and their ontology (Ndhlovu & Odhiambo, this volume). There is no action that encircled individuals and groups can take, which is on their own terms unless, of course, they manage to subvert the system through exercising epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2011). Epistemic disobedience entails doing at least the following two things simultaneously: (i) troubling normative (colonial)

traditions of knowing and de-linking from them; and (ii) embracing other ways of knowing and being that (re)introduce alternative languages, grammars, vocabularies, memories, economies, and social organisations that accord with diverse ontological subjectivities (Mignolo, 2011: 63). For Ndhlovu and Odhiambo (this volume), the posture of epistemic disobedience is necessary because it urges us to shift the focus from languages of the state (that have an encircling effect) to the languages of the people (that liberate and empower).

In Chapter Five, Zahid Akter and Arvind Iyengar introduce the concept of niche languages to shed light on the quintessential colonial approach to viewing linguistic diversity as a beast to be tamed and its present-day manifestation in postcolonial avatars. Akter and Arvind (this volume) suggest that locally-grounded language use and maintenance are best achieved when languages find their respective niches in the ecology and co-exist in mutual harmony, with different languages being used in specific domains in a complementary manner. Such an approach both dovetails with precolonial plurilingual traditions of the Global South and has the potential to liberate Indigenous communities from the implicit pressures of expanding their domains of language use while simultaneously inventing a standardised written form. In introducing the concept of niche languages, Akter and Iyengar seek to expose the problematic aspects of colonial approaches to linguistic diversity, along with their evident and not-so-evident impacts. They point to the limitations and blind spots of what are otherwise well-intentioned attempts to replace a colonial language with an indigenous one as the 'national' or 'official' language. Such efforts at decolonising language policies and practices inadvertently perpetuate the colonial tactic of promoting one language – and its affiliated sociopolitical group – at the expense of others.

The last set of concepts that promises to enrich the discourse and praxis of decolonising languages comes from Chapter Eight, authored by Finex Ndhlovu. In this chapter, Ndhlovu yokes together the three concepts of global coloniality, trickster discourse, and habitus and suggests that these can be used as a framework for decolonising language testing regimes in contemporary Western societies. He posits that although language proficiency tests are, to a degree, useful in informing measurement and assessment in a range of social and educational contexts, they do have a dark side that betrays the hallmarks of coloniality of power and trickster discourse. Drawing on the earlier work of Banazak & Ceja (2010), Ndhlovu says global coloniality refers to a pattern of comprehensive and deep-reaching power spread throughout the world. It is about how, even when the formal process of colonisation has ended, there remains a form of power, which produces, uses, and legitimises differences between societies and forms of

knowledge. Ndhlovu uses the metaphor of the complex mythological character of the trickster that appears in folk stories among most Indigenous communities around the world (the spider, the hare, the coyote, the raven) to characterise subtleties of language testing regimes. When coupled with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the proverbial character of the trickster generates a nuanced explanatory paradigm for unpacking the complex mechanisms of global coloniality. Global coloniality is the trickster hidden behind language tests (the habitus). Therefore, trickster discourse can help us illuminate the ways in which language and citizenship tests have historically been used as convenient technology by central authorities to exercise power and control over non-desired individuals and groups alike.

Critical Reflections, Empirical Studies, Applications

Three cross-cutting themes and lines of argument are explored across ten chapters in Part Two. The first theme is critical reflections on decolonising languages from Indigenous perspectives. Two chapters, one by Glenys Collard and Celeste Rodríguez Louro (Chapter Twelve) and the other by Dima Rusho (Chapter Thirteen), draw attention to the importance of centering Indigenous perspectives on language in our theories and praxes. With a critical eye on storytelling as methodology, Collard and Louro (this volume) posit that to Indigenous and First Nations people, academic research is historically intertwined with other forms of colonialism and injustice. Drawing on their work with the *Nyungar boodjar* Aboriginal communities of Southwest Western Australia, they describe a cross-cultural research model that allowed them to document varieties of Aboriginal English. Collard and Louro's research is the first to document sociolinguistic aspects of Aboriginal English yarning – a First Nations cultural form of storytelling and conversation – which they used to capture the voices of those rarely featured in sociolinguistic research. The First Nations-led fieldwork not only made it possible to document previously marginalised voices for sociolinguistic research into storytelling. The recordings also allowed the authors to understand the importance of storytelling for speakers of Aboriginal English, specifically, its role as a culturally appropriate means to convey information and share knowledge. Based on this analysis, Collard and Louro suggest that the process of decolonising linguistics practice must entail hearing decolonial stories of First Nations peoples to develop new design methods that honour different ways of being and doing in the world. They introduce aspects of a participatory model that allowed them to re-think the discipline of linguistics as a more inclusive and socially just enterprise. To move closer towards decolonisation, they propose a decolonising enterprise that rests on (i) the need to hear the voices of those rarely featured in linguistic research; and

(ii) sharing knowledge in the creation of collaborative projects that engage First Nations communities meaningfully and sustainably.

Dima Rusho takes up (further) the theme of centering Indigenous and First Nations perspectives in language interpreting in Australian legal settings. Her point of departure is the recognition that Indigenous language interpreting in Australia has always taken place within a colonial context. She explores how enduring colonial relations of power contribute to the discretionary use of interpreters in institutional contexts. Specifically, Rusho's chapter examines the unequal distribution of power in the justice system that places the decision to engage interpreters predominantly in the hands of those in positions of power, such as judicial officers, police, and legal professionals, often leaving Indigenous language speakers without much-needed interpreting assistance. Applying a 'coloniality of language' lens demonstrates the ways in which how colonial ideologies continue to shape attitudes towards Indigenous languages and impact speakers' linguistic needs that are rarely addressed in legal, institutional contexts. Rusho's contribution arrives at three conclusions with significant implications for decolonising language practice in legal contexts: (i) that anti-colonial approaches must involve creating the opportunities for Indigenous leadership to incorporate Indigenous languages and knowledges into novel and reimagined frameworks of justice; (ii) that it is only by engaging in transformative efforts that we can finally begin to redress historical and ongoing language-based injustices; and (iii) that a recalibration and reorientation of power dynamics in the justice system and the genuine empowerment of First Nations language speakers and interpreters are required if we are to successfully right the ongoing wrongs of colonialism and social injustices in legal contexts.

The second theme explored in Part Two is the application of decolonial concepts to inform social and educational policies where language is implicated. Chapter Nine (Rose Njoki Mutuota and Mutuota Kigotho); Chapter Ten (Prashneel Ravisan Goundar); and Chapter Eleven (Hamza R'boul) draw attention to imperatives of decolonising in the context of language policies and language and literacy education. Drawing on the example of Kenya, Mutuota and Kigotho suggest that decolonising languages and literacies education must start with liberating one's mind (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). They point out that in Kenya, strategies have been put in place by activists and proponents of change to decolonise the language and literacy practices of individuals and communities. The Kamirithu Community Theatre is one such example. The group has staged plays written and directed in the Gĩkũyũ language. Another example has been an increase in local music artists who perform at parties, clubs, and family gatherings using a wide range of local language repertoires and literacies to challenge and unsettle

the normative colonial canon. The decolonised literacies that Mutuota and Kigotho discuss go beyond language and include community assets such as a community's interconnectedness/relationships; the use of the circle and semi-circle in community meetings and schools, the use of storytelling, riddles, songs, and proverbs to transmit knowledge.

Exploring the same theme of decolonising the canon in language education policy, Prashneel Ravishan Goundar takes us to the South Pacific. Goundar provides an in-depth analysis of the negative consequences of colonisation in the education systems of South Pacific nations, which he says must be decolonised. He shows how, in the South Pacific countries, the most common forms of educational inequalities concern the curriculum, lack of resources, language of instruction, and shortage of teachers. Goundar also brings to light the impact of poor infrastructure and the gap between urban and rural schools as some of the key contributors to educational inequalities. Drawing on the previous body of literature and data from ethnographic studies conducted in Fiji, Goundar's chapter puts forward suggestions for pushing back the frontiers of colonially inherited educational inequalities in the South Pacific. These include reassessing the quality and relevance of curriculum materials, the need for contextualised and relevant Pacific curricula, and looking at the validity and reliability of assessments.

Chapter Eleven, authored by Hamza R'boul, extends the arguments advanced by Goundar by taking us to Morocco. R'boul unpacks language planning and policies in Morocco as a Southern space that has been grappling with its postcolonial positionality and epistemic dependency on French (the ex-colonial code). He argues that some peripheries are making use of the coloniality of language by advancing English as a decolonial option to undo the lingering legacies of colonial languages such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian. That is, some peripheries are replacing linguistic colonialism with linguistic coloniality. To illustrate this point, R'boul draws on the coloniality of language as an analytical lens for reading new meanings into Morocco's language policy conundrums. The chapter joins the critical body of literature that is developing alternative epistemologies into the sociopolitical and sociolinguistic intricacies of English in the peripheries, reflecting the exigency of nuanced knowledges in accounting for multilingualisms, postcolonial malaises and vulnerabilities to colonial workings. The chapter examines the coloniality of language and its overarching implications into the peripheries' epistemological positionalities as they are reflected in the Morocco's language planning and policies. R'boul posits that the political instrumentalisation of language betrays the Moroccan state's failures to signal a true (post)colony as it sustains supposedly 'liberal' and 'progressive' language policies that enforce English to earn acceptance from the

dominant and hegemonic Anglosphere of the world. The analysis of Morocco's language policies illustrates concepts of trickster habitus, coloniality of language, and global coloniality canvassed in Part One of this collection as an analytical lens for canvassing alternative futures.

The third theme is in the form of a question: What might decolonising from the centre – that is, from within the belly of the empire – look like? A selection of three chapters in Part Two addresses this question. Together, the three chapters that explore this theme illustrate complexities surrounding the concepts of Global Souths and Global Norths that Alastair Pennycook and Sinfree Makoni problematise in Part One. The first is by Paul Smith, who draws on the multilingual tradition of opera, theories of authorship and performance, and the embodiment of knowledge in song to shed light on ongoing modes of decolonisation in opera. Case studies include two 2022/2023 productions by New Zealand's national opera company, NZ Opera: *Ihitai'Avei'a – Star Navigator* (2023) by Célestine Hitiura Vaite, Tim Finn, and Tom McLeod, and Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762) titled (*m*)*Orpheus*. A key question addressed is in what ways do these productions depart from the coloniality of European opera, and what framework is needed to address this question?

Smith spotlights the colonising force of opera that is counterbalanced by its decolonising potential, which is more abstract. The chapter weighs into this conundrum by focusing on the writing and conception of new works that are First Nations-led, ones that lean on opera's neutrality as a medium for attempting to decolonise from within the centre of an empire. Additionally, the community of diverse singers that do not necessarily create new works but bring new understandings to *pre-existing* opera is considered. The chapter by Smith shows that there exists an uncomfortable tension and an unresolved cadence between whether opera returns to and points towards a Eurocentric tradition or if the positive potential of singing redirects and restructures systems of meaning and history in real-time. How static/robust is opera in relation to decolonisation? Arguing for the promotion of a new perspective on opera does not negate other perspectives on the way that it might affirm coloniality (Smith, this volume). Both the opera and scholar communities wrestle with the shape and content of works and the way that they resonate with contemporary audiences, and, as Smith adds, it is only from sharp insights that have pointed out the colonial fabric of opera that communities can seek new models and practices that disrupt, unsettle, and challenge the overbearing hegemony of the imperial centre.

In Chapter Sixteen, Valentina Gosetti extends Smith's arguments by weighing into the question of post-revolutionary 'glottophobia' and the bill against 'accent discrimination' in France. Gosetti explores the strong nexus between language purity and national identity in the modern nation-state of

France as well as the recent tortuous journey to embrace linguistic diversity and promote language justice. She provides a detailed account and analysis of France's 2022 entry for the hugely popular international Eurovision that featured a song in Breton entitled "Fulenn" [Sparkle]. The song was performed by Alvan, an electronic music artist, in collaboration with Ahez, a vocal trio formed by singers Marine, Stereen, and Stereen. The artists, all from Brittany, decided to represent France by singing a song in Breton, their own language. This seemingly uncontentious choice sparked a heated controversy on social media, with some people on Twitter blaming this "backward" linguistic choice as the chief culprit for a disappointing twenty-fourth placement in the competition, "by choosing a song in a regional *patois* that no one understands". Those who defended the band's choice of language said Breton is not a mere *patois* but a *proper language* in its own right. As Gosetti (this volume) argues, this apparently trivial example is symptomatic of centuries of linguistic discrimination in France, the linguisticism on which the "*République une et indivisible*" had been founded – or what French linguist Philippe Blanchet (2019) has termed "*glottophobia*". Blanchet's concept of glottophobia continues to be quoted since it was introduced in a 2019 bill at the Assemblée Nationale. France's lower parliament chamber, aimed at banning all discrimination based on regional accents, argued that this must be considered equal to other forms of discrimination like racism and sexism. By charting France's history of language oppression and "internal colonialism", from the French Revolution's efforts through to present times, Gosetti's chapter draws attention to the contradictions and conundrums of attempting to decolonise Global Souths from within.

In discussing the invisibility of Russian imperialism, Tomasz Kamusella (Chapter Seventeen) adds a unique and interesting perspective to the question of what decolonising from within the belly of the empire might look like. Kamusella argues that Russian imperialism and the existence of Russia's colonies have been stringently denied for the past three centuries in the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and now in the Russian Federation. At the same time, the Russian language and culture have been consistently employed for colonising the subject peoples to replace their precolonial languages and cultures. In turn, abroad, teaching Russian as a single nation's language and promoting Russian literature within Russian studies have effectively blinded the West and all the world to the past and the current mechanisms of Russian imperialism.

Coming against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Kamusella's chapter is a timely intervention that reminds us of the subtleties of coloniality in the former Soviet Union region and Eastern Europe in general. He spotlights the West's myopia, or even delusion, about Russian imperialism from two perspectives. First, the discussion focuses on

the present-day Russian government's observed practice of (ab)using the Russian language and culture for neo-imperial ends. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine did away with any illusions in the West about whether Russia is a colonial empire or not. Politicians and journalists are now actively commenting on the neo-imperial nature of Russia's governance and politics. But, the discourse has not percolated into Western academia yet. Second, Kamusella probes into the persistent lack of methodological reflection on the Cold War discipline of Russian studies. He says this situation helps to continue and 'justify' the disciplinary dominance of the Russian language and culture in the research on the post-Soviet space and especially the Slavophone postcommunist countries from the former Soviet bloc. The significance of Kamusella's contribution rests on the possible methodological postures for decolonising inside the belly of the colonial empire.

To conclude, the point of greater significance in this collection of chapters is one about how decolonising must be conceived as a planetary project, one that is understandably inspired by the travails of the Global Souths while simultaneously seeking to rehabilitate the Global Norths. This might come across as a contradiction of sorts, but it is not. The crucial point is one about ontologies of incompleteness and interconnections (Nyamnjoh, 2017, 2020). Global Souths and Global Norths exist relationally. Neither of them can meaningfully exist without the other. This effectively means that decolonising Global Souths is *ipso facto* engaging in a project that must be committed to decolonising Global Norths. Such imperatives of conviviality, interdependences, collaboration, and co-creation inform the lines of argument advanced in this collection of chapters.

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PART 1

Theories, Concepts, Debates



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2

MULTILINGUALISMS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTHS

Shaping Language Scholarship in the Global Norths

Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook

A Global Souths Perspective

In this chapter, we focus particularly on Global Souths perspectives, which we see as incorporating decolonial projects within a wider socio-political and educational agenda. The concept of the Global Souths is not itself straightforward. It should not be conflated with the geographical south (land south of the equator) though there are major overlaps that involve colonial, economic and political histories (much of the geographical south has been impoverished and marginalised by the geographical north) (Rodney, 1972; Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). The Global Souths exclude regions of relative wealth in the geographical south – much of Australia and New Zealand, for example (but not all; it is not a geographical concept) – and includes Indigenous and disenfranchised regions and people of the geographical north. It is a geopolitical idea rather than a geographical region. The concept of the Global Souths also emphasizes forms of knowledge, ways of thinking and being that have been spurned by narratives and institutions of the Global North. All knowledges are socio-historically situated and local and have to be understood in relation to capitalism, patriarchy and colonization (Santos, 2018; Menezes de Souza, 2022). Southern perspectives are concerned with the re-engagement with languages, cultures and ways of being and thinking that have long been subjugated.

Various doubts have been expressed about the usefulness and the vagueness of the term. For Mignolo (2011), both the East/West dichotomy (based on a Christian-colonial division of the world) and the North/South dichotomy (based on northern analyses of global inequality) are frameworks

we need to step beyond. Milani (2017: 174) similarly sees “the very act of using this spatial, sociocultural, political, and historical position” as creating a problematic binary between North and South, suggesting necessary conditions in the one and not the other and excluding certain forms of analysis. The North-South distinction is a clumsy dichotomy that might be better reconceptualised by ideas such as *marginalization* (Milani, 2017) or *decoloniality* (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). The Global South has also been conceptualized in terms of *Global Blackness* (Gordon, 2022), treating Blackness as a continuous category that includes both people of African descent – Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Argentiniens, African Americans – and other minorities who identify with people of African descent in their political struggles (Indigenous Australians, for example). The notion of Global Blackness treats Blacks who are part of the Global South as situated in neo- rather than post-slavery conditions, treated as expendable commodities (Gordon, 2021). Global Blackness, however, also excludes those in the Global South who may see the commonality of struggles but who do not identify as Black, such as many in Southeast Asia or those within the Arctic Circle (Lane, 2023).

The intertwined relationship between Southern epistemologies and decoloniality is also still in need of much greater exploration (Deumert & Makoni, 2023). Decoloniality may similarly have radically different meanings depending upon the geopolitical context, from North American concerns with social justice and emancipation from contemporary enslavement to South African efforts to contain and reverse the continuing legacies of economic apartheid or from an Eastern European focus on state socialism to other European concerns with Whiteness. It can take many forms, from pulling down statues linked to colonial histories to rewriting curricular content to include those (the colonized, people of colour, women, Queer identities) that have been marginalised. A constraint of decolonial projects is that, despite an insistence on delinking from a colonial past, they still place great emphasis on the colonial archive and thereby overlook all that escaped or is distinct from the effects of colonialism. A lot of decolonial scholarship remains at the level of a critique of colonial forms of knowledge without engaging with what the decolonial might look like in a more positive sense (Mufwene, 2020; Makoni et al., 2023).

Decolonizing Linguistic Practices

This is not to suggest by any means, however, that we can ignore the fact that linguistics has deep roots in coloniality (Hutton, 1999; Rajagopalan, 2020; Mufwene, 2023) and is ‘viscerally’ tied to colonialism. Colonial authorities and missionaries “shared a territorial logic that was similarly inscribed in colonial linguistic work, presupposing mappings of monolithic

languages onto demarcated boundaries” (Errington, 2001: 24). Ethnolinguistically homogeneous groups were then naturalised within these boundaries as ‘tribes’ or ‘ethnicities.’ Linguists “can be regarded as a small, rather special group of colonial agents who adapted European letters to alien ways of talking and, by that means, devised necessary conduits for communication across lines of colonial power” (Errington, 2008: 4). As a result, the description of languages was intimately linked to the wider colonial emphasis on human hierarchies (Rajagopalan, 2020), so that “the intellectual work of writing speech was never entirely distinct from the ‘ideological’ work of devising images of people in zones of colonial contact” (Errington, 2008: 5).

Any project to rethink multilingualism from the South cannot simply start afresh from a blank slate but must rather engage with the dominant modes of thought and investigate how they came about and why they are flawed. If a goal of *decolonial thinking and doing* is to “delink from the epistemic assumptions” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018: 106) that have come to define languages and their use, then we need to understand those modes of thought and how and why they developed. We cannot engage with a Southern project without establishing what it is we are trying to supersede, and we cannot proceed with a Southern project without acknowledging the deep connections across ways of thinking. As Mufwene (2020: 290) comments, the idea of *decolonial linguistics* “entails reducing the Western bias and hegemony in how languages of the global South and the (socio) linguistic behaviours of their speakers and writers are analysed,” though what such a project entails will differ across different decolonial projects.

More broadly, we need to understand how disciplinary knowledge – Western academic knowledge and disciplines such as anthropology, linguistics, economics, political science and history (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021) – developed during and as part of the colonial process. The current challenge to decolonize these disciplines, co-occurring with calls to decolonize universities across the globe, is provoking major battles over whose knowledge should count (Bhambra et al., 2018) and whose knowledge has social and political legitimacy. We use the term Western academic knowledge as a shorthand, but a more accurate characterization might be imperial knowledge. According to Connell (2019) botanical classification was based on specimens brought back to the University of Uppsala by what Linnaeus referred to as his ‘apostles’ (Connell 2019: 74–75). As many studies of the development of the vast colonial knowledge archive have shown (MacLeod, 2001), it was this constant shipping back to the imperial centre of plants, skulls, artefacts and languages – a process of both extraction and erasure of local knowledge and practices – that fueled the development of European science and its universalizing claims.

One of the primary objectives of decolonizing linguistics is to challenge its ‘disciplinary decadence’ (Gordon, 2016), which occurs when disciplines fetishize themselves, creating a form of ‘epistemic apartheid’ through an impression that the knowledge they contain has always been as it is (Gordon, 2024). The decolonization of linguistics aims to effectuate emancipatory possibilities to liberate people from Euro-modern colonial thought. While one part of the difficulty in decolonizing linguistics is the reluctance to be subject to an ideological critique of its views and orientations towards language (Reimer, 2023), another concern is that attempts to decolonize linguistics may ironically fetishize and reify the discipline by addressing only theoretical assumptions rather than academic practices. Reimer (2023: n.p.) draws our attention to the danger of allowing the “decolonizing of linguistics as theory to be substituted for the decolonizing of the discipline as an institutional practice, or for the decolonizing of universities or society more broadly.”

Following Reimer, we suggest four key dimensions that need to be addressed: Linguistics is embedded in the structures of higher education; linguistics is not just a body of ideas but also a set of coercive practices; linguistics freezes a dynamic set of practices into an object through a process of reification; and the decolonization of linguistic theory should not substitute for the decolonization of linguistic practices. An example of this problem can be seen in Leonard’s (2021: 223) account of linguists suggesting that his attempts at reclaiming his language, *myaamia*, would fail. They “were trying to uphold their academic territory – manifested here as the power to define, describe, and control the fate of Indigenous languages.” Along with “a racialized assumption of inferiority” and “a more general logic of failure that gets applied to Native Americans engaged in language work” (Leonard, 2021: 223), this is about assumptions of expertise, of superior knowledge about language, of disciplinary practices as much as disciplinary knowledge. In order to enable language projects that meet community interests to succeed, Leonard (2017: 32) insists, we need to “decolonize ‘language.’”

“Northern Hegemony and Southern extraversion are massive realities that shape the research-based knowledge formation. Hegemony does not mean total domination” (Connell 2019: 78), as the development of alternative research agendas has demonstrated. The development of decolonial linguistics can be construed as a strategy to disrupt the domination of Global North scholarship. Because most linguistics teaching takes place in universities, a successful decolonization of linguistics needs to occur simultaneously with the transformation of other aspects of the university. Still waiting for a much more comprehensive analysis is the metalanguage used in linguistics (Hutton, 2022). In decolonial linguistics, we advocate “alternative means and categories of knowledge production, not yet objectively institutionalized

as ‘academic’” (Menezes de Souza, 2024) but characteristic of face-to-face interaction and frequently occurring in dialogical and plurilogical narratives. The calls for the decolonization of different disciplines should be seen as part of the development of knowledges of the Souths and the search for emancipatory possibilities (Santos, 2007).

Multilingualisms and the Global Souths

Rather than continuing the critique of the colonial theories and practices of linguistics, we find the framework of the Global Souths can provide more positive steps for a project of renewal. The Global South(s) are always plural: It is not a term intended to address commonalities so much as a commonality of struggle. A southern perspective, as articulated by Santos (2018) and others, is useful as a way of addressing not only global inequalities but also the failure to recognize the contribution of the Global South to the development of the Global North and how the South may bring insights into problems in the Global North (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Comaroff, 2024). We are pluralizing Global Souths and Global Norths to capture the diversities within each area epistemologically. Despite the epistemological diversities within the Global Souths, all of the Souths’ epistemologies avoid the “idea of a self-contained being . . . who need no others” (Gordon, 2024: n.p.). In other words, the epistemologies in the Global Souths are predicated on the notion of what Escobar (2017) refers to as ‘relationality,’ that the critical notion in constructing livable worlds resides in the cultivation of ways of knowing and acting based on a deep awareness of the degree of interdependence of everything.

The primary objectives of our chapter are, therefore, on the one hand, to challenge the establishment of a Eurocentric episteme, particularly in linguistics or, at a broader level, the geopolitics of knowledge where “the European point of view – and more exactly that of the Western White man – replaces God’s point of view as the only measure of all possible and universal knowledge,” thereby relegating intellectual traditions and forms of knowledge in the Global Souths “to the realms of belief, magical or primitive thinking and at best, mere folklore” (Mangeon, 2020: xvii). On the other hand, we seek not only to challenge Eurocentric worldviews, but also to suggest ways in which non-Eurocentric worldviews can emerge and thrive and to argue that there are approaches to language and communication that have always been beyond the reach of coloniality that may have developed in relation to colonialism but cannot be defined only in these terms.

This chapter focuses on southern multilingualisms. Across the fields of socio- and applied linguistics, there is general agreement that multilingualism is and always has been the global norm. To view multilingualism from

the Global Souths, however, involves more than just moving beyond monolingual assumptions. Many students in the early years of schooling in different parts of the world (though particularly in the Global Souths) attend school without knowing they are ‘multilingual.’ Being multilingual is something they discover at school through a radical process that alters their self-perception and identity when pedagogy forces them to discover languages as separate entities. Pedagogy often entails teaching a specific view and understanding of language. In such cases, pedagogy creates objects: Language reinforced by the presence of ‘subjects’ like English, Shona or Yoruba on the timetable alongside mathematics, biology, health and science. The Northern understanding of multilingualism as “multiple monolingualisms” insists on ideas such as a mother tongue or a medium of instruction so that “African languages, which have existed side by side for significant periods of time, complementing each other in multilingual symbiosis, are suddenly cast as competing for spaces” (Banda, 2009: 2). One of the important challenges that Southern Theory or Epistemologies of the South present for socio- and applied linguistics is the realization that this has been common knowledge in the Global Souths for much longer.

The first step is to look at far more contexts of southern multilingualisms and for more southern scholars to look at more southern languages. This widening of the research agenda is not enough, however, without a more extensive reworking of the frameworks through which languages are viewed. If we start with the emerging sociolinguistic truism that languages are social inventions, it is evident that what languages are and how they are used together must be embedded in local social and cultural frameworks of reference. Recent scholarship that insists that multilingualism has to be seen as more than the sum of its parts often overlooks the point that such ideas have long circulated in the Global South. The revelation that *translanguaging* is a common practice “astonished southern scholars immersed in complex multilingual societies where horizontal modes of multilingual crossing and fluidity were documented decades earlier” (Windle et al., 2023: np). Global North scholarship too often fails to grasp the need to focus on multilingualism not as a collective phenomenon but as an idea in need of pluralization (multilingualisms) (Heugh & Stroud, 2021). Multilingualism from such a perspective is not, therefore, a universal category; indeed, the very idea that multilingualism could refer to the same thing in diverse contexts of communication is revealed as an absurdity.

We have written at length elsewhere (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007, 2012) about languages as inventions and the need to engage in a project of *disinvention* as part of any critical language project. The idea of a language “is a recent culture-specific notion associated with the rise of European nation-states and the Enlightenment. The notion of ‘a language’ makes little sense

in most traditional societies” (Mühlhäusler, 2000: 358). Before anthropologists and linguists visited Indigenous communities in South Australia, “people engaged in fluid speech practices and arguably did not have, or indeed need, the concept of a formalised language.” Language, in this sense, is “part of an imposed Western analytical framework that is underpinned by scriptist notions of the primacy of the written word over speech” (Monaghan, 2012: 52). According to Billig (1995), language is an ‘invented permanency’ in the context of colonialism and the rise of the nation-state. The invention of language co-occurs with the invention of reified ethnic categories (Brubaker, 2013). In our work, we examine the implications of the ‘invented permanency’ of language and reification of language for language policy and planning, language reclamation and language rights. What are the implications of invented permanency on the promotion of indigenous languages? Indigenous languages are, in part, European constructs, as African communicative practices, for example, were framed using Latin grammatical categories (Makoni, 2003). We explore the implications of invented permanency by analyzing its metalanguage/metadiscursive regimes.

Multilingualing, Multilingua Francas and Remixing Southern Multilingualisms

Where, then, do we turn in the search for alternative ways of thinking about language? While plural monolingualism is consistent with a model that renders it possible to choose between languages, alternative ways of conceptualizing multilingualism – *as a lingua franca* (Fardon & Furniss, 1993) or what we have elsewhere (Makoni & Pennycook, 2012) called a *multilingua franca*, or Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) call *multilingualing* – view language by contrast as a multilayered chain that is constantly combined and recombined and in which “secondary” language learning takes place more or less simultaneously with language use. In many Southern contexts, global North concepts of languages, mother tongues or multilingualism simply do not reflect the ways languages are used and understood. Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) also talk of ‘*ubuntu translanguaging*’ to refer to African worldviews of interdependence and the ways languages are used without boundaries. Ubuntu translanguaging does more than just combine a northern-derived concept (translanguaging) with a philosophy of the South: It also challenges understandings of languages and speakers, grounds these concerns in Southern African educational contexts and resists the atomistic individualism that underlies some approaches to translanguaging.

By insisting that neither people nor languages can be complete without each other, the concept of ubuntu enters into a South-South dialogue with other philosophical traditions. Ubuntu is “an ethical as well as

a politico-ideological concept” and “always entails a social bond” that is always being reshaped by the ethical demands it places on participants. In this sense, it cannot be reduced to northern categories of ontology, epistemology or morality but rather points to the ways humans are intertwined as ethical and knowing beings with social, ethical and political obligations (Cornell & Van Marie, 2015: 3). It can be usefully contrasted with the Senegalese (Wolof) idea of *nite* (Diagne, 2021; Diagne & Amselle, 2020), suggesting that humanity is something achieved through togetherness and reciprocity. Bringing these ideas into dialogue with each other – or as we have suggested elsewhere (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020), African philosophical ideas such as *ubuntu* with Central American concepts such as *nepantla* (in-betweenness) – can provide renewed ways of thinking about language, which can no longer be considered in separate, atomistic terms but rather as always mutable, relational and reciprocal.

Fresh challenges also derive from new *urbilingualisms* (Mazrui, 2017) that draw on and use a wide range of local and non-local languages and create new and fragmented semiotic systems; they are constantly in flux; they are predominantly oral; they are street languages, and as such are often linked to popular culture and urban unrest. To speak these languages, it is necessary to draw on multilingual resources, and yet these urban languages are also multilinguals in themselves, diverse, shifting, constantly evolving and unpredictable in their usage. The grassroots multilingualism that we are trying to bring to the fore is evident in forms of popular culture, which creates opportunities to advance an analysis of *transmodal multilingualing* that links music, language, painting and public transport (Makoni & Makoni, 2010). As Williams (2017) shows in his work on Hip Hop in South Africa, the styles and performances of Hip Hop bring about a *remixing* of multilingualism: Not only do Hip Hop artists draw on a variety of language varieties in their performances (Kaaps, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sabela, SeSotho, Tsotsitaal and various types of English from both South African and African American sources) but they also create new ways of doing multilingualism, requiring in turn new ways of thinking about multilingualism. Study of Hip Hop performances requires a broader understanding of “complex semiotic webs within and across which speakers move, comprising not just languages as we know them, but bits of language such as registers, accents, words, and assemblages of form-meaning elements, such as rap rhythms and embodied performances” (Williams, 2017: 4).

There is a danger, nonetheless, of treating youth or urban language use as special cases, an approach that can misleadingly suggest that multilingual juggling, semantic manipulations and phonological processes such as truncation or abbreviation are unique to youth languages. Like *creole exceptionalism* (de Graffe, 2019), there can be a tendency here to exoticize such

variations at the expense of non-urban contexts, other age groups or small-scale multilingualisms. Small, rural, multilingual communities – sometimes referred to as *egalitarian multilingualism* (François, 2012) or *traditional multilingualism* (Di Carlo, 2016) – can be found across the world, from West Africa and Amazonia to Northern Australia and Melanesia (Lüpke, 2016). As Evans (2018) argues, the most plausible way of understanding language evolution is not so much via isolated monolingual communities but rather through an understanding of small-scale multilingualisms as the starting point. Multilingualism did not come about when language communities met; it was always the way people used language. While presenting a far more plausible account of language development as having always been multilingual, this argument leaves open the question of how such multilingualism was understood if it was part of everyday linguistic practices: Are we projecting a contemporary understanding of multilingualism back onto such communities?

A Global South framework, therefore, needs to ensure it looks not only at rapid remixing in Hip Hop performance but also at differently-paced and differently-realized forms of linguistic creation in many other contexts. The changing realities of urban and rural life, with enhanced mobility, shifting populations, social upheaval, health and climate crises, increased access to diverse media and forms of popular culture and the political imperative to redress Northern hegemony, suggest we need to rethink, and therefore possibly rename, the ways in which language has been conceptualized. It, therefore, has to develop local metalanguages: If current dominant metadiscursive regimes are a product of Western/Northern philosophy intensified by colonial and postcolonial scholarship, they will not be able to bear the weight of renewed southern multilingualisms. Simply translating metalanguages from English into local languages does not resolve the underlying problem of assumptions about the nature of language. “The existence of alternative knowledges is felt not only in linguistics but in other areas as well. For example, alternative universalisms, such as Islamic knowledge, or The Gandian perspectives developed by scholars such as Vinay Lal” (Connell, 2019: 91). These alternative knowledges have never lived alone; they lived in ways that are best understood as ecologies of knowledge (Santos, 2014).

From Southern Multilingualisms to Pluriversal Languages

The focus of a renewed sociolinguistics of southern multilingualisms is, therefore, on multilingualism as part of wider social and cultural practices, making the social grounding of human interaction central, as opposed to language-centered multilingualism, which assumes a multiplicity of

language systems as central to the analysis. From the perspective of linguistic anthropology, with a particular interest in the notion of *language ideological assemblages* (Kroskrity, 2021), the question becomes one of asking how it is that languages are understood locally in schools, in communities, in workplaces, in families and in diverse social interactions. We are obliged to take into account whether people believe they speak languages, what they believe about those languages and analyze the beliefs about language that they hold passionately.

Looked at from an ethnographic point of view, the Americas are not only a region of great linguistic diversity in terms of what are usually known as ‘languages’ but also in terms of different genres, styles, chants, songs, dreams, wailing and narrative conventions within and across communities. These diverse phenomena, Hauck & Heurich (2018: 5) argue, “should not be understood as easily commensurable instances of a general phenomenon ‘language’” since they “all may have different linguistic natures.” As Course (2018: 5) suggests, the idea of ‘language’ possibly “obscures a fundamental diversity of ultimately irreconcilable practices.” From this point of view, the question is not only whether Mapudungun (spoken by the Mapuche in South-central Chile) and Spanish “are two different kinds of the same thing” (two different languages from within the wider pool of language) but also whether they are “fundamentally different kinds of things” (made up of different elements, used differently, understood in different ways).

This is not just a question of pluralizing linguistic epistemologies but of thinking in terms of multiple language ontologies and diverse multilingualisms. If we accept aspects of the ontological challenge to language, we are confronted by the possibility that language may have multiple natures, that questioning the pluralizability of languages themselves as named and enumerable entities may come hand in hand with a need to entertain the pluralizability of the idea of language itself. To posit some kind of linguistic constant, whereby all language(s) share a commonality, is to “presume that there is a metaphysically invariant and ontologically real phenomenon called ‘language’ apart from its materiality” (Wee, 2021: 26). The notion of *southern multilingualisms* recognizes not only that there are many different kinds of multilingualism, many different ways in which language resources may be interwoven – and that it is, therefore, possible, for example, to talk of “Indigenous multilingualisms” (Vaughan & Singer, 2018: 84) – but also that there may be multiple language ontologies, that *southern multilingualisms* refer not just to multilingualism in different places but to different kinds of multilingualism.

To engage with Southern multilingualisms, therefore, collaborative work must be able to encompass deep forms of difference. We need to develop what Ndhlovu (2021: 199), following Nyamnjoh (2015), calls *convivial*

research, devoted to “finding connections, points of confluence, and opportunities for transfer of concepts, among members of academic communities, and between them and the non-academic communities they serve.” Socio- and applied linguistic research needs to be understood as “an act of decolonisation” (Stebbins et al., 2018: 237). The research process must be seen in decolonial terms, involving different ways of understanding language and its relation to community and place, different relations between linguists and community members, different knowledge statuses between academic and community ways of knowing and different ways of writing and exploring voice. This entails a “much broader view of what is involved in linguistic analysis. It requires a deep listening at discipline level, to hear what other ideologies are important and relevant to our understanding” (Couzens & Eira, 2014: 332).

The point is to seek meeting points between different ways of knowing, between different accounts of language and its relation to family, culture and land (Engman et al., 2022). When the common trope is invoked that a language is “sleeping” rather than “dead” (Perley, 2012) – “My tribal heritage language, *myaamia*, was sleeping for a long time” (Leonard, 2017: 17) – it is important to consider the different ways of thinking that this invokes, the implications for language in relation to landscape and people and use. As Monaghan (2012: 53) puts it, language and stories are understood as still being “in the land, having been placed there by the ancestors,” and to reclaim such sleeping languages may be as much a spiritual process as one involving documentation. If a speaker of Maringa (Arnhem Land, northern Australia) characterizes the way they speak (and its difference from other ways) as “saltwater words” (Vaughan, 2018: 127), this must be taken seriously in relation to language and seascape epistemologies (Ingersoll, 2016). Researching southern multilingualisms is a decolonial project as much as a sociolinguistic one.

Once we take the step to understand that all languages are assembled through a range of processes and practices (Pennycook, 2024) and that Southern epistemologies and indigenous ontologies consist of mobilization and construction of assemblages of non-Western ontologies and discourse perspectives and practices of marginalized communities (Severo & Makoni, 2021: 16), it becomes clear that languages are necessarily pluriversal rather than universal. Languages can then be seen in a variety of relational terms, as linked to land and as alive. An Ojibwe language ontology, Hermes et al. (2022: 4) explain “is grounded in material relationality – a way of thinking in which humans and more-than-humans are connected as relatives in an interlocking web of relationship as one of many, not one apart.” A central ontological innovation in the work of Hermes et al. (2022: 2) was to define “language as alive – meaning that the relationships of land and language are

treated as active agents.” Songspirals in north-east Arnhem Land (Australia) are much more than stories about the land since they

bring us into being and they link us to the land, to Country. They come from the land and they create it too. It’s not just that songspirals created our land a long time ago, but they keep on creating it, and us, and everything in our Country.

(Gay’wu Group of Women et al., 2019: xvii)

Conclusions: Liberating the Global Norths

In this chapter, we have sought to shed light on the concern that the monolingual/multilingual dichotomy “misdirects and misrepresents the notion of language diversity” (Ndhlovu, 2018: 118). There is a need for research that focuses on the ways in which languages are locally used and understood, as well as the effects of particular metadiscursive regimes on the working of local languages. The assumption that monolingualism and multilingualism are two important pillars which might be used to frame sociolinguistic analysis or that studies of multilingualism are attempting to move beyond the blinkered monolingualism that has constricted a lot of thought about language use takes us a certain way but then stops short. For many people across the world, the critical issue is not whether one is monolingual or multilingual, but that one uses language. Both monolingualism and multilingualism are inventions (Gramling, 2016, 2021). This doesn’t mean they are not forces to be reckoned with – subject to powerful discourses about assimilation, diversity, education and so forth – but it points to their status not only as human creations but as the creations of a very particular set of humans.

The problem more broadly is that any approach that considers only a predominant community language misses the point of Southern multilingualisms. There is a major gap in thinking about educational multilingualism, especially in Southern contexts, “a singular failure to engage with the nature of multilingualism in these areas and how multilingualism can be harnessed as a resource, say, in a sector like education” (Mwaniki, 2018: 36). The problem with “language-specific approaches,” Nakata (2007: 175–176) points out, is that whether they focus on bilingual education, English as a second language or local languages, they assume “that all students have a common language.” The situation is always more complex, with multiple languages and multiple relations to oral and written modes operating across communities. Oral and literate worlds are not separate but “entwined, inter-textual and continue to evolve as traditions and artefacts of our engagements with each other” (Nakata, 2007: 176). Advocates of

bilingual education, Nakata suggests, fail to understand the complex communicative lifeworlds of the Global Souths.

Part of any project to decolonize (applied) linguistics and language education needs to step away from simple assumptions that replacing a former colonial language with an Indigenous one is in itself an emancipatory move. This view still operates from a Northern framework that fails to understand the differences that the South brings to the fore. This process then becomes naturalized so that, for example, the sociolinguistic truism that multilingualism is the natural and common condition for the majority world obscures the implicit language categorizations that lurk behind such apparently descriptive classification. What is often overlooked is that multilingualism, as commonly understood, is a way of thinking, a worldview and an intellectual orientation that forces us to look backwards under the burden of a metalanguage which was never designed to account for diverse and contemporary language use. Sociolinguists and applied linguists have reveled in their *multilingual turn* (May, 2014), their discovery that multilingualism is the normal state of humanity, their denunciations of monolingual mindsets among both colleagues and a broad range of policy-makers and the wider public, without pausing to examine the ideological underpinnings of the version of multilingualism that they are proposing for the world.

The next step is to move towards an understanding of the relationships among language resources as used by certain communities (the linguistic resources users draw on), local language practices (the use of these language resources in specific contexts) and language users' relationship to language varieties (the social, economic and cultural positioning of the speakers). From this point of view, therefore, we can start to move away from both mono- and multilingual orientations to language and take on board insights from outside the mainstream of language studies. The liberal linguistic consensus that sees "so-called 'heritage', 'ethnic', 'minority' and 'migrant' languages" threatened by the monolingual mindset and dominant languages misses the point that it is the way language is being understood here that is the problem (Ndhlovu, 2018: 123). The challenge is for Southern socio- and applied linguistics to break free from assumptions about separate languages, endangered languages and language rights and instead move toward a more complex and appropriate understanding of language in the Global Souths, which may also liberate the Global North from its narrow and inadequate notions of language.

All this needs to be done with necessary warnings and precautions: Local, indigenous or native forms of knowledge "are today highly valued, desired and more often appropriated by Western economic and industrial powers themselves, in the context of a new transformation of global capitalism" (Mangeon, 2020: xiii). As others have cautioned, there are concerns that

the ontological turn maps Western epistemological crises onto southern communities while appropriating and failing to attribute Indigenous forms of knowledge that are taken up (Cusicanqui, 2012; Todd, 2016). Thinking from the Global Souths, however, suggests far more than a move from monolingualism to multilingualism, but rather, via ideas such as *multi-languaging* or *multilingua francas*, towards an appreciation of pluriversal languages. Languages are not local instantiations of a universal and invariant category of language but potentially different things assembled out of local resources, stories and relations to land, water and history (Pennycook, 2024). Those people we now see as deeply multilingual in the Global Souths rarely see themselves in the same way and may not acknowledge this label of multilingualism. If we can do away with our language enumerations that sit so often at the heart of multilingualism, a great deal of productive research could start to open up the real complexities of grassroots multilingualism.

Further Reading

- Bauman and Briggs (2003) analyze the making of language in the writings of key thinkers of the Western tradition and how the underlying language ideologies have shaped how language is understood.
- Deumert and Makoni's (2023) book presents a range of different ways of thinking about the decolonization of sociolinguistics.
- Escobar (2017) argues for a pluriversal account of the world based around the radical interdependence of all beings.
- Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) present a comprehensive case for decolonizing multilingualism in the Global South.
- Pennycook and Makoni (2020) lay out the challenges for rethinking applied linguistics from the Global South.

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3

EPISTEMIC RECONSTITUTION OF MULTILINGUALISM

Disrupting and Levelling of Linguistic Hierarchies of Power

Felix Banda and Kelvin Mambwe

Introduction – Multilingualism as Language Practice in Zambia

Zambia is a country found in the South-Central Africa region. As a land-locked country, it shares its borders with Zimbabwe on the south, Mozambique and Malawi on the east, Namibia, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo on the west and Tanzania on the north. The country covers a total of 752,612 square kilometres, with a population estimated to be slightly above 19 million (Central Statistics Office, 2022). The country is divided into 10 administrative regions called provinces, with Lusaka being the capital city. Like in many African countries, Lusaka has the largest share of the national population, accounting for 30% of the total population.

There are 72 ethnic groups in Zambia who have traditionally been assumed to speak an equivalent of 72 languages. When one adds the colonial language English to the mix of 72 so-called ethnic languages, one finds that Zambia has fertile ground for multilingual or translingual languaging practices. This is particularly the case in urban cities of the country, such as Lusaka, Ndola, Kitwe (in the Copperbelt Province) and Livingstone, the tourist capital of Zambia. However, rural communities are not immune to multilingualism as it is not uncommon to find people who do not necessarily speak the same named language to live side-by-side, and also, since education is compulsory, people are exposed to English as one of the languages for teaching and learning (Banda, 2016). Mobility of people and cultural materials from other regions means that people also pick up named languages that are not originally spoken in their area. It has been argued

that a typical Zambian speaks at least four named languages, which are often used as a singular semiotic repertoire (Banda, 2016). We shall return to this argument about decolonial and anti-hegemonic language practices. However, following the colonial legacy, only seven of the indigenous Zambian languages, together with English, have been legislated as official languages (Banda & Mwanza, 2020). While the seven Zambian languages have been designated for local government and community-level communication in particular regions, English is seen as the language of education and high-level knowledge and the official language of government nationally. This has resulted in complex and interlocking hierarchies with English at the top and the official regional Zambian languages at the bottom, and another layer of hierarchy with the seven standardised Zambian languages at the top and the rest of the non-official Zambian languages at the bottom. It is noteworthy that the standardisation of the Zambian languages was carried out by missionaries and colonial agents. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the named languages are not used as envisaged by the colonial legacy of language zoning, which consigned them to specific localities. It also shows how the hierarchical orders of discourse, which restrict some named languages or their forms to certain domains, are levelled in heteroglossic languaging practices. The idea is to show how the hegemonic social structuring of languages, which places English above standard African languages and the non-official languages at the bottom, is challenged by social actors. In this conceptualisation, we see heteroglossic language practices as acts of decoloniality that represent ‘a political, epistemic and ethical project that surfaces from local histories, elsewhere and otherwise, and speaks back to this world system that affects all aspects of society’ (García & Baca, 2019: 2). We show a decolonial southern perspective that celebrates heterogeneity, linguistic impartiality and horizontality entangled in heteroglossic languaging practices.

Decoloniality and Translanguaging

Translanguaging refers to language practices of plurilingual individuals and communities in various contexts of interaction (García & Wei, 2014; Banda & Mwanza, 2017; Banda, 2018). In our conceptualisation, translanguaging is not necessarily about the alternative use of named languages; it is about the use of linguistic features from a semiotic repertoire to make and negotiate meaning in different contexts. We argue using a decolonial lens that translanguaging allows social actors to communicate with no due allegiance to societal or outside hegemonic forces, as they have free reign to select any features from their semiotic repertoire for interaction (Banda, 2016; Mambwe, 2014). As García (2009: 51) adds, translanguaging ‘shifts

the lens from cross-linguistic influence to how multilinguals intermingle linguistic features that have hereto been administratively or linguistically assigned to a particular language or language variety". This allows speakers to gain 'sufficient agency . . . [to enable] them resist policies that contribute to symbolic domination' (Canagarajah, 2001: 210).

This chapter, therefore, is designed to make a contribution that showcases translanguaging as a decolonial practice which enables Zambian social actors to resist symbolic domination by English monoglot/monolingual norms. Thus, translanguaging provides a way in which Zambian social actors achieve voice, power and agency in contexts where monolingual practices would *mute* them. In this regard, in the chapter, translanguaging is perceived as subverting and levelling structural systems of subjugation that duplicate hierarchies of racialized, gendered and socio-economically classed power structures.

Methodology

The study collected data qualitatively from different sources that were thought to be representative of the language practices in Zambia. To this end, we collected samples of data from a formal office meeting at an institution of higher learning in Zambia, ordinary interaction data, radio shows from Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) (Radio 1 and 2) and classroom interactions from selected schools in Livingstone, Southern province. The data involves discourses that reflect the ground-level forms of linguistic expressions. The idea is to use the data to explore language practices as a way to illustrate the disruption and levelling of linguistic hierarchies of power and the dismantling of the orders of discourse which compartmentalises English and indigenous languages and standard languages and non-standardised languages into differentiated systems for differentiated statuses and social role structures.

At the institution of higher learning, data were collected purposively from formal meetings through a recorder and notetaking with permission from participants. The official language for formal meetings is standard English. We also recorded radio programmes from ZNBC radio stations (1 and 2) to gain insights into the language practices on these channels. ZNBC was chosen because it has a national coverage and, therefore, more representative of the language practices in Zambia. We recorded programmes from the English radio channel known as Radio 2 and from 2 local languages sections of Radio 1 channel, namely the Bemba and Kaonde sections. These stations are expected to use the standard forms of the designated languages.

From the education sector, we sampled three schools where language, as used in the classroom situation, was captured from grades one to four. We

purposely selected three public schools where the adherence to language policies is expected to be rigid in its application. We therefore selected four classes from the mentioned grades. The idea was to assess the actual language practices in the school environment, which are regarded as domains of compartmentalised standard language use.

The Study: Decolonial Translanguaging Across Domains

In the examples that follow, through what Banda (2016) calls counter-hegemonic heteroglossic languaging practices, the monopoly enjoyed by English is checked by drawing and infusing linguistic features from local languages. The data shows that social actors draw linguistic features from their repertoire without following strict adherence to designated named languages in the spaces they find themselves or to the doctrine governing formal and informal language use. The data that follows (Table 3.1) is taken from a formal meeting from a workplace at an institution of higher learning where (standard) English is the designated official language expected to be used to conduct official business.

In the preceding extract, the context is formal. Thus, the expectation is that the meeting would be conducted following the dictates of the context or domain in which the activity is taking place. The formality is initially informed by the way the Chairperson introduces the meeting in what can be said to be standard English. He begins with a formal welcome message in formal English. Members 1 and 2 and, in turns 2 and 3, respond following the same dictates of the domain. However, in turns 5 and 6 and Members 3 and 4 disrupt the pattern by responding in a mixture of informal Nyanja as in *yapasa* 'it is successful' and continues with some English 'Chairperson, I think we can proceed with others'. The Nyanja phrase *yapasa*, is composed of the feature *ya-* 'it has' from Nyanja/Chewa and the loan English form – '*pasa*' from the word *pass* to refer to a successful application.

Similarly, Member 4 responds to Member 3 by questioning his authority to conclude an agenda before the Chairperson determines the matter. He does so by responding using features drawn from Nyanja and English, *ndimwe ba Chairperson?* 'are you the chairperson?' in keeping with the same pattern that Member 3 has used. This response would sound discourteous and, hence, offensive if uttered using English linguistic features. Using Nyanja enables the speaker to draw on cultural semiotic resources, that is, honorific morphemes *-mwe* and *ba*, which are used to raise or recognise the high status of the intended respondent. It also adds a humorous perspective to the exchange, thereby lighting up the atmosphere, as seen in the accompanying laughter from the rest of the members in attendance. It also

TABLE 3.1 Official meeting

Turn	Speaker	Dialogue
1	Chairperson	Good afternoon colleagues, and welcome to this meeting. This meeting has been called to consider some applications for promotion of our colleagues who responded to the call. Therefore, the agenda is as follows: . . . (Continues): At this point in time, may I ask the applicants involved to leave the meeting please. . . . Our first application is from Mr. X. I now invite comments.
2	Member 1	I feel there is a need to rework the CV as it does not present the achievements according to the template provided, otherwise, the applicant appears to have satisfied the conditions for promotion.
3	Member 2	I wish to second my colleague (Member 1). I think the application is long overdue, although, as already stated, our colleague needs to revise the CV in order to reflect what needs to be there.
4	Chairperson	Points taken. Are there any further comments on this particular case?
5	Member 3	<i>Yapasa</i> , Chairperson, I think we can proceed with others. ['It has passed'.]
6	Member 4	<i>Ndimwe ba chairman?</i> ['Are you the Chairperson?']
7	All	<laughter>
8	Chairperson	It appears then that we are all fine with this particular application. Alright then, <i>bo</i> X (Member 3) ['Mr. X'], will you please call back the applicant? And our next applicant is Mr. T.
9	Member 3	<i>Nga mwalimbikila bwanji ine?</i> <laughter> ['Why are you always insisting on me?']
10	ALL	<laughter>
11	Chairperson	<i>Ndiwe mbuya haha</i> ['You are my (tribal) cousin?']

Adapted from Mambwe (2014: 144)

disturbs the formality of the ongoing meeting as well as the elevation of English over local languages.

The Chairperson continues in turn 8 with the same pattern of formality that he has been using. However, within the formal English he has been using, he now draws on a standard or formal Lozi feature *bo-* 'honorific/for respect' in place of the expected formal English address 'Mr. X'. Member 3 responds in standard Nyanja *nga mwalimbikila bwanji ine?* 'why are you insisting on me?' You will notice here that in such a formal context in which power relations matter, Member 3 may not have the authority to

question the Chairperson, who, in this case, has more power or authority to instruct a member to do something. However, what we notice is that the response from Member 3 does not elicit any negative response from the Chairperson, who, in this case, also responds in a hybrid formal and informal Nyanja *ndimwe mbuya* 'you are my cousin' phrase. The selected linguistic features do not surprise the rest of the members. Such a non-hierarchical way of doing discourse is a common language practice among this group of interlocutors. It sends them all into laughter, including the Chairperson himself.

The extract also shows the levels of collegiality among the social actors that make them at liberty to easily slip from one code to another without having to worry about formalities that are expected to be observed in such an environment. The extract also shows that these members have access to a semiotic repertoire at their disposal, which involves linguistic and cultural features from named languages, English, Nyanja and other Zambian languages (Mambwe, 2014; Banda, 2016). We should point out here that the linguistic and cultural features that the interlocutors have used other than English are taken from both formal and informal forms of local languages. For example, *yapasa* and *ba chairman* can be said to be informal, while *ndimwe* and *mwalimbila bwanji ine* are standard Nyanja forms. *Ndimwe mbuya* has both formal and informal Nyanja features. *Ndimwe* is a formal/standard Nyanja feature, while *mbuya* is originally from Ngoni/Nsenga. But the entire feature is used in informal (urban) Nyanja. Thus, considering the standard and official designations of Zambian languages reflect a colonial legacy, the use of Ngoni/Nsenga and non-official forms shows that the disruption and levelling of vertical language structures extend to indigenous languages.

The illustration that follows shows that it is not always possible to distinguish discourses as, say, Nyanja or English, as they are constituted by an integrated repertoire. Although there are long stretches of what appears to be English and Nyanja forms, it is problematic to call the discourse monolingual naming ideology either English or Nyanja. The extract in Table 3.2 illustrates what Banda (2016) calls counter-hegemonic discourse, which fuses centrifugal and centripetal forms and, in the process, disrupts the standard language and monolingual ideologies. This took place in the corridors at an institution of higher learning in Lusaka.

How what appears to be Zulu and formal and informal English and Nyanja linguistic features are seamlessly integrated gives credence to arguments that translanguaged discourse is better conceived as a single semiotic repertoire (García & Wei, 2014; Mambwe, 2014; Banda, 2016, 2009, 2020). *Mudala* is from Zulu, spoken in South Africa, and is used extensively in the so-called urban Bemba and urban Nyanja. *Muliche* combines the Nyanja or Bemba

TABLE 3.2 Social interaction

Turn	Speaker	Dialogue
1	Member 1	<i>Muliche mudala? Munasobela kuti?</i> ‘How are you big man? Where have you been?’
2	Member 2	<i>Bwino bwanji? Long timeka?</i> ‘I am fine and how are you? It has been a long time, hasn’t it?’
3	Member 3	<i>Ndipo mwaina.</i> ‘You have really put on weight.’
4	Member 2	<laughter> a little bit . . . <i>sivioneka</i>, had some small problem so I had to be away for a while and then went to the village <i>mukudya mbewa</i>, from there. . . . ‘I have enjoyed a little bit . . . life is tough. I had some little problem so I had to take short leave. I went to the village to eat mice’.
5	Member 1	No you don’t have to explain everything. <laughter>
6	Member 3	No, . . . he wants to explain <i>kaili</i> ‘now’. ‘Leave him, . . . he wants to explain’.
7	Member 1	<i>Nicani naiwe?</i> ‘What do you mean?’ [lit., what is it with you?]
8	Member 2	I am giving you . . . am giving you details.
9	Member 3	eh eh. ‘Yes’.
10	Member 2	You mean details.
11	Member 1	You mean how you moved?
12	Member 2	No, not everything.
13	Member 3	So that you don’t ask further . . . so <i>iwe siunaionele umo?</i> ‘So then you didn’t realise what he meant?’]
14	Member 2	So [that] you don’t ask further questions.
15	Member 1	Oh oh so <i>namvela manje</i> <laughter> <i>unga ineko naiwe.</i> ‘Ok, I now understand [you]. <laughter> You can also put on some weight’.
16	Member 3	<i>Nanga tifola liti? Ta bloka.</i> ‘So when will we get paid? We are broke’.
17	Member 4	<i>Batiuza ati mailo.</i> ‘They told us that we shall get paid tomorrow’.

Adapted from Mambwe (2014: 118)

morpheme *muli-* ‘you are’ with an urban Nyanja form *-che*, which, in this case, means ‘fine/well’. It is literally, ‘You are fine/well?’, meaning ‘How are you?’. The standard Nyanja and Bemba forms would be *mulibwanji?* and *mulishani?*, respectively. The amalgamated form, *Muliche*, is reciprocated by a standard Nyanja response, *Bwino bwanji?*. This is followed by another *disinvention* (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007) of Nyanja with what appears to be an English form of ‘long time’. However, the English form itself represents a disinvented form as it is morpho-syntactically modified with Nyanja/

Bemba (or many other indigenous languages) enclitic of affirmation *-ka*. The form is used where one does not expect the listener to refute the proposition being put forward. The rest of the morphemes, phrases and sentences, although from different named languages, are so integrated in the language practice or discourse that they cannot be analysed as compartmentalised or autonomous forms but as part of a singular linguistic or semiotic repertoire. We argue that it is an integrated whole that should be seen. As is further illustrated in the extract that follows, the meanings do not lie in the origins of the forms or morphemes but in the contexts of use as part of a communicative repertoire.

The extract in Table 3.3 is taken from a conversation that took place among friends during the funeral procession of the late President Frederic Chiluba of Zambia.

The previously mentioned data shows that linguistic forms from English, Zulu, standard and informal Bemba and Nyanja have been fused in such a manner that the assumed boundaries between them have become blurred. For example, in turn 1, *benze banankala baganiza che ati tizakanyamula bwanji iyi* ‘they might have sat down and planned about how they would lift it’ can be analysed as a combination of different parts, which include the Bemba prefix *ba-* and urban Nyanja *-enze* to form *benze* and *-anankala* where the Nyanja plural marker *e-* has been fused with the vowel *a-* from the Bemba prefix *ba-* to form *be-* in *benze*. Note also the assimilation of *a* into *e*. *Manje* ‘now’ is from Zulu, a South African language.

TABLE 3.3 Conversation

Turn	Speaker	Dialogue
1	Jack	So <i>benze banankala baganiza che ati tizakanyamula bwanji iyi, ni matons angati, ilema bwanj. Ndiye kwayenda ndalama, vimaconcrete vija ndipo zangena</i> <i>very expensive . . . na equipment cabe</i> . [‘So they must have been planning how they should lift it (referring to the marble tombstone), they might have considered how many tons it weighs. This is what has gobbled money; such massive concrete has cost money. They are very expensive . . . including the equipment’.]
2	Brown	<i>Manje cija banacipanga kuti?</i> ‘Now where did they make that from?’
3	Jack	<i>Banapangila mwamene muno mu Zambia</i> . ‘They produced it right here in Zambia’.

Adapted from Mambwe (2014: 113)

Furthermore, Nyanja *a-* for subject agreement as in *enze anankala* has also been assimilated into the vowel of the Bemba prefix *ba-* to read as *banankala*. However, we argue that even the feature *-enze* is, in fact, from Ngoni and not Nyanja, as typical standard Nyanja would just read *anakhala* ‘they sat’ without the addition of *-enze*. Note also what can be said to be the influence of Bemba morpho-phonology with the transformation *anakhala* to *banankala*, with the addition of the Bemba bilabial fricative *ba-*, and the nasalisation of *nk* and the dropping of aspiration so that *khala* ‘sit’ and has been transformed into a hybrid form *nkala*. It could be argued that the prefix *ba-* can also be traced to other sources other than Bemba, which could include any Bantu language that also uses the same prefix *ba-* for number and subject-verb marking. Similarly, *baganiza* follows a similar pattern to *bena banankala* where again the prefix *ba-* is from Bemba and has been fused into Nyanja *aganiza* ‘they think’. This is also followed by *che* ‘only’, another Nyanja (urban) form which is combined with Bemba *ati* ‘that’. In *tizakanyamula bwanji iyi ni*, the *ti-* ‘we’ and *-za-* ‘future tense marker’ are Nyanja while *-ka-* also future tense marker is Bemba (notice the use of two future tense markers in this form to mean the same thing).

The form *-nyamula* ‘lift’ and *bwanji iyi* ‘how is this’ are from Nyanja. Furthermore, we notice that the combination of forms also involves English. For example, in *matons*, the prefix *ma-* is a plural marker from Nyanja or indeed Bemba and combines with *tons* from English, which has another plural marker *-s*. This is followed by *angati* ‘how many’ from Nyanja. Furthermore, *ndiye kwayenda ndalama* is also from Nyanja. The Nyanja form *vima* where *vi-* is a pejorative prefix for objects and *ma-* a prefix for plurals attached to *concrete*. The two prefixes have been fused with *concrete* to show how huge the concrete is. The form *vija* ‘those’- from Nyanja has been used to show subject-verb agreement. Furthermore, *ndipo* ‘indeed’ and *zangena* ‘gobbled’ are from Ngoni/Nsenga. This is followed by *very expensive* and immediately after it is *na* ‘and’ from Nyanja and *equipment* from English, and, finally, the discourse closes with Nyanja (urban) *chabe*.

What is interesting in the previous data is that this blurring of linguistic boundaries does not only involve languages but also involves language varieties, a variety being defined as a ‘recognizable system of linguistic features which can be associated with a community of speakers’ (Sergeant & Tagg, 2011: 498). From this definition, language and variety tend to share the notion of a distinguishable system. In this regard, it has emerged that rural and urban Nyanja, on the one hand, and rural and urban Bemba, on the other, combine in such a way that they become deconstructed and reconstituted into a single (hybrid) language. Although a distinction is often made between rural and urban varieties of Bemba and Nyanja and between standard and non-standard varieties of English, from the manner in these

so-called rural and urban varieties, and standard and non-standard forms of English are being used in urban cities of Zambia, the assumed boundaries between them are not tenable. With that, the vertical structuring of named languages and their forms according to domains of language use and related predictions that language use is determined by a particular domain are not always sustainable. However, we want to argue that these linguistic features constitute a semiotic assemblage and are part of the semiotic repertoire of the social actors. The forms and functions of the linguistic features in the translanguaging discourses do not necessarily align with the named languages they were originally compartmentalised in, and their meanings are in the social contexts of use. The disassembling of the linguistic features from named languages and their re-assembling or reconstitution as one communicative repertoire is what makes the language practices counter-hegemonic.

Levelling Regional Language Zoning and Hierarchies

Translanguaging Across Regional Language Boundaries in Classrooms

The data that follows shows how social actors translanguage using linguistic features from English and local languages that are not designated for the locality to facilitate teaching and learning in classroom situations. The data was gathered from a lower primary school class in Livingstone, Southern Province, Zambia, in an area where Tonga is designated as a regional language and, by implication, a language to be used for teaching alongside English in lower primary school grades (see Zambia Language in Education Policy, 2013; Banda & Mwanza, 2017).

In his study of classroom language practices in a black school in Cape Town, Banda (2018) conceives translanguaging as a decolonial and counter-hegemonic practice which enables learners to be involved in classroom discussions and to generate knowledge, which they would not do if there were strict adherence to standard African language or standard English norms. Banda (2018) also argues that in multilingual contexts, if learners hear and understand a task in one form of language, successfully translate the content and give the correct response in a different form or named language, then it can be concluded that learning took place. The extract in Table 3.4 illustrates the use of Nyanja and English linguistic features to facilitate learning. Learner 1 uses Nyanja, in turn 1, to ask his peer (Learner 2) how he should write something in English. In turn 2, Learner 2 expresses ignorance in Nyanja (*siniziba*, 'I don't know'). Learner 3 chips in, in Nyanja and some English (*nimwamene so chabe*, 'it's just like that', to assure Learner 1 that what he has written is the correct way. Note here that the use of the

TABLE 3.4 Lesson 1

Turn	Speaker	Dialogue
1	Learner 1	(To learner 2 in Nyanja) <i>Nikulemba bwanji?</i> ‘How do we write?’
2	Learner 2	(Responds to learner 1 in Nyanja) <i>Kaya</i> . ‘I don’t know.’
3	Learner 3	(Assuring learner 1 in Nyanja) <i>Nimwamene so chabe</i> . ‘That’s the way, just like that.’
4	Teacher	D is what in Arabic numerals? [Children are all trying to remember]
5	Learner 2	(Whispering to learner 1 in Nyanja): <i>Si 500?</i> ‘Isn’t it 500?’
6	Learner 1	(In Nyanja) <i>Kamba! Niyamene!</i> ‘Say it! It’s the one/numeral!’
7	Learner 3	<i>Niyamene</i> . ‘It’s the one?’
8	Learner 1	<i>Ee, Kamba</i> . ‘Yes, say it.’
9	Learner 2	Teacher, I think it’s 500.

Adapted from Simachenya (2016: 38)

English form ‘so’ is different from how it ought to be used in formal English. Here, the word has been appropriated to mean ‘it is alright’. Also, note that while the teacher continues to teach in English, the learners are using Nyanja among themselves to expedite deeper understanding. The only time that Learner 2 speaks English is in his response to the teacher’s question towards the end of the extract, ‘Teacher, I think it is 500’.

We should also note the English that the teacher uses while teaching her learners is, in fact, a reconstruction from the Bantu language structure. Instead of the ‘standard’ question construction in English, ‘What is D in Arabic numeral?’ she says it following the local language form in which the subject of a question can be transposed to the initial position of the sentence as in: ‘D is what in Arabic numeral?’ This construction is deliberately used to help the learners understand what she wants.

The extract reveals further that the learners are using Nyanja freely as a resource for communicative purposes. However, their practice of using Nyanja defies legislative expectations because Tonga should be the language to be used in the Southern region, while Nyanja is to be used in the Eastern and Lusaka regions (Zambia Language in Education Policy, 2013). Therefore, their translanguaging practices defy not only the regional zoning of indigenous languages but also the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages for learning (cf. Banda, 2016; Banda & Mwanza, 2017).

What follows is another example of translanguaging in the same area but involving a different set of named languages. Tonga, a regional official

TABLE 3.5 Lesson 2

Turn	Speaker	Dialogue
1	Teacher	(In Tonga) <i>Ino bamwi batyani?</i> . . . Miriam. ‘What are others doing?’ . . . Miriam’.
2	Learner (Miriam)	(In Nyanja) <i>Batyola milisi</i> . ‘They are plucking maize’. (The teacher continues with her oral questions about TV and radio.)
3	Teacher	Who is going to get more information?
4	Learners	(In Nyanja) <i>Wamene atamba</i> . ‘The one who is watching’.

Adapted from Simachenya (2016: 40)

language, is used alongside Nyanja, a non-official language for the region, and English.

The extract in Table 3.5 shows that the learners and their teacher have access to multiple linguistic features from named languages, which makes up their communicative repertoire from which they can draw resources for making meaning and negotiating their identities (Banda, 2016; Banda, 2009; Mambwe, 2014). The data also show that Tonga and Nyanja were used more among friends within the classroom. In this regard, the learners used these languages to show solidarity and close friendships among themselves. For example, a learner who spoke Tonga with his or her close friends in class would switch to Nyanja when addressing or talking to a distant classmate and vice versa.

Levelling Language Hierarchies in Radio and Television Programmes

During the colonial era and after Zambia’s independence in 1964, there were tight restrictions on the languages used for broadcasting on radio and television. The colonial government broadcast in English to the colonial administrators and their families, who mostly lived in urban areas, and the few Africans who could understand the language. There were hardly any stations dedicated to Zambian languages. At the time of Zambia’s independence, the Zambia Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) came into being after the dissolution of the Northern Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation (NRBC), which mostly catered to the English-speaking colonial government and its agents in the Federation of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe and Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi) (Kasoma, 1990). After independence, the Zambian government continued with the inherited colonial programming, which

slotted languages in different stations, with English programmes taking up most of the broadcasting time. In terms of radio, Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) operated two channels dominated by English, the General Service in English, and the seven official indigenous regional languages had one to two hours each on different slots on the Home Service channel. Following the colonial monolingual dispensation, the programmes broadcasted were monolingual. This meant that during a Nyanja programme, Nyanja was the only language permitted to be used. It was the standard Nyanja as devised in missionary and colonial times that was heard.

However, with the opening up of the airwaves after 1991 that came with the ouster of the Kenneth Kaunda regime, there was noticeable decolonisation of the airwaves, with English losing its monopoly with multilingual discourse gaining momentum. Private individuals and organisations that entered the radio and television broadcasting market did not strictly monitor the languages or keep a strict regime on the forms and standards of language contributors used. Thus, although on paper, some programmes are officially labelled in autonomous terms as English, Bemba, Nyanja, Luvale, etc., the practice tends to be multilingual, with speakers using two or more named languages and/or combining their linguistic features.

Therefore, as is illustrated in what follows, regardless of what some radio and television programmes might be called: an English or a Zambian language programme, the increasing practice is that there are usually traces of non-adherence to legislative or radio/television language expectations. This ensures that there are usually no clear-cut hierarchies based on named languages and their forms, as was the case during colonial times and 20 or so years after independence. The extract that follows is taken from a ZNBC radio morning show which takes place from 06:00 to 08:00 on weekdays. The show is hosted by Mavuto (pseudonym), and it is supposed to be conducted in English. It often discusses trending stories of the week or day. This programme then invites members of the public to give their opinions on a trending story.

The extract reveals two things. First, the radio host or announcer maintains the use of the officially designated language for the radio station (radio 2), thereby establishing and maintaining the language policy position for the station and official government position. Caller 1 follows suit by maintaining the official English throughout his comment. The second aspect we note is a disruption of this pattern by Callers 2 and 3, who use a mix of Nyanja/English and Bemba/English, respectively, thereby breaking not only the norm for the station but also in the process levelling the unequal relationship or structure between English and Zambian languages and between official/standard Zambian languages and informal and non-official Zambian languages.

We must mention here that the languaging practice noted in Table 3.6 is present on Radio 1, a public radio station solely dedicated to the seven official regional languages which are meant to reflect the regional language zones across the country. The extracts that follow are taken from the Bemba and Kaonde Sections of ZNBC Radio 1. For purposes of context, the two extracts are taken from Bemba and Kaonde radio programmes in which the public is given an opportunity to call and interact with the radio announcer in the designated regional languages.

In the extract in Table 3.7, while the programme is supposed to be conducted in Bemba as seen in the introductory part of the programme, the announcer lives by the prescribed language for the section, that is, formal Bemba, a language designated for Bemba speakers in the Copperbelt, Muchinga, Luapula and Northern regions of the country. However, her first caller does not use the expected language but chooses to use Nyanja and, in this case, the rural Nyanja forms. This practice disrupts the language expectation, but it does not seem to disturb either the flow of the programme or the announcer herself. If anything, the interaction proceeds smoothly. What we note further is that this free circulation of languages across regions is eased by technology, which tends to bring people with seemingly different linguistic repertoires into one space, thereby breaking down perceived political, linguistic and social boundaries. People phone in from regions other than the officially designated one, using languages that are not officially sanctioned for the programmes. In this regard, we see that the interaction of languages or translanguaging does not only involve English with local languages but also involves local languages which have traditionally been assigned regions and groups of people, a colonial legacy. To augment this argument, Table 3.8 is an extract from Kaonde Section of ZNBC Radio 1. This section is designated for the North Western province of Zambia but specifically for Kaonde speakers since this province/region was zoned for three languages, which include Kaonde, Lunda and Luvale. Like the Bemba programme in Table 3.7, the programme is open for callers to pass greetings to their loved ones, presumably, among Kaonde speakers only.

In the extract, the announcer begins the programme following the expected language to be used in this section of Radio 1. However, the expected linguistic flow is disturbed by his first caller, who chooses to use a 'different' language, Lunda, to communicate. Their communication goes on well without any difficulties. Notice that within the exchange, the Kaonde announcer infuses some English in the discourse.

We want to argue that if strict compartmentalisation of the programmes were followed, then those using a language other than the designated one would not participate. Yet, it is clear that social actors can communicate across named languages and their forms without difficulties. Restricting

TABLE 3.6 ZNBC Radio 2 programme

Turn	Speaker	Dialogue
1	Radio host [Mavuto]	It is a good Tuesday morning once again. It has been raining whole night. I hope you are keeping yourselves warm and safe as you drive to work . . . Today, we are discussing the kidnapping of the 12 girls here in Lusaka. I will be opening the show for callers on our usual line 097. . . . In other news, the President of the Republic of Zambia, His excellence Hakainde Hichilema, has appointed the new Director of public Prosecutions, Mr. Gilbert Phiri, replacing Mrs. Siyuni. . . . I now wish to open the show for calls.
2	Caller 1	Good morning, Mavuto. I am X, calling from Kitwe. I wish to add a voice on the rescue of the kidnapped girls. We thank the public and the police for this well-done job. However, the police took too long to rescue the girls. I hear one of the girls is now pregnant?
3	Radio host	Yes, that is what we are told. It is so unfortunate. . . .
4	Caller 1 (continues):	This is very sad. Why are things like this happening in our communities now? Last time, it was gassing of innocent citizens, and now kidnappings. . . .
5	Radio host	Thank you very much for the call and your opinion. I have another caller on the line. May know whom talking to?
6	Caller 2	I am X, calling you from Kabwe.
7	Radio host	Yes, Sir, please, go ahead with your opinion or comments.
8	Caller 2	<i>Eya mukwai ba Mavuto, me I want to say something on the kidnapping. Kanshi bushe where were the police all this long? How safe are we ngachakuti bakapokola kuti basenda inshita itali so to find the kidnappers? Awe I am very disappointed ba Mavuto. Chawamafye abana babasanga.</i> ‘Yes, Madam Mavuto, I wanted to say something on the kidnapping’.
9	Radio host	Thank you very much, Mr. X from Kabwe . . .
10	Caller 2	<i>Natotela mukwai. Have a nice day, too.</i> ‘I thank you’.
11	Radio host	We pick another caller. Please, where are you calling from Sir?
12	Caller 3	<i>I am calling you from within Lusaka. Ine ba Mavuto nakondwela maningi ati ma girls bapezeka. Chawama maningi.</i> ‘I am very happy, Mavuto, that the girls have finally been found. This is very good’.

TABLE 3.7 Bemba Radio programme (*Natubalondole* 'let's locate them')

Turn	Speaker	Dialogue
1	Radio announcer	(In Bemba) <i>Mukwai nalelo twamichela na programme iyo mwatemwisha iya natubalondola. Iyi ni programme iyo mwinga sanga abatemikwa benu. Nga lyonse ulemiletelako neni . . . mukwai kuti mwatutumina kamusange pa namba iyi 097 . . . Mukwai ninkwata kale abaletuma. Hello, nibanani ndelenda nabo?</i> 'Good morning. We come again with your favourite programme 'let's locate them'. This is a programme that helps you locate your loved ones. As always, I am . . . the producer. Please, you can give us a call on this number 097 . . . I already have a caller. Who is calling?'
2	Caller 1	(in Nyanja) <i>Ndine Mwanza nditumila kuchokela ku Chipata. Ndifuna kupeza munzanga wamene tenze kuphuzila naye mu grade 8 ku Chizongwe muchaka cha 1988 . . . Number yanga ndi 097 . . .</i> 'I am Mwanza, calling you from Chipata. I want to find my friend, a former classmate in grade 8 at Chizongwe Secondary School in 1988 . . . my phone number is 097 . . . '.
3	Radio announcer	(In Bemba) <i>Bweshenipo phone number yenu nakabili . . . twatotela.</i> 'Repeat your phone number, thank you'.

TABLE 3.8 Kaonde Radio programme (*Mitende* 'greetings')

Turn	Speaker	Dialogue
1	Radio announcer	(In Kaonde) <i>Kimabanga mwane bangikazhi. Mwane katushinkule phone. Mwane Tutuminai phone pa ino nambala 097 . . . mupane mutende kubatemwe. Yafika nekala, hello . . .</i> 'Good evening listeners. We are now opening up phone lines on this number 097 . . . so you can greet your loved ones. We already have the first caller, hello'.
2	Caller	(In Lunda) <i>Hello mwani, ndi nakutumila nsambo kufuma ku Mwinilunga mwani. chakutachika, ndi nakukeng'a kwimushau amrwali, atata ndi amama ndi anyike ami ezhiba . . .</i> 'I am calling you on phone from Mwinilunga. To start with, I want to pass my greetings to my parents and all my siblings . . . '.

listeners to linguistic features from one named language would unnecessarily trigger inequality based on linguistic features with negative consequences – most likely, the social actor would not call in.

These counter-hegemonic discourses are also seen in the fact that in the main English news broadcasts on radio and television of the major networks such as ZNBC, Prime Television and Muvi Television, there are hardly any translations, English voice-overs or English sub-titles on news items that are in a Zambian language, or translanguaged discourse, as used to happen in the past. It is not just the monopoly of English that is checked; it is the entire colonial-inspired language hierarchies, which also puts official standard African languages at the top and turns non-official African languages into illegitimate languages of broadcasting. Thus, during prime-time English news broadcasts, one hears items in so-called non-official Zambian languages such as Tumbuka, Lenje, Mambwe, Nsenga, Ila, Soli and Lamba.

These counter-hegemonic discourses are also found in mainstream English print and online newspapers. Banda (2016) gives the following headlines with blended linguistic features from English as illustrative of counter-hegemonic discourse designed for economical, aesthetic and information value.

It appears there is an expectation that Zambian readers will understand these headlines without the need for English glosses for the words and phrases written in Zambian languages. *Ubukopo* comes from *icikopo* in Bemba and other Zambian languages, which means an ‘empty tin’, but in this case, means ‘a stupid and dull person’. *Alangizi* is originally from Nyanja, and it refers to ‘female marriage counsellors’ who instruct soon-to-be-married women on what they can expect and how to behave once in marriage.

Kutumpa ‘stupid’ is a Bemba word which has become integral to the extended Zambian linguistic repertoire but carries a different social sanction (Banda, 2016). *Kutumpa* and ‘stupid’ have become specialised terminology, with the former being in common use, while the English version is perceived as a serious insult. Historically, during colonial times, white bosses would unfairly admonish their black employees with the word ‘stupid’. When these black workers would go to their communities, they would

TABLE 3.9 Hybrid headlines and news stories in print and online media

‘UPND Supporters are a proper definition of Ubukopo’

Source: *Zambia Reports* (12 November 2015)

Mumbi needs alangizi – Ngoma By Fridah Nkonde

The Post (22 October 2015)

TODAY’S EDITORIAL COMMENT: Kutumpa

Source: *The Post* (4 November 2015).

use the word ‘stupid’ not just to sound superior but also to insult fellow blacks. Even in independent Zambia, the word ‘stupid’ is viewed as more venomous than *kutumpa*.

Moreover, producers of radio and television advertisements, radio and television dramas and even movies increasingly allow characters to use linguistic features they would employ in their everyday interactions in particular contexts. The discourse practices in such productions tend to be heteroglossic, with linguistic features from multiple named languages (Mambwe, 2014; Banda, 2016). Thus, radio and television dramas in Zambia are almost entirely multilingual, as they try to depict the way Zambians interact and the language practices they deploy in the process. Television series such as *Mpali*, *Zuba*, *My Kitchen Party*, *Shi Mumbi* and *Uncle Limbani* are multilingual, with translanguaging patterns reflecting the way Zambians use languages in various contexts.

Conclusion

The chapter has shown that the colonial inheritance in language zoning, standard English as a language of higher-order functions and standard indigenous languages as low languages tolerated for their traditional cultural value are continually being disrupted. The hegemonic social structuring of languages, which places English above official regional African languages and the non-official languages at the bottom, is continually challenged by social actors. From the languaging practices analysed in this chapter, it can be argued that social actors do not see multilingualism as constructed from autonomous named languages, with some having more social capital than others, as envisaged in Bourdieu’s characterisation. Although this does not put complete breaks on Bourdieu’s social capital perspective, it shows that social actors can circumvent the unequal structuring based on named languages. The chapter has thus demonstrated acts of decoloniality in which vestiges of coloniality and its predilection to control and minoritize through its global imperial designations are disrupted.

The chapter has further shown how forces of centralisation based on the inherited colonial aspirations of monoglotism and the belief in a singular standard language as the language of education and socio-economic mobility are challenged. In this conceptualisation, centripetal socio-ideological forces, which ‘serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 270), are disrupted and counteracted by anti-hegemonic forces of decentralisation seen in multilingual languaging practices. The forces of centralisation, which include pressures that force the structuring and hierarchisation of language, are checked by decentralisation forces that

promote the localisation of linguistic forms, including the localisation of linguistic forms drawn from colonial languages.

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4

DECOLONISING THE LINGUISTIC ENCIRCLEMENT IN AFRICA

Finex Ndhlovu and Edwin Chris Odhiambo

1. Introduction

Among several other imperatives, the control of language was key in actualising the imperial goals of European colonial forces in Africa and elsewhere. This is because language (however imagined or defined) is the first point of contact in human interaction. Whenever there is contact among individuals or groups of people – for whatever reason – there is a language or a set of languages that mediate the process. It is through language that things are called into existence – for good and for bad causes alike. People's identities can be inscribed and/or erased through language. And, most importantly, language is the medium through which people express their aspirations, joys, fears, and sorrows: essentially, language is at the heart of our perceptions of what it means to be human and how we project our humanity to other beings. The more worrisome thing is that language can be deployed instrumentally to create social cleavages that are oftentimes manipulated to justify all manner of exclusions and segregations along any number of lines: racial, xenophobic, ethno-nationalistic, chauvinistic, autochthonous, tribalistic, and so on. In the African context, this has played out in the form of linguistic encirclement (Wa Thiong'o, 1981, 1986)¹ – the invention and imposition of linguistic identities that alienate African peoples from their cultures and traditions of knowing.

Encirclement affects people's praxes, their agency, their thinking, their independence, their autonomy, their creativity, and their ontology. There is no action that they take, which is on their own terms unless, of course, they manage to subvert the system through exercising epistemic disobedience

(Mignolo, 2011). Epistemic disobedience entails doing at least the following two things simultaneously: (a) troubling normative (colonial) traditions of knowing and de-linking from them; and (b) embracing other ways of knowing and being that (re)introduce alternative languages, grammars, vocabularies, memories, economics, and social organizations that accord with diverse ontological subjectivities (Mignolo, 2011: 63). This epistemological posture is necessary because linguistic encirclement paves the path to domination: the exercising of power on Africans and other formerly colonised peoples around the world was achieved through changing and controlling the colonial subjects' languages, cultures, mental and cognitive capacities, and sense of self-definition (Lane, 2023). Wa Thiong'o (1981, 1986) says while the bullet was the means to achieve the physical subjugation of the colonised, language was the vehicle for erasing cultural memory, thus leading to spiritual and mental subjection:

Economic control and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.

(Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 16)

The notion of linguistic encirclement covers colonial projects that produced types of 'indigenous African languages' that were and continue to be used as mechanisms for consigning Africans into language-based categories or hierarchies of humanity. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o further elaborates how this played out in the following terms:

So wherever you look at modern colonialism, the acquisition of the language of the colonizer was based on the death of the languages of the colonized. African languages were weaponized against Africans. Language was a weapon of war . . . Language was a very important element in both the conquest and maintenance of colonial rule because it was likely to bind the minds of the middle class.

(Wa Thiong'o, 1981: 9)

The significant point here is that over and above languages such as English, French, and Portuguese that came to Africa as imperial languages, a new category of 'indigenous African languages' was produced. Standard African languages such as IsiZulu, Setswana, ChiShona, IsiNdebele, GiKuyu, Hausa, KiBemba, XiTsonga, and ChiChewa – among others – owe their existence to the colonial project of linguistic encirclement, which they continue to sustain – albeit by stealth. These are languages of the state and not languages of the people. Languages of the state are disconnected from

the real language practices of real people because they owe their existence to colonial linguistics ideologies (Fardon & Furniss, 1994; Makoni, 1998; Brutt-Griffler, 2006; Zeleza, 2006; Errington, 2001, 2008; Severo, 2016). The approaches of colonial linguistics were largely motivated by the quest for ‘command over language’ to produce ‘languages of command’ (Cohn, 1996; Brutt-Griffler, 2006) – effectively, language types/categories that could be manipulated instrumentally to serve colonial interests.

In the sections that follow, we show how national language policies have been used as instruments for enforcing these forms of linguistic encirclements by both colonial and postcolonial regimes in Africa. The focus is on four categories of languages that must be decolonised: Ex-colonial languages, African vehicular cross-border languages, African official/national languages, and African lingua francas.

2. Dimensions of Linguistic Encirclement – Colonial Languages

The critique of the overbearing nature of European languages such as English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish and their imposition in colonised African societies was the primary reason behind Ngugi’s introduction of the concept of linguistic encirclement. The 19th-century scramble for Africa by Europeans necessitated the carving of the continent into balkanised nation-states and geo-political regions to enhance the colonial project of exploiting both human and natural resources. Therefore, the geographical boundaries of the more than 50 African countries as they currently exist are inventions of the 19th-century European colonial expansionist policies. The African national boundaries that were drawn at the Berlin Conference on 15 November 1884 to bring about order in the scramble for Africa have remained in place to the present day. Because it was not motivated by the desire to serve the interests of diverse groups of African people, the process of carving boundaries for different African countries was done in an arbitrary fashion that was insensitive to local cultural and linguistic realities. The three consequences of the Berlin Conference were: (1) the splitting of ethnic/linguistic communities that belonged together into two or more groups that were subsequently forced into different nation-states; (2) the lumping together of distinct ethnic/linguistic groups into imagined homogenous communities that were subsequently forced to adopt a uniform national identity; and (3) the emergence of multiple cross-border languages known by different and sometimes similar names across different national boundaries (Ndhlovu, 2009).

So, effectively, African national and regional identities rest on principles of containment that would advance the interests of the colonial project.

And after the trampling of local African linguistic and cultural formations, the imposition of the languages of colonising European countries in their respective spheres of influence followed. Of the eight European powers that colonised Africa, five were the most successful in terms of having their languages retained as both official and identity markers for the formerly occupied territories after the attainment of political independence. These include Belgium and France (French in West Africa, Central Africa, and the island nations of Mauritius and Madagascar); the United Kingdom (English in Southern Africa, parts of East Africa, North Africa, and West Africa); Portugal (Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and the islands of Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Principe); and Spain (Equatorial Guinea, Morocco, and Western Sahara). The languages of respective colonial powers were then imposed as official languages and identity markers of colonial subjects.

This legacy of colonial linguistic encirclement remains in present-day Africa. This is evident in the national language policies of individual post-colonial African countries whereby ex-colonial languages are either the sole official languages or are used as such alongside a selection of African languages. A few examples that illustrate this point are fitting. First is Cameroon, whose official language policy reflects the country's dual colonial heritage: with both English and French as official languages because the country was formerly colonised by the British (two out of the ten regions classified as Anglophone) and the French (eight out of the ten regions classified as Francophone) (Ngué Um, forthcoming). Cameroon is a perfect exemplar of what Ajit K. Mohanty (2019) calls the 'double divide,' a summary term for the existence of "a power gap between the dominant colonial language at the top of the hierarchy and the major regional languages, and a second gap between these regional languages and the ITM [indigenous, tribal, minority and minoritized] languages" (Mohanty, 2019: 88). The longstanding social and political tensions between so-called Anglophone Cameroonians and Francophone Cameroonians are based on perceived differences wrought by colonial experiences. The points of convergence shaped by shared African linguistic and cultural traditions of Cameroonians from the two regions are overlooked, while the colonial language experiences that divide are unnecessarily magnified.

Other African countries such as Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe are yet other examples where English is the constitutionally declared official language alongside local African languages. In Kenya, English and KiSwahili are the constitutionally declared official languages. Similarly, in South Africa, English and Afrikaans are the declared official languages, together with nine African languages and sign language. But these examples illustrate the *de jure* position because the *de facto* situation in both countries is one where ex-colonial languages are used as the sole official languages in

domains such as education, the law courts, business and trade, and government. The official language status of Kiswahili in Kenya and that of the nine African languages in South Africa are tokenistic because English is the *de facto* official language in both countries.

The previous analysis reveals both the containment and fragmentation effects of linguistic encirclement. These constitute a major stumbling block to the crafting of pan-African identities that transcend the colonial narrative. Such is the resilient and pervasive effect of linguistic encirclement that must be decolonised to pave the way for the more locally grounded Africa-centred narratives that side-step the language of fatalistic binaries imposed by colonialists.

3. Dimensions of Linguistic Encirclement – National Languages²

The concept of national language has many senses (Ndhlovu, 2013a). It is used differently from one context to another, depending on the community of practice. In the African context, the notion of national language carries at least three senses: (1) a selection of standardized language forms promoted and propagated as symbols of national identity; (2) all the indigenous languages of nation-states and polities regardless of size of speaking populations and the geographical extent of the territory in which they are spoken; and (3) all languages of those considered to be the aboriginal or first peoples of a given country such as the languages of the Khoisan people in Namibia.

The definition of national languages that we have adopted here is one that considers them as standard forms connected to the rise of the modern nation-state. Examples of African national languages included in this definition are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo in Nigeria; Amharic, Oromo, and Tigrinya in Ethiopia; Dyula and Senoufo in Ivory Coast; Lingala; Kikongo, and Swahili in DRC; Gikuyu; Luo and Swahili in Kenya; Zulu, Xhosa, and Afrikaans in South Africa; Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe; and Setswana in Botswana. Since the publication of Benedict Anderson's seminal work typifying the nation-state as an imagined community, critical sociolinguistic scholarly communities have concluded that national languages and the nation-state were co-constructed (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021; Otheguy et al., 2015). African national languages, most of them celebrated today as prime markers of group and individual identities, were invented at the behest of the rise (or rather imposition) of the colonial nation-state in Africa. They are part of the myths and symbols that have attracted the sentimental and instrumental loyalties of the masses of the national population. As Kelman (1971: 25) observed, "political leaders have

at their disposal national symbols and subsystem roles that they can use for purposes of mobilization. National symbols can be brought into play to heighten emotional arousal” in support of the visions and dreams of the nation-state as well as in eliciting the population’s ideological and normative commitments to the legitimacy of the nation-state. African national languages are among such symbols that have sustained the nation-state since its emergence in the late 18th century. The pioneering work of Joan Rubin and Bjorn Jernudd (1971) and Herbert Kelman (1971) on language policy and planning draws attention to perceptions about the unifying force of national languages. National languages are perceived as potentially powerful in strengthening both sentimental and instrumental attachments of populations to the nation (1971: 30). For African countries in particular, national languages have served the purpose of consolidating the postcolonial nation-state and its dream and vision of building cross-cultural integration, a sense of shared national identity, unity, and socio-cultural cohesion among the diverse peoples existing within the respective nations’ geo-political jurisdictions.

The history of colonial and postcolonial Africa demonstrates that African national languages have traditionally been mobilized and manipulated instrumentally to achieve the desired goals of political regimes of the time. National languages were invented, promoted, and cultivated during the colonial period for purposes of administrative convenience. Such manipulation of African national languages as tools for managing fluid and diverse identities of the colonised peoples constituted ‘command over language’ aimed at developing ‘languages of command’ (Cohn, 1996; Brutt-Griffler, 2006). In postcolonial Africa, national languages have come to represent imaginations of African identities as fixed entities that are contained within the geo-political frontiers of individual nation-states. This containment and encirclement is traceable to the 19th-century carving of African national boundaries by European colonialists.

We argue that through their encircling effect, national languages constitute another source of power for disciplining, punishing, normalising, and imprisoning diverse polities into the narrow cultural and linguistic norms of hegemonic forces. Of salience in the African context is the naming and development of standardised national languages that date back to and coincide with the onset of colonialism. Here, the notion of languages, conceptions of ‘linguageness,’ and their associated metalanguages that describe them are brought under the spotlight. Is there any material essence, for example, in ‘Shona,’ ‘Ndebele,’ ‘Zulu,’ ‘Chewa,’ or ‘Bemba’ as languages? To what extent do these monolithic and ontological nomenclatures represent the multiple identity narratives of all who live in the states and polities where they are spoken? Makoni and Pennycook (2007) and Ndhlovu (2015,

2020) suggest that national languages are semiotic and social inventions used to make other language practices invisible by projecting an impression of uniformity amid social, cultural, political, and linguistic diversities. In other words, the idea of national language serves to invisibilise and diminish language types and expressions that fall outside the normatively constructed standard forms.

Another pertinent point is that the national status of most African national languages remains problematic and, therefore, subject to contestation on three grounds: (1) national languages are used by hegemonic and socio-politically advantaged groups to emasculate and imprison entire populations into narrow ethnolinguistic norms; (2) most national languages assumed their status on account of the numerical supremacy of their ethnic speakers over those whose mother tongues are not in this privileged category. This is problematic in the sense that language is by its very nature a social matter whose symbolic and pragmatic value cannot be decided based on the number of speakers alone; and (3) the third point is an inverse of (b): some African national languages do not have large speaking populations that identify them as their heritage or ethnic languages, and yet they enjoy the privileged 'national language' status. A case in point here is Swahili in the East and Central African countries of Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and DRC, where small numbers of people who identify Swahili as their ethnic language do not warrant the national language status that it currently enjoys. However, through the processes of status planning in the form of terminology development coupled with vigorous popularisation and political support, Swahili is now used with a higher degree of sophistication not only in East and Central Africa but in many other parts of the world. It is now one of the working languages of the African Union, spelt out in Article 25 of the African Union Constitutive Act. Swahili is also now an international language of the widest communication that is taught at many higher education institutions in the United States of America, the Netherlands, and the European Union.

The foregoing analysis indicates that the national language in Africa is complicated and multifaceted in that it interweaves colonial processes of manipulation and control as well as postcolonial political goals of nation-building, cross-cultural integration, and identity formation. The postcolonial African nation-building enterprise was pre-eminently reinforcement and a carryover from where the colonial language-based social engineering processes left. In other words, while the objective of promoting standardised language forms (national languages) during the colonial period was "marketed as a program of enhancing administrative convenience, the same process was popularized as being part of nation building, 'progress' and 'modernization' [whatever these mean] in the context of the postcolonial

dispensation” (Ndhlovu, 2009: 124). However, the common denominator in both cases is that of control, manipulation, and the exercising of power. We interpret this as a form of linguistic encirclement that must be decolonised through centering the idea of African languages as multilayered, interconnected chains. African languages must be reimagined through the prism or metaphor of ‘frontiers’ to reflect real repertoires of “real people in their everyday real lives” (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021: 167).

Furthermore, the well-known ties among the diverse African peoples predating colonisation must be leveraged as part of the broader goal of decolonising through centering frontier Africa, frontier African languages, and frontier African identities. For example, the Bantu linguistic and cultural identity is one common narrative of origin that could bind together most African people from across the entire continent. Historical accounts and philological studies are replete with evidence that supports the claim that following their migration from southern West Africa, people who speak the genetically related Bantu languages spread throughout much of the African continent: from east of the Great Lakes region all the way through central Africa to modern-day South Africa and Namibia (Nurse & Philippson, 2003; Bresnan & Moshi, 1990; Vansina, 1995; Hiernaux, 1968). Therefore, rather than rely on narratives that begin at the point of colonial encounters (Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, Lusophone Africa, etc.), we must turn to archives on pre-colonial Africa in our search for alternative ways of seeing and thinking that are anti-colonial.

4. Dimensions of Linguistic Encirclement – Vehicular Cross-Border Languages

A remarkable goal of the African Vehicular Cross-border Languages (VCBLs), as the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) envisages, is to resolve potential intercultural communication challenges to augment African continental economic and political integration. ACALAN (2009: 4) defines VCBLs as “languages that are common to two or more states and domains straddling various usages.” Since the conceptualisation of VCBLs, many scholars have theorised its efficacy in advancing African integration, among other reasons, because “it holds the promise to push back the frontiers of colonially inherited language ideologies that are firmly entrenched in postcolonial African multilingual policy frameworks” (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021: 94). While acknowledging this supposition, it is also informative to contend that the idea of VCBLs is not new but a replica of the former colonial language ideologies that strategically continue to explicate domination, subjugation, and containment.

Situating this section within the framework of decolonial scholarship as a methodology and praxis, which deemphasises the idea of having an absolute way of solving problems (Smith, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019; Ndhlovu, 2020), we critically interrogate the discursive conceptualisation of VCBLs by ACALAN in the context of African political and economic integration, focusing on the colonial ideologies of standardisation and homogenisation of people's rich linguistic and cultural identities. Under ACALAN, an arm of the African Union, we surmise that VCBLs conceptualisation was usurped by the principles of Euro-centric and neoliberal ideologies that contributed to the construction of another form of regional containment by (a) being informed by Euro-centric models of epistemologies that create social stratification between people with their linguistic repertoires; (b) propagating the erasure African multilingual polity; (c) confining people as enumerable objects within a geolinguistic ecology; and (d) resulting in an engineered colonial invention of containment of African people with their linguistic and cultural identities.

In the context of achieving successful African integration, ACALAN identified and prioritised 12 VCBLs, notably: Chichewa/Chinyanja and Setswana (for the Southern region); Kiswahili, Somali, and Malagasy (for the Eastern region); Fulfulde, Mandenkan, and Hausa (for the Western region); Modern Standard Arabic and Berbère (for Northern region); and Lingala and Beti-fang (for Central region) (ACALAN, 2009). These vehicular cross-border languages are foregrounded to be used as lingua franca between African nation-states because they are considered tools for transcending differing linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical demarcations to enhance effective intercultural communication and African integration. However, leading sociolinguists examining the affordances of VCBLs in advancing the African integration debate have been critical to the ideologies (colonial) upon which they were conceived. For instance, Ndhlovu questions the utility of vehicular cross-border languages to resolve the intercultural communication problems of an integrated Africa by alluding to:

Vehicular cross-border languages suffer from the same limitations as those besetting national languages in the sense that: (i) they are conceived as isomorphic, monolithic, and countable entities that do not accommodate other forms; (ii) for them to functionally transnationally, cross-border languages need to be subjected to the same corpus planning and standardization processes that gave birth to standard national languages; (iii) they are contested, and their cross-border status is defined in terms of existing nation-state boundaries that they purport to transcend.

(2013b: 15)

Guided by the previous assumptions, it is apparent that VCBLs, as previously argued, are just a continuum of colonial linguistic ideologies like those of English, French, and Portuguese, which are based on monolingual ideologies that enunciate colonial matrices of power and domination. As Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) rightly remind us, the current hegemonic positions that ex-colonial languages and other African national languages hold were conceived and propagated with a methodology and conceptual hierarchisation process upon which VCBLs typify. This implies that if a system is founded on poor development practices, it is deemed to fail simply because it was designed using a wrong methodology that overlooked the expected results. In so doing, it may be rendered useless for the required tasks. Put simply, the conceptualisation of African vehicular cross-border languages was designed on the wrong system (colonial) that largely disregarded the results. It is, therefore, in tandem with colonial linguistic ideologies of nationalising, universalising, and homogenising, which are opaque to the plurilingual realities of Africa – resulting in the creation of stratified regional African nation-states where a few minorities have access to the trappings of power, wealth, and economic resources at the expense of a majority of the ordinary people who remain subjects and spectators in their state.

Regarding the previous argument tightly connected to the integration debate, Susan Gal casts doubt on the use of standardised languages for European integration. By introducing the idea of ‘standard language ideology’, she inverts the false narrative that “language boundaries are isomorphic with the boundaries of ‘publics’ – those politically significant and performatively created communities of strangers that can shape political action” (2006: 165). More concretely, Gal (2006: 175) poignantly avers, “There is no necessity for a single common (standard) language in order to create a public sphere.” To explicate this supposition within the African integration context, we doubt that the African integration dream may not be achieved if it so much relies on vehicular cross-border languages, which explicitly illuminate standardised language ideologies that annihilate multilingual identities with their speakers. Instead, it is investing heavily in the prospects of linguistic and cultural diversity in Africa that will ensure the voices of ordinary people are heard, leading to a budding ground of inclusive African economic and political integration.

The theoretical point of departure of languages being seen as colonial inventions upon which we build and extend was furthered by critical sociolinguists Alistair Pennycook and Sinfree Makoni. In their paper, *Disinvesting and (re) constituting languages*, Makoni and Pennycook (2005) trace the historical antecedents as the precursor to the colonial invention of African languages. They problematise the concept of “census ideology” and

cogently demonstrate that “the idea of linguistic enumerability is based on the dual notions of both ‘languages’ and speakers of those languages being amenable to counting” (2005: 143). This is precisely the logic that informs ACALAN’s projection of the 12 African vehicular cross-border languages perceived as a panacea to intercultural communication problems. At the heart of this linguistic ideology, which is still very common with us today, is that African multilingual polity is evasively concealed to what other scholars have referred to as ‘bilingualism through monolingualism’ (Fishman, 1967), ‘parallel monolingualism’ (Heller, 1999); ‘separate bilingualism’ (Creese & Blackledge, 2011), or ‘multiple monolingualism’ (Ndhlovu, 2014). Instead, Hill (2002: 128) suggests that the enumeration of speakers should be founded on a “monolingual norm of speakerhood” which maintains that in multilingual contexts, such as Africa, speakerhood should be a key factor to determine language use and not “census ideology” as observed by Makoni and Pennycook (2005: 143).

Given the previously mentioned contestations, we contend that African vehicular cross-border languages are by and large seen in the colonial archive of knowledge. Essentially, we refer them to another form of the colonial invention of ‘regional linguistic containment,’ which is a microcosm of colonialism insofar as it purviews both people with their linguistic repertoires within artificial colonial precincts, namely Northern, Eastern, Western, Central, and Southern regions. Undeniably, this scenario instigates chances of social exclusion of the majority of people based on their linguistic proficiency of the 12 projected VCBLs. Accordingly, the choice of languages to be used for mainstreaming African integration should not misconstrue since “language can determine who has access to schools, who has opportunities for economic advancement, who participates in political decisions, who have access to governmental services, and who gets treated fairly by governmental agencies” (Ndhlovu et al., 2022). Equivalently, language can also determine “who gets ahead and who is left behind; it can affect the prospects for success – for ethnic groups and for individuals in these groups” (Ndhlovu, 2015, 2020; Brown & Ganguly, 2003; Eades, 2013).

Discernibly, vehicular cross-border languages and African national languages are different sides of the same coin in so much as they all embolden aspects of power hidden in monolingual ideologies that patronise the colonial matrix of power and domination. As such, the African integration dream may not be realised if only the 12 VCBLs are appropriated. For that reason, decolonial epistemic perspectives become preminent to address these underlying challenges not as a dictum to providing solutions but as a paradigm of suggesting alternative ways of knowing, doing, and being.

New alternatives, therefore, demand thinking beyond the traditional and fatalistic view of conceptualising problems. As Makoni and Pennycook (2005: 152) succinctly note:

All societies are in one form of transition, and they cannot be changed by using modes of thought with which they are still confronted. Change requires new thought and new ways linguistically of conceptualizing problems.

When we talk of new ways or alternatives in how language(s) is conceptualised, we need not simply focus on colonial history as a problem. Rather, the issue should be about formulating theories that conceptualise African languages within the spectrum of the linguistic realities of the people and their challenges. However, we conclude by posing a fundamental question: If the ideologies of the Global South are to be used in conceptualising African languages, how might they not (re)produce the same ideologies of colonial domination that they decry?

5. Implications for African Language Education Policies

Having clarified the key contours of linguistic encirclement, we now turn to its manifestations in the domain of language, literacy, and education. We survey the ways in which the colonial legacy of linguistic encirclement continues to shape language and literacy education policies in postcolonial Africa and how this might be decolonised. The focus is specifically on policies around the teaching of languages in schools and not on the medium of instruction, which is a separate matter. At independence, nearly every African country that had been colonised inherited policies around the teaching and learning of languages that were originally designed to serve social engineering processes that would enhance the colonial goals of divide and rule. Although some such policies were – in principle – repealed at independence, they remain in practice. We show how by looking at the case studies of two African countries: South Africa and Kenya.

In South Africa, the onset of the apartheid political system in 1948 saw the carving of the country into semi-autonomous ethnic-based territories that came to be known as ‘Bantustans’ or ‘homelands.’ The apartheid regime set these apart as land on the peripheries of South Africa for exclusive occupation by Africans (Black South Africans). The *Self-Governing Territories Constitution Act of 1971* legislated the formation of “independent” and “self-governing” Bantustans. In just a little more than a decade, ten culturally and ethnically distinct Bantu territories were formed and classified into two categories of (a) self-governing: Lebowa, Gazankulu, Qwaqwa,

Kangwane, Kwazulu, and Kwandebele; and (b) independent: Bophuthatswana, Transkei, Venda, and Ciskei (Lund, 2008; Mnwana, 2011). Language-in-education policy then followed as an instrument of enforcing this social engineering process of separate ethnic segregation. In 1953, the *Bantu Education Act* was introduced to ensure that discriminatory educational practices for black people could be uniformly implemented across South Africa. Children in each of the ten Bantustans were taught in the language of the homeland, plus Afrikaans. This, on paper, seemed to be a good policy that supported mother tongue or heritage language education, but in practice, it prevented intercultural interactions and exchanges among the black people resident in different homelands. Therefore, the dark side of the policy is that it was designed to entrench segregation through separate language-based citizenships and identities. The endemic inequalities and the exclusion of the majority of black South Africans from participation in social, political, and economic spheres of life that remain to this day are major consequences of this apartheid system of education.

Following the advent of democratic governance in 1994, South Africa introduced new language policy measures aimed at reversing the ills of apartheid. The new language policy rests on the four pillars of promoting national unity within the country's linguistic and cultural diversity; entrenching democracy, which includes the protection of language rights; promoting respect for and tolerance towards linguistic and cultural diversity; and furthering the elaboration and modernisation of the African languages (Ndhlovu, 2008). To this effect, South Africa's national language policy, which informs approaches to language and literacy education, is driven by imperatives of unity, equality, social justice, and greater cross-/intercultural understanding among the diverse people that were previously confined in their respective homelands. The aspirational goal is that of building a South African national identity narrative that is socially cohesive and less balkanised or fragmented. Consequently, a multilingual policy that recognises 12 official languages was legislated and written into the national constitution in 1996 (see Satyo, 1999; Beukes, 2004; Perry, 2004; Ndhlovu, 2008; and Department of Arts and Culture, 2003 for more detail on provisions of the language policy).

Having said the previous, some lingering concerns remain around the disconnect between the apparently generous, progressive, and revolutionary intentions of South Africa's policy on the one hand and the lacklustre implementation of the same on the other. There is a glaring mismatch between that stated policy and what Ndhlovu (2008) calls the hidden policy. In his critique, Ndhlovu (2008) suggests that the politics of agenda-setting, selective attention, inclusion and exclusion, and the management of belief, trust, and consent are at the heart of South Africa's language policy that purports

to accommodate linguistic diversity. Unlike in the apartheid era, where racial or ethnic difference was an explicitly stated goal, the language policy of post-apartheid South Africa hides political processes of social engineering behind the veil of legislated multiple official languages.

The South African Constitution and relevant policies are quite detailed and heavy on guidelines for languages of learning and teaching (LOLT) but very thin on guidelines for the teaching of languages as subjects. Section 29(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa says, “Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable” (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Similarly, the National Education Policy Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) deals with the language question in the context of the medium of instruction and not in terms of languages as subjects in the curriculum. A foundational premise of the National Education Policy Act is one about the need to push back vestiges of the apartheid system, whereby education was one of the primary tools to enforce the deep-seated discrimination against the black people of South Africa. However, two blind spots remain insofar as some aspects of the National Education Policy Act inadvertently reproduce the very same forms of linguistic encirclement that it was meant to undo. The first is in Section 3 of the National Education Policy Act, which provides for the teaching of languages in a staggered or rather hierarchised manner by categorising them into ‘home language/mother tongue,’ ‘first additional language,’ and ‘second additional language.’ These categories of languages are introduced into the school curriculum at different stages of children’s education journeys from primary school through high school. The underlying implication of such categorisation is that the languages classified in this way are hermetically sealed, self-contained, and not connected to one another. This layering and ring-fencing in language education policy is a form of linguistic encirclement. It contradicts the well-documented patterns of fluidity and boundary crossing that are characteristic of the real language practices of ordinary South African children in their everyday, real lives (Ndhlovu, 2015; Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021).

Related to the previous, the second blind spot in South Africa’s National Education Policy Act is about responsibility for implementation. There is a three-level policy management structure, namely national government level, provincial government level, and local government level (Ndhlovu, 2008).³ This means, in principle, the documented language policy of South Africa has provisions for the devolution of decision-making on language use from the national, through the provincial, and down to the local government levels. The overall intention of this devolved approach to managing and implementing language policy in South Africa is four-fold: democratising

decision-making; encouraging the use of all official languages in a wide range of contexts; easing channels of communication; and ensuring the use of all official languages as lingua francas at local and regional levels (Kamper, 2004; Ndhlovu, 2008). This is, indeed, a commendable approach to implementing policy guidelines on languages in education and in other social domains more broadly. However, the downside is that the language choices that provincial and local governments make are driven by local needs and interests, with little regard to the broader imperative to cultivate social cohesion and intercultural and cross-linguistic understanding at the national level. The default for provinces and local governments is always to pick languages that are widely spoken in their respective regions and have them taught as subjects in local public schools.

There is nothing wrong with this except that it inadvertently reinforces the very same linguistic encirclement and balkanisation that is the legacy of the apartheid Bantustan social engineering. A much better and more progressive approach would be one where provinces and local governments choose official languages spoken outside of their respective jurisdictions to be taught as subjects in public schools. For example, in KwaZulu-Natal, Setswana and/or Sesotho can be the selected languages to be taught in public schools in the province. Similarly, Limpopo, Northwest or Northern Cape would have isiZulu, isiNdebele, or isiXhosa as school subjects. This approach can be replicated across the nine provinces. The singular most important benefit of such an approach is that it would help break down those linguistic and cultural barriers that were created by apartheid policies of separate existence. This would provide students from across the country opportunities to learn each other's languages (as subjects) and to have a better understanding of the cultures of South African communities from provinces and regions other than their own.

The example of South Africa we discussed previously is comparable to Kenya's language-in-education policy. In Kenya, the colonial education system had a long and macabre history. It was deliberately designed to entrench a racially stratified system of schooling such as 'African Education,' 'European Education,' or 'Asian education.' As the Koech Report (1999) observes, the colonial education system was "restrictive" and "discriminatory" as "reflected in the racially segregated schools for Europeans, Asians and Africans" (p. 2). Through this segregated education system, Europeans were being prepared for white-collar jobs in government, Asians for clerical jobs, and Africans for menial or industrial jobs. This explains why the education of Africans only emphasised vocational and industrial training (Chege, 2006).

The previous separatist policy had far-reaching ramifications not only on how education was to be proffered but also on how language-in-education

policies both in colonial and postcolonial Kenya were to be formulated and implemented. The historiography of this phenomenon points to two pivotal epochs: the colonial and postcolonial spells. The colonial era discerns an overt and covert linguistic dichotomy of goals between the missionaries on the one hand and colonialists on the other. As was the case elsewhere across colonial Africa, both missionaries and colonial administrators favoured the teaching of the mother tongue in schools. While the missionaries supported these languages for proselytisation, the colonialists advocated them primarily for administrative purposes (Bunyi, 1999). As Bunyi (1999) argues, the mother tongue principle was incongruent with the White settlers' interests in Kenya, who supported their teaching, considering that it was a symbol of sourcing a cheap labour force from Africans.

At face value, the missionaries' and colonialists' support of teaching indigenous languages in schools would seem to have African interests at heart. However, this was part of the selective agenda to create and naturalise alien social class enclaves that defined Africans within their straitjackets of linguistic identities. Therefore, language became a form of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) between the haves (English speakers) and the haves-nots (non-English speakers). It is no wonder the colonial administrators advocated for the controlled teaching of English in order to obtain a low calibre of employees for administration purposes (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998). Echoing Mazrui's argument, Nabea (2009) posits that the British settlers became apprehensive of the Europeanisation of Africans through English insofar as it would be an impediment for them to access a cheap labour force if they became too educated.

The education commissions and conferences of the colonial era typically valorised teaching English over Kiswahili and the mother tongue from primary school to university. Notably, the United Missionary Conference (UMC) in Kenya (1909), the Phelps Stoke Commission Report (1924), the Beecher Report (1949), the Prator-Hutasoit Commission Report (1952), and the Binns Education Commission Report (1952) all played a pivotal role in this regard. For instance, during the United Missionary Conference of 1909, the language question in education was first discussed. The conference recommended using the mother tongue in the first three classes in primary school, followed by Kiswahili in two middle classes, while English was to be used in the rest of the classes up to university (Gorman, 1974). Similarly, the Phelps Stoke Commission Report (1924) upheld the UMC recommendations. However, it went on to recommend the removal of Kiswahili from the curriculum, except in areas where it was used as a native language. Ideally, the removal of Kiswahili was meant to avert its growth and spread on which Kenya's political emancipation was anchored (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998). It is worth mentioning that subsequent education commissions

(see Beecher Report, 1949; Prator-Hutasoit Commission Report, 1952; Binns Education Commission Report, 1952) took precedence over the previous commission's recommendations until the later years of colonial rule.

On attaining political independence in 1963, English was declared the official language. This officialdom consecrated English use in all government sectors (Nabea, 2009). The epistemological understanding of this declaration, as postulated by Wa Thiong'o (1986), was to create a new form of leadership and elites who would push forward the colonial interests since Kenya was on the trajectory of attaining political independence. Thus, "English was the official vehicle and magic formula to colonial elitedom" (Wa Thiong'o, 1985: 115). This scenario remains in Kenya today. The teaching and learning of languages as subjects in postcolonial Kenya are a legacy of colonial language policies insofar as they reproduce and maintain hierarchical social classes that reflect the workings of linguistic encirclement. Successive commissions (see Ominde Report, 1964; Gathathi Report, 1976; Mackay Report, 1981; Kamunge Report, 1988; Koech Report, 1999) that were set up to address Kenya's educational challenges remained colonial. A common denominator of these postcolonial commissions was that they inadvertently reinforced colonial language policies of hierarchisation, class-based segregation, and encirclement that remain problematic to achieving social cohesion and equality in socio-economic and political advancement.

The Ominde Commission, the first postcolonial education committee, was formed in 1964 to suggest solutions to the systemic educational challenges Kenya was facing. Concerning the linguistic question, the commission found that most Kenyans preferred a trilingual approach to education. The mother tongue was favoured for verbal communication, especially in rural areas, whereas English and Kiswahili were desired for education from primary to university. The commission, therefore, recommended the continued teaching and learning of English, arguing that it would spawn learning in all subjects by ensuring lustrous transitions from 'vernaculars' (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1996). More significantly, the commission reiterated the use of the mother tongue and Kiswahili in the education system at differing levels and geographical confines (Nabea, 2009).

Hitherto, even with the 2016 introduction of the new curriculum (the Competency-based curriculum – 2-6-6-3) from the current 8.4.4 curriculum, the teaching of languages, especially indigenous languages, has been peripherised in the lower primary school level (Republic of Kenya, 2016). A more worrisome situation is that indigenous languages have yet to be recommended to be taught in schools from classes one to three in rural areas, where they are predominantly spoken. English and Kiswahili, categorised as official languages in the Constitution (Republic of Kenya, 2010), have been proposed to be taught as a second language. Given these realities, we

argue that as in South Africa (and indeed across the entire continent) colonial linguistic policies and various forms of linguistic encirclement are still entrenched in Kenya's language education system. The net effect is three-fold: (1) colonial languages are overvalued while indigenous languages continue being undervalued; (2) perceived ethnic cleavages are perpetuated for administrative purposes (divide and rule policy); and (3) intercultural unity and social cohesion are threatened.

In light of the previous, we observe that language-in-education policies in Kenya constitute another form of neo-colonialism and confinement that must be decolonised. We suggest that instead of teaching the indigenous languages within their circumscribed catchment areas, teaching these languages in different regions where they are not predominantly spoken must be the policy and practice. For instance, languages such as Luo, Kisii, and Kuria, widely spoken in the former Nyanza province, could be taught in public schools in the former Central province (Kiambu, Meru, Nyandarua, Embu Counties), where Gikuyu, Embu, Meru, and Ambeere are spoken and vice versa. Similarly, in the former Western Province (Busia, Kakamega, Bungoma, Vihiga, Trans-Nzoia Counties), Luhya and its dialects (Samia, Isukha, Idaho, Khayo, Marachi, etc.) could be adopted and taught in primary public schools in the former Coastal province (Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, and Lamu counties), where Digo, Chonyi, Duruma, Kambe, Giriama, Taita are predominantly spoken. This could be replicated across all the former eight provinces of Kenya. Doing so will help mitigate the negative effects of linguistic confinement set up by the colonialists and foster national unity, intercultural understanding, peaceful coexistence, and social cohesion.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have taken up Ngugi wa Thiong'o's concept of linguistic encirclement and used it as an analytical lens in troubling mainstream narratives about Africa, the language question in (post)colonial Africa, and African identities. Our effort to unsettle the pervasive effects of linguistic encirclement discussed in this chapter invokes the idea of socially realistic multilingualism (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021) as a pathway for epistemic disobedience. This is about privileging – in our analyses of African identities – those languages and language practices that reflect people's everyday communicative practices. Such communicative practices are characterised by hybridity, fluidity, and boundary crossing – as opposed to notions of fixity, purity, normativity, and boundedness (Blommaert et al., 2012) that were at the heart of colonial linguistics projects. Unlike standardised languages of the state that tend to encircle and circumscribe individuals and communities, these frontier varieties are the 'languages of the people' in the

sense that they emerge from the atoms of society and reflect users' creativity and innovation. We, therefore, conclude that the concept of 'socially realistic multilingualism' is a fitting counter-hegemonic approach that we can leverage in charting alternative pathways for reimagining decolonised African identities that side-step colonially-inherited discourses of encirclement and containment.

Notes

- 1 We provide detailed elaboration on the concept of linguistic encirclement in the next section.
- 2 Some of the material in this section consists of significantly revised extracts from Ndhlovu, F. (2013a). African national language question and the African national project. In S.J. Ndhlovu-Gatsheni and F. Ndhlovu (eds.), *Nationalism matters: The African national project in an age of globalization* (pp. 121–139). Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa.
- 3 For details on the role of each level of government in managing language policy, please refer to Ndhlovu, F. 2008. The conundrums of language policy and politics in South Africa and Zimbabwe. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 28(1), pp. 59–80.

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5

NICHE LANGUAGES¹

Decolonising Language Use Through Domain Specialisation and Linguistic Harmony

Mohammed Zahid Akter and Arvind Iyengar

1. Introduction

Although driven primarily by the prospect of economic benefit, a central tenet underlying the Euro-Western colonial enterprise was the ideal of a notionally monolingual society, with the coloniser's language at the top of the pecking order and indigenous ones at the bottom. Former colonies of the Global South, in their modern avatar of independent nation-states, continue to retain latent imperialist linguistic ideologies in their political structure, wherein economically and/or politically dominant language(s) with codified written forms are perceived as having the most value and, consequently, designated the 'national' or 'official' languages. Besides undermining indigenous spoken traditions, such a capitalist, utilitarian and graphocentric approach to language use legitimises mutually competitive free-market behaviour among languages and entrenches a survival-of-the-fittest attitude. Consequently, well-intentioned maintenance and revitalisation efforts often focus on increasing minority and indigenous languages' domains of use and creating or codifying a Roman-script orthography. Unfortunately, this inevitably sets minority languages on a collision course with socioeconomically powerful national or official languages and destabilises previously harmonious linguistic ecologies. In this chapter, we argue that apparent socioeconomic utility or availability of a standardised written form are neo-colonial and suboptimal metrics of language value. Moreover, sustaining minority and indigenous languages need not entail sociolinguistic one-upmanship. Rather, we posit that stable language use and maintenance are best achieved when languages find their respective niches in the

ecology and co-exist in mutual harmony, with different languages being used in specific domains in a complementary manner. Not only does such an approach often dovetail with organic multilingualism prevalent in the precolonial Global South, but it also has the potential to liberate indigenous communities from the implicit pressures of expanding their language's domains of use and inventing a standardised written form as outward indicators of their language's health.

In making our case, we first introduce in Section 2 the connection between colonialism and linguistic diversity – or, more precisely, the decline of the latter. We begin by unpacking the aims underlying the colonial enterprise of several early modern European powers, with particular emphasis on their problematising of linguistic diversity. This is followed in Section 3 by a critical historical analysis of the emergence of modern nation-states, with a focus on nation-states in the postcolonial Global South and how they were often created in the image of their Northern counterparts. Here, we shed light on and critique the policies of modern nation-states in unintentionally or deliberately perpetuating colonial-imperialist approaches towards linguistic diversity. Despite being embedded or camouflaged within the discourses of development and progress, we contend that such policies simply serve to entrench a 'survival-of-the-fittest' attitude, causing distinct socio-political groups to fight each other for power, status and money under the banner of their respective languages. As an alternative to this competitive dog-eat-dog approach, we posit in Section 4 that languages and their associated social groups thrive in a situation of domain specialisation, with specific languages being used for distinct purposes and societal multilingualism being the norm. We argue that such an approach encourages the sustainable and harmonious co-existence of languages and peoples, in the process engendering peace and mutual harmony. This, in turn, augurs well for the economic growth and stability of the society in question. Most importantly, we argue that the idea of niche languages and domain specialisation is not a utopian ideal, nor is it novel. Rather, it has its roots in traditional linguistic practices prevalent in the precolonial Global South, which makes it a genuinely decolonising and emancipating approach.

2. Language and Colonialism

Colonialism, despite its historical, territorial and demographic differences, began literally with encroachment and operated essentially on a relationship of exploitation and dominance. At the outset, this dominance manifested in the sheer display of military power and other repressive forces, but to sustain itself, it had to create a stable and loyal regime. In order to do so, the colonisers formulated ideologies and developed tools so as to effectively manage

or control diversity or, more accurately, from their point of view, deviations and/or aberrations. An often implicit but powerful weapon of this control was to create hierarchies between the rulers and the ruled and all the concomitant categories that these hierarchies encompassed, including racial, religious and linguistic. Regarding the linguistic, which is the focus of this chapter, the colonial agenda of language, while in many cases hidden, was astonishingly explicit in some cases. For example, in 1492, Queen Isabella of Spain was presented with a plan for establishing Castilian ‘as a tool for conquest abroad and a weapon to suppress untutored speech at home’ (Illich, 1981). Further, the coloniser’s language was conceived of not only as a better language but in the truest sense of the term, *the language*, as if languages of the colonised were not languages. In this connection, note the explicit goal of the colonial role of the French as articulated by the first director of the Alliance Française, founded in 1883:

It is necessary to attach the colonies to the metropole by a very solid psychological bond, against the day when their progressive emancipation ends in a form of federation as is probable – that they be and remain French in language, thought, and spirit.

(Rodney, 1972, p. 259)

The inherent nature of colonial linguistic agenda is, of course, not new, and the seed of the colonial linguistic epistemology does, in fact, date to the ancient Greeks who stigmatised non-Greek speakers as barbarian, indicating speakers of a non-language. In fact, the colonial conceptualisation of language reached such a level of absurdity that a Frenchman writing on why French was a ‘universal language’ argued that “languages which do not follow the syntax of French *are illogical and inadequate*” (Calvet, 1987; our emphasis).

As the colonial language(s) established its hegemony over time, an array of *non*-linguistic factors that characterise the coloniser’s language, such as codification, spoken and written standardisation, literacy and institutionalism, became the defining criteria of language. These sociolinguistic beliefs and reifications helped the colonisers to rationalise the ‘intrinsic’ superiority of their language and to effectively brainwash the so-called ‘enlightened’ indigenous elites into believing that their languages were not worth pursuing for livelihood, ‘progress’ and ‘civilisation’. The impassionate advocacy for English education by the indigenous elites in early nineteenth-century colonial India bears testimony to this tendency. Consider, for example, Raja Rammohun Roy’s famous letter to Lord Amherst (Dec. 11, 1823), urging the government of India to stop contributing to Sanskrit-language education and spend the money instead on teaching English (Chatterjee, 1975).

Further, with the colonial episteme of hierarchies in the conceptualisation of language, these indigenous local elites, when turned anti-colonial nationalists, replicated and reproduced the very colonial-linguistic hierarchical binaries of national-regional, official-vernacular, standard-dialect/patois, cultivated-uncultivated and so on in their formation of nation-states in the postcolonial context (see Section 3). The coloniser's language was not only considered the language of 'reason', 'logic' and 'science', but it also became the language of God in the postcolonial context. The national elites transferred this ideology in making the language of the superior ethno-national group the language of their modernist and nationalist projects. The bottom line is that, in the colonial discourse, the ideas of 'standard', 'modern', 'systematic', 'written', 'civilised', 'literate' and so on could not be conceived of without necessarily evoking the 'chaotic', 'barbaric', 'ugly', 'non-literary' and 'primitive' local colonial antecedents.

In addition to creating a political condition that favours the language(s) of the colonial ruler, colonialism, by its inherent nature of exploitation, has also seriously adversely impacted the languages of the colonial subjects. The histories of colonialism in diverse territories of Asia, Africa and the Americas are filled with stories of forced displacement and concentration of indigenous peoples as labourers for the colonial undertaking of agricultural production. For example, the Dutch 'cultivation system' for the production of sugar in nineteenth-century Java (Elson, 1986), the Portuguese forced cotton cultivation in Mozambique (Isaacman, 1992), the concentration of labour force to produce ivory, rubber, palm oil and other agricultural products in the early twentieth century Belgian Congo (Lyons, 1988), and workers on fixed-term contracts, most notably Indians, of whom nearly 1.3 million signed contracts of indenture from the 1830s to the 1920s, filled the demand for plantation labour from the Caribbean and the Guianas to South Africa and islands in the Indian and Pacific oceans (Northrup, 1995). These brutal acts of forced labour transformed vast proportions of rural colonial populations into a class of wage-earners who eventually became uprooted from their linguistic habitats. Over time, these new conditions turned the displaced groups into largely monolingual nuclear families with a certain degree of fluency and literacy in the coloniser's language, which was almost invariably imposed as a *lingua franca*.

Another accompanying and historically well-documented act of colonialism was its religious interference in the name of evangelising the colonial pagan 'savage' with lasting linguistic repercussions.² This process provided yet another, and in many cases more effective, route for the colonial language to enter the private domains of the colonised and unsettle the niches in which the indigenous languages thrived for hundreds of years.

Apart from the officially ended territorial colonialism, the colonialism that lasted through the settler colonies in Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the Americas also adversely affected (in fact, in most cases, more drastically affected) the local indigenous peoples and their languages. In these linguistically diverse and unique ecological spaces, the colonisers forcefully imported their sociolinguistic world views regarding what constitutes a language (e.g., merely a communicative tool³), what its relation to society is (e.g., one language, one society) and what knowing a language means (e.g., literacy). For example, the United States' de facto language policy that attempted to transform a diverse and indigenous population into monolingual English users was directly linked to the processes of colonisation and national identity formation. In support of this, note US President Theodore Roosevelt's declaration in 1919: 'We have room for but one flag, the American flag . . . We have room for but *one language* here, and that is *the English language* . . . and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people' (Phillipson, 2012, p. 212; our emphasis). In these settler colonies, we have harrowing accounts of the systematic decimation of indigenous peoples along with their languages at a rate that is unmatched in history. The mass killing of language, or 'linguistic genocide' as the United Nations terms it, is still rampant in the modern world and can be considered a crime against humanity (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010). Finally, the colonial legacies that are still at work and playing a central role in displacing indigenous languages are the direct linkage between language and economic, political and military power, which determine the fate of languages. Sadly, these deeply rooted colonial legacies are active in reproducing 'colonised minds' in the newly liberated former colonies, which wrongly believe, as Phillipson (2012) notes, that 'knowledge society' is a colonial invention, though, in fact, such societies flourished in India, China, Arabia and in other Southern societies long before.

3. Indigenous Languages in the Postcolonial World

Two of the major forces that characterise the postcolonial world include imperialism and nation-states. Though postcolonial countries are seemingly politically 'independent' in one way or another, they operate with the dynamics of imperialism. Since its inception, imperialism has, no doubt, functioned differently in different times and territories. However, in general, we can distinguish modern imperialism from historical ones (i.e., Roman, Persian and Ottoman empires) in terms of its nature, scope, strategy and impact. Whereas the apparatuses of earlier imperialisms were mostly engaged in collecting levies and taxes, the scope of modern imperialism goes far beyond and deeply impacts peoples' cultures and languages in

intricate ways (Edwards, 2004). We are aware that it is modern imperialism that accounts for the highest number of language deaths (Tsunoda, 2006). In order to gain total control over peoples' lives without territorial occupations, modern imperialism or neo-imperialism requires a condition in which a language is used so as to gain political, economic and cultural domination. At present, the language that serves this purpose is English. English is now undoubtedly the dominant language of commodity, knowledge, technology and communication. In this role, English not only displaces countless small indigenous languages but also marginalises even large ones, including Hindi, Bangla, Spanish, Swahili and so on. What the imperialist power does to legitimise English's hegemony is draw on the so-called 'common sense' logic, which states that our world requires 'a common language for communication for all' (Phillipson, 1992). What remains hidden is that in the process, the capitalist West or the Global North monopolises both knowledge and commodity and takes up the 'subject' position in affairs regarding language and communication. This imperialist force does not see the possibility of a cohabitation of languages and cultures, instead constantly promoting a monolingual and monocultural myth of society, which is deeply rooted in the Western, colonial-Northern epistemology of society and the world.

Further, to legitimise English's international status, imperialist power propagates that the United States or the United Kingdom no longer holds the language's ownership; English is rather owned by those who speak it. But the irony is that the Anglophone countries retain the monopoly of English by setting its norms and standards. In doing so, they make a staggering profit from their language learning and testing businesses. By monopolising the English Language Teaching (ELT) industries (e.g., ETS, TESOL, etc.), these countries have created a global ELT market to sell books, materials and 'native-speaker' teachers. In this way, the profits that they make exceed even the collective GDPs of several postcolonial Southern countries (Khan, 2009). The US and UK monopolies over the world's standardised tests of English through TOEFL and IELTS attest to this grim fact. Another factor that reinforces English's hegemony in areas such as aesthetics and epistemology is the ubiquity of English studies in the postcolonial Southern education systems, whereas local and indigenous languages and literatures are severely ignored. English literature (e.g., Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*), in complicity with imperialism, keeps controlling the postcolonial peoples ideologically, aesthetically and politically and helps reproduce a negative attitude towards vernacular languages and literatures.

There are also other ways in which imperialism has, indirectly but inevitably, affected the indigenous languages. One of them is the modernist projects that attempt to transform indigenous peoples' notions of life, wellbeing

and 'development'. At present, with its superiority in technology, military and politics, imperialism is more capable than ever in achieving these goals. Currently, the predominant notion of 'progress' requires owning private property, earning wages and having access to global commodity markets. The indigenous way of life cannot support and sustain this lifestyle. This results in mass migration of indigenous peoples to urban areas where they disintegrate and shift to imperial/neo-colonial languages and cultures.

As regards nation-states, we have noted in Section 2 that the architects of nation-states in the postcolonial Global South are essentially the local colonial elites who, in their vision of nation-states, transferred many of the mantras (e.g., one nation, one language; a language as standard and inherently better and is accorded more prestige and honour, etc.) that they picked from their colonial masters. What modern nation-states do immediately upon formation is that they declare the ideology of the majority and/or the powerful ethnic group as the ideology of the state. In so doing, they impose the identity and preferences of the ruling class on all its citizens. Thus, Malaysia, for example, takes after the identity of the majority and powerful ethnic group Malay, Bangladesh of the Bangalee, Sri Lanka of the Sinhalese, Spain of the Spanish and so on. In the process, the language of the powerful ethnic group typically becomes the language of the state. This was not the case before the emergence of modern nation-states, where languages were usually associated with a 'speech community' (MacKey, 2003).

Nowadays, though, most countries of the world, whether explicitly or implicitly, make a language their national language (as in Bangladesh and Israel) or some languages their official languages (as in India and South Africa). A possible danger of this tendency is that, at best, 300 languages (against about 195 nation-states) out of about 7,000 languages may get state-sanctioned support and protection while the rest of the languages remain unsupported and are left to perish. Further, emulating the paradigm of imperialism, nation-states also stress the need for a common language for all to communicate within the country. However, compared to imperialism, the forces of nation-states are, in most cases, far more direct and take place under 'legal' façades. For nation-states, the use of the official or national language(s) and, thus, the languages of the ruling class are often essential conditions to function in society. In effect, that language(s) becomes associated with the peoples' prospects in education, jobs and careers.

The ability to use the language of the ruling class becomes emblematic of peoples' patriotism and allegiance to their country. In this process, by making all people believe that an official or a national language is the language of all, nation-states legitimise the promotion and support for the language(s) of the ruling class by allocating most of its resources to those languages. In so doing, they first formulate language policies accommodating only the

language(s) of the ruling class of the powerful ethnic group. In policy documents, they declare this language as 'national' (e.g., Indonesia, Bangladesh, etc.) or some languages as 'official' (e.g., India, South Africa, etc.). Second, they direct all kinds of economic and political leverages in 'developing' and disseminating the language(s) of the ruling class. For example, most nation-states make a systematic allocation of their budgets to disseminate the language(s) of the ruling class and commission linguists, textbook writers and educationists to codify, systemise and promote the language(s).

In addition, often, they force the print and electronic media to use the language(s) of the ruling class. As noted, all these measures often take place with complete negligence to small, indigenous languages. A direct consequence of this kind of language policy is that indigenous children fail to get an education in their mother tongues in the new colonial/Northern social dynamic in which they are forced to go to school. This disrupts inter-generational transmissions of their mother tongues. Besides, often, a lack of perceived utilitarian value of indigenous languages and their absence in books, media and public places generate a negative attitude towards those languages even in the minds of indigenous speakers (Bradley, 2002). Therefore, it is no wonder that indigenous peoples are sometimes reported to be unwilling to preserve their own languages, as we have found with some of the Dayak speakers in Sarawak, Malaysia (Akter, 2014) and Pangkhua speakers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh (Akter, 2020, 2022, 2024).

Further, the 'development' projects that nation-states undertake often go against the interests of indigenous peoples. For example, the undertaking of dam projects (Maan Dam, Bargi Dam, Maheswar Dam, etc.) by the Madhya Pradesh government of India has displaced thousands of Adivasis from their homes (Roy, 2005). Likewise, the building of the Captai Dam in the core living areas of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh left hundreds of them homeless. The Malaysian government, as we witness, has undertaken several massive palm oil plantation projects by clearing forests where many indigenous peoples live. Similar projects are being undertaken by nation-states every day without seeking consent from indigenous peoples and giving any thought to their impacts on the lives of indigenous peoples. These kinds of 'development' projects usually result in mass migration of indigenous peoples to cities and urban areas. An irrevocable result of this is that, in their new living conditions, these peoples tend to undergo a language shift towards the dominant language(s) in their new areas of settlement with the majority and powerful ethnic group(s) while abandoning their own languages.

Lastly, we would like to shed some light on how the collaboration of imperialism and nation-states leads to the endangerment of indigenous languages. In many ways, the ruling class and the imperialist forces have

common interests in terms of economic advantage and ideological hegemony. More precisely, the rulers of nation-states are mostly represented by those who come from the majority and powerful ethnic group(s) and who are already ideologically controlled by the modernist projects of neo-imperialism. The predecessors of these few local elites from the powerful ethnic group were the main beneficiaries of imperialism during its territorial phase (Mommensen, 1986). It should not then come as a surprise that nation-state governments divert most of their national resources to the service of the national elites that are represented by the powerful ethnic group(s). This is evidenced by the enormous allocations of budget for the promotion and dissemination of the English language, often by hiring foreign experts and consultants. They do so usually without sanctioning any money to ensure indigenous peoples' basic education in their mother tongues. Budgetary allocations for education of most of the countries of the Global South from Asia and Africa and their contributions to the 'promotion' of the English language conform to this tendency (MacKey, 2003).

4. Language Ecology, Niche Languages and The Future of Indigenous Languages

As described in Section 2, the colonial linguistic episteme was centred around an idealised monolingual and monocultural society. This necessitated the establishment and maintenance of named languages as distinct bounded entities, with the concomitant proclamation and enforcement of their respective roles in society. To this end, the colonisers' languages, in their normative written forms, invariably occupied the top of the pecking order and were used in domains of power and status such as education and government. At the bottom lay speech varieties or lects used by the colonised. At best, if the colonised society happened to use a codified language or register in formal or liturgical contexts – such as classical Arabic, Chinese or Sanskrit – the colonisers might pay lip service to it (Evans, 2002; Frykenberg, 1988; Patton, 2018). The presence of a quasi-standardised lect used in highbrow situations aligned with the colonisers' own bias of a codified language being a marker of supposed civilisation. Conversely, the absence of a classical speech variety and/or a relatively standardised written form reinforced colonial stereotypes of an underdeveloped or savage society (Batibo, 2005, p. 58; Ndhlovu, 2008, p. 138). As a result, oral-only lects were considered fair game for being displaced from their place in the linguistic ecosystem by a seemingly higher-status and socioeconomically more useful codified language.

The displacement of lects perceived as low-status and socioeconomically worthless has resulted in what psycholinguist Ajit Mohanty (2006)

describes as *anti-predatory* behaviour. In the context of minority languages in India, he notes that:

When animals of subordinate species are threatened by powerful predators, they engage in some anti-predatory behaviors to enhance their chances of survival. Such behaviors usually involve retreating to areas of lesser access and visibility and low resources. A similar pattern is quite evident in the maintenance of minor and tribal languages in contact with major languages in India. In face of pressures from dominant contact languages, these languages withdraw into domains of lesser socio-economic power and significance and their speakers usually adopt a form of bilingualism in which the tribal/minority languages are invariably restricted to domains of home and in-group communication and other less significant domains.

(*Mohanty, 2006, p. 266*)

Notwithstanding the portrayal of home and in-group communication as 'less significant domains', Mohanty's analogy of socially subordinated languages withdrawing to less conspicuous domains of use neatly captures the sociolinguistic reality of minority languages and their speakers, not only in India but across postcolonial societies of the wider Global South. According to Mohanty's allegorical portrayal, the societal manifestation of a language is akin to that of an organism in its ecosystem. If threatened, it tends to retreat in order to ensure its survival. Put differently, whenever languages compete – or are forced to compete – for a particular ecological space, it naturally triggers competition and, consequently, a survival-of-the-fittest attitude. Such a situation inevitably results in a race to the bottom and is detrimental to linguistic diversity and societal harmony.

Scholarship from the Global North on the subject of language maintenance often tends to emphasise expanding a language's domains of use as an imperative for ensuring its survival (Fishman, 1991, 2001). In making such recommendations, less attention is paid to the feasibility of doing so in the linguistic ecology the target language finds itself in. Albeit well-intentioned, such one-size-fits-all recommendations may, on occasion, come across as idealistic and out-of-touch with the everyday situation and needs of individual minority and indigenous communities in the postcolonial Global South. Blanket suggestions of increasing a minority language's domains of use tacitly entail pitting it against a powerful, often ex-colonial language that dominates key sociolinguistic domains such as education, business and government. Such a face-off may well prove detrimental to a minority language's – and its speakers' – wellbeing. It does appear that calls to boost a language's visibility in the linguistic ecosystem may stem from subconscious

attempts to replicate the European model of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, wherein nation-states founded on the ideal of a ‘nation’ – a people with a bounded culture and language – served as the basis for geopolitical and sociolinguistic organisation (Kamusella, 2012, 2015). Evidently, some of these notionally isoglossic European nation-states espousing ideals of ‘one state, one people, one language’ (Judge, 2000) did witness high levels of economic prosperity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, such prosperity was more likely attributable to the spoils of colonisation obtained from these states’ Southern colonies. Against this background, assuming that institutionalised monolingualism, wherein one codified language is used in as many domains of life as possible, was responsible for economic and societal growth amounts to conflating correlation with causation.

Thus, the notion of a monolingual society with a bounded, codified and graphised language being a prerequisite for socioeconomic and cultural progress emerges as an unwittingly or deliberately propagated myth. The untenability of this argument lies in the fact that certain Southern polities, notably India, Singapore and South Africa, have managed to achieve socioeconomic progress to various extents despite being institutionally multilingual. Then again, such institutionalised multilingualism is also founded on the notion of codified and written named languages and intrinsically entails favouring certain lects over others. We identify and critique the epistemological issues with institutionalised multilingualism later in this section. For now, we contend that force-fitting minority Southern lects into the Northern mould of named, bounded languages may prove suboptimal or even detrimental to the communities associated with those Southern lects. This begs the question – how did Southern societies organise themselves in precolonial times, and what was the linguistic dynamic at the time? If colonising Northern powers felt the need to bring ‘order to chaotic diversity’ (Khubchandani, 1984, p. 172), what did this Southern diversity actually look like, and was it truly chaotic?

Thankfully, there is ample evidence from the scholarly literature and lay experience of the kinds of sociolinguistic stratification and organisation that existed in precolonial Southern societies. In societies that employed a quasi-standardised classical language for certain purposes, it was invariably this language that occupied the top slot in the sociolinguistic hierarchy of prestige. Examples include the classical spoken and written forms of the Chinese, Egyptian, Mayan, Persian and Sanskrit languages, not to mention those of Greek and Latin. However, it was rare to find the same language – or, more correctly, the same lect – used in all contexts. Notwithstanding their revered status, the quasi-standardised classical forms were typically restricted to formal or intellectual domains, typically religion. In domains of a quotidian

or mundane nature, local spoken lects were used. In being conditioned by context rather than by the people involved, the choice of lects in the precolonial Global South was often *use-oriented* (Bunčić et al., 2016). Scholarly literature affirms the fluid use of so-called spoken vernaculars across Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas (Ferguson, 1996; Iyengar, 2021; Kachru et al., 2008; Khubchandani, 1997; Makoni, 2012; Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021; Singer & Vaughan, 2018). Such domain-centric use of language contrasts with the *user-oriented* linguistic stratification commonly espoused in the present-day Global North, with language choice or affiliation being determined by one's ethnic or national background. This outlook is also reflected in historical attempts by Northern colonisers to commodify speech varieties prevalent in their Southern colonies and associate those commodified varieties with specific ethnocultural groups (Makoni, 2012; Ndhlovu, 2021, 2022).

The use-oriented pattern of lectal choice meant that the same person or people might employ different speech varieties depending on the situation. For instance, a family may conduct their worship or liturgical activities in a classical language, use their community lect for intrafamilial communication and utilise another speech form as a lingua franca or bazaar language for wider societal communication. Evidently, using languages in a somewhat mutually exclusive manner in complementary domains required people to be necessarily multilingual. That said, such organic multilingualism was distinct from contemporary understandings of the idea, which hinge on proficiency in multiple codified languages across several domains. In other words, present-day conceptualisations of multilingualism often amount to 'multiple monolingualisms' (Banda, 2009; Heugh, 2003; Pennycook, 2010). To distinguish the two approaches, one may characterise domain-specific language use as entailing *plurilingualism*.

The domain-specific or use-oriented stratification of speech varieties also meant that the classical or other prestigious lect at the top of the linguistic hierarchy did not necessarily prey on subordinate lect. Put differently, the languages at the apex were not apex predators. Since each language or lect had its respective role in society or niche in the linguistic ecology (Haugen, 1972; Mufwene & Vigouroux, 2017), they did not pose a threat to each other in principle. The existence of language forms in their respective niches allowed them to co-exist in relative harmony, which stands in contrast to the present-day situation that Mohanty (2006) describes. When there are no linguivorous predators in the ecology, languages do not feel the need to exhibit anti-predatory behaviour and retreat into less-conspicuous domains.

Sustained use of languages in distinct niches also ensured a neat division of linguistic labour and, in the process, allowing each language or lect to develop rich, highly specialised vocabulary in its respective domain of use.

The value of such lexico-semantic specialisation is evinced by the modern-day fascination for supposedly ‘untranslatable’ words in certain languages (Large et al., 2019). The very existence of such specialised vocabulary is evidence of the linguistic sophistication that may be achieved when languages are able to thrive in a situation of relative linguistic-ecological security without looming existential threats. After all, a local craftsperson can sustainably hone their skill and refine their trade only when there is no imminent risk of being undercut by cheap, low-quality wares. And just as a diversity of skills and specialisations is important for an innovative and resilient economy, so too is the existence of diverse and specialised language forms crucial for a robust and flourishing linguistic ecology.

5. Towards a Sustainable Future

At this juncture, it is necessary to clarify that the precolonial past in Southern societies was not a perfect one, where people and their languages existed in perfect harmony. Assuming the past to be a linguistically egalitarian utopia is as silly as assuming monolingualism to be a prerequisite for socioeconomic development. Indeed, the history of humankind is littered with glaring examples of discrimination of various kinds, including linguistic. Linguistic discrimination was a significant factor behind the anti-imperialist popular movements that arose in nineteenth-century Europe and culminated in the establishment of nation-states (see Iyengar, Chapter 7). Besides, there is good evidence for the existence of historical language shift and death, which further accentuates the less-than-ideal nature of the past (Tsunoda, 2006). Yet, it is also true that historical language shift and death were not as swift or systematic as they turned out to be from the colonial era onwards and continue to be in present times.

Whereas debates on the true nature of the past will continue *ad infinitum*, a pragmatic view on the way forward must take into account the fact that precolonial Southern ways of living cannot be replicated and that people in these societies will inevitably live in modernity. Put simply, Indigenous and Southern peoples will go to school, seek out jobs and tend to migrate to urban areas – just as people in the Global North would. To this end, advocating idealistic models of language maintenance by domain specialisation that fail to consider Southern peoples’ lived realities will prove inconsequential or damaging as idealistic suggestions of language maintenance by domain expansion. The question, therefore, is: how can idea(l)s of niche languages be reliably and sustainably woven into administrative and educational policy in present-day sociopolitical structures while also normalising the notion of niche languages among the population at large?

A promising first port of call is to question and critically examine the concept of national and official languages that exist at various levels of government around the world. Albeit purportedly intended to affirm and empower the people of a particular society and enable them to fully participate in the workings of government on an equal footing, the implementation of national or official languages has often proven discriminatory, as outlined in Section 3. This has especially been the case in countries or societies with large populations, as such populations will inevitably be linguistically diverse. Compounding the situation is a narrow preoccupation with policy implementation as a marker of governmental efficiency, which inevitably results in indiscriminate – and undemocratic – impositions of so-called national or official languages on all people in that country. Ironically, comprehensive implementation of national or official language policy is often perceived as a marker of democratic health.

The problematic nature of national or official languages has been recognised by some Southern governments, who have implicitly noted its exclusionary nature and unsuitability in intensely plurilingual societies. In response, these governments have sought to recognise multiple local or indigenous languages as national or official ones. Prominent instances of such language policy in the Global South are seen in South Africa, Zimbabwe, India and Bolivia, whose legal systems expressly recognise eleven, sixteen, twenty-three and thirty-six languages, respectively (Constitution of India, Part XVII; Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Chapter 1(6); Constitution of Zimbabwe, Section 6; Nueva Constitución Política Del Estado, Artículo 5). The constitution of Bolivia further states that ‘all the languages of the Indigenous nations and peoples of the regions’ are official (our translation). *Prima facie*, such a policy approach may seem rather egalitarian, as it appears to grant administrative, political and symbolic power to languages and lects that were often suppressed during the colonial era. In practice, however, the effects of such an approach need to be carefully monitored and scrutinised, lest it degenerate into platitudinous tokenism with little real-world impact or, worse, simply perpetuate competitive behaviour among language groups. After all, if everyone has power, no one has power.

In contrast to a maximal approach of this kind, certain governments and organisations may adopt a minimal approach and decree one or more codified languages as so-called working languages. At its core, a working language is one that is employed primarily in the domains or niches of government and administration – and, to a lesser extent, trade – primarily for purposes of convenience and expediency. It is not intended to serve as a marker of supposed nationhood, which differentiates it from the colonial-Northern construct of national language. Noteworthy political entities in

the Global South adopting this approach are the government of Singapore and the administration of the intra-national African Union.⁴ However, for such a policy approach to be truly effective, it needs to be executed judiciously and without malintent. It is not inconceivable that a political entity might decree a language as the lowest common denominator on paper while favouring that language to the detriment of others in practice. In such a situation, the notion of ‘working language’ becomes a sham and a façade. However, if implemented sincerely and rigorously, the concept of working languages does carry promise as a practical way forward in postcolonial Southern societies as it embodies the basic idea of using a specialised language within the niche of government and administration. In most other domains or niches, such as religion, home or media, the languages or lects used would emerge by consensus and evolve organically. Since the absence of a national language would free the government from implementing its use in as many domains as possible, the government would play little part in mandating language use outside of administration except to prevent flagrant discrimination.

Admittedly, things become sticky in domains where codified and standardised languages are seen as indispensable. Prominent examples of such domains are law and education. In their modern, colonially-conditioned manifestations, law and education entail extensive use of standardised and codified language forms in speech and writing. Even if the government adopts a hands-off approach to these domains, the need for normative language forms will likely persist. Thus, even if a country’s legal and educational policies and systems aspire to be plurilingual, their roots in colonial-Northern traditions will likely compel them to multiply monolingual at best, comprising multiple codified languages harnessed for the same purpose. Such a situation exemplifies more than one language being used in the same niche, which invariably creates the conditions for mutual competition and outwardly shows of linguistic one-upmanship. While more research and debate are required on how existing legal and educational systems can be made truly plurilingual in a practicable manner, the fact remains that using distinct languages in distinct niches is, in principle, non-competitive and encourages the harmonious co-existence of languages and speech forms. More importantly, it is largely consistent with the organic plurilingualism that was prevalent in the precolonial Global South.

The case for niche languages has received a shot in the arm thanks to technological developments in the twenty-first century. With the widespread availability of computing and mobile devices that easily allow laypersons to record and replay spoken language, minority and indigenous communities around the world are able to preserve their oral and performative traditions directly through audio and video recordings. Such traditions include

language, which, in the past, could only be reliably recorded by means of a reasonably codified written form. In this regard, reinvigorating and normalising the ideas of plurilingualism and niche languages may well relieve minority and indigenous communities in the Global South from the implicit pressures of expanding their language's domains of use and, in the process, having to conjure and consistently use codified spoken and written forms as outward indicators of their ethnolinguistic vitality. Being released from such conceptual shackles and from having to compete for their language's survival, minority and indigenous communities may instead be able to devote more attention to the preservation and cultivation of their languages in their traditional niches. Such an outcome might prove far more beneficial for their languages' health and longevity.

6. Conclusion

The point of departure for our arguments in this chapter was on the colonial enterprise being centred around the notions of power and control. Put simply, from the colonisers' perspective, effectively controlling a group of people was best achieved when the people in question were as similar as possible to the colonisers themselves. If the subjugated people were diverse in their sociological characteristics – such as traditions, religion, or language – it was in the colonisers' interest to flatten or neutralise these characteristics to align with those of the colonisers to the greatest extent practicable. In the realm of language, such harmonisation of characteristics, included favouring one particular language, or at best a select group of languages, over all others in that society. In addition to being administratively convenient, favouring one or only a handful of languages dovetailed conveniently with the foundational colonial maxim of *divide et impera* – Latin for 'divide and rule'. Consequently, from a colonial lens, organic linguistic diversity came to be viewed as an existential threat that needed to be eliminated or mitigated if the colonisers were to maintain their power over their subjects. Unsurprisingly, the taming of linguistic diversity has typically been portrayed in colonial discourse as a benevolent act on the part of the colonisers. Euphemisms commonly used in this context include 'civilising the natives', 'introducing them to modernity' or, in the rare instances where colonisers adopted an indigenous language for administrative purposes, 'emancipating the natives'.

Sadly, political independence for Southern colonies in the twentieth century did not result in a reinvigoration of the colonies' precolonial organic linguistic diversity. Rather, local elites or powerful groups often took over the mantle of socio-political dominance from the erstwhile colonisers and perpetuated the practice of favouring select languages over others, albeit

portraying such practice as a display of national or ethnic pride. Simultaneously, the hegemony of several erstwhile colonial languages continued unabated as international or global languages of business, education and communication. In the meantime, languages spoken by numerical minorities or disadvantaged groups have continued to languish at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, just as they did during colonial times. Consequently, the colonial-era hierarchy of ex-colonial languages at the top, so-called national or official languages in the middle and indigenous and minority languages at the bottom has, in effect, remained largely unchanged.

Although a genuine return to the linguistic diversity of the precolonial past has not been achieved, it is possible and, indeed, desirable. History reveals that the choice of language in precolonial times was typically determined not so much by the user's ethnocultural background as by the context of use or niche. As we argue in this chapter, when language choice is determined by use-oriented contextual parameters such as domains or niches of practice rather than by user-oriented ethnocentric parameters like interlocutors' background, the result is usually individual and societal plurilingualism, economic productivity and societal harmony.

Whereas an ecosystem entailing niche languages was not, and will never be, a one-stop solution to issues of linguistic discrimination, we contend that it has the potential to be far more effective than the currently prevalent neo-colonial paradigm of national and official languages – a paradigm that intrinsically entails sidelining non-national or non-official ones. The challenge lies in translating the abstract concept of niche languages into a tangible reality. It appears that the idea may be relatively easily incorporated and reflected in certain domains, such as religion and media. However, more research is required on how to weave the principle practicably and sustainably into contemporary systems of education and law, which tend to be colonially derived, centrally controlled and largely monolingual in nature. Key issues that emerge in this regard hinge on codification, standardisation and the modalities of pedagogical practices in formal settings. These discussions sit within broader ongoing debates on what genuine decolonisation means and how we may feasibly establish truly democratic socio-political structures, policies and practices that enable and affirm the harmonious cohabitation of languages and peoples.

Notes

- 1 In this chapter, we use the term 'indigenous' with lowercase 'i' to mean 'native' or 'local'. Where required, we use 'Indigenous' with uppercase 'I' as a demonym for specific people groups, such as the autochthonous peoples of the Americas and Oceania.

- 2 In this regard, Phillipson (2012, p. 205) notes ‘Languages were central to Christian missionary activity that accompanied several European languages worldwide’.
- 3 ‘If you are the last speaker of a language, your language – viewed *as a tool of communication* – is already dead’ (Crystal, 2000, p. 2; our emphasis).
- 4 Legally, the Constitution of Singapore declares Malay to be the ‘national language’ and Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English as ‘official languages’ of the country (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, Article 153A). Similarly, the African Union deems ‘any . . . African language’ to be official (African Union, n.d.). In practice, English is the most commonly used language in both these political institutions, as well as in the territories they oversee (Hornberger & Vaish, 2009).

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6

DECOLONISING COMPETENCY-BASED ASSESSMENT THROUGH AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES

Linda McIntosh

Introduction

Despite countless scholarly articles on multilingualism, monolingual ideologies and social justice in applied linguistics, the discipline of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in Australia remains firmly rooted in colonial ideologies that prescribe and circumscribe the nature of language. Many of these ideologies and attitudes surrounding English and Indigenous languages were initiated during the colonisation of Australia and are reused and reworked today with the same debilitating effect. These ideologies posit, as fact, ideas about the relationship between Australian nationality and the English language and the responsibility of migrants to Australia to seek to acquire native-speaker-like proficiency in Australia's de-facto national language, English. Although colonial attitudes about the links between language and nation have been well examined (Heller and McElhinny, 2017; Piller, 2001; McNamara and Ryan, 2011), not enough has been done to question language teaching practices which reflect these ideologies at a local and personal level, particularly in the area of language assessment in adult migrant education.

Rather than validate the language practices of migrants, thus enabling migrants to build upon their existing linguistic resources as they add English to their repertoires, colonially derived ideologies often end up contributing to feelings of failure and demotivation on the part of these migrants, particularly for those who have had limited access to formal education. This is apparent in the area of English language assessment, where colonial assumptions about English and how English should be spoken and measured have

an enormous impact on the practices and motivations of English language teachers and students alike (Shohamy, 2007: 144–145). Therefore, a necessary element in the decolonising of language is the examination of the ways in which language assessment within the English language education system impacts both students and teachers and their views about the language practices of multilinguals.

Autoethnography as a Decolonising Research Methodology

When talking about the colonial ideologies underlying language assessment regimes, it is important to recognise that many research methodologies currently utilised by applied linguists also have colonial origins, and much of the scholarly research available retains a colonial mentality about the nature of knowledge (Ndhlovu, 2021). Therefore, if we are to decolonise language, we must first decolonise our epistemologies and methodologies – the way that we think about language and knowledge, their place in the world and the way we study language use in the world.

This decolonisation of research epistemologies and methodologies is necessary because Western colonial ways of seeing and knowing appear ‘natural’ and ‘normal’. They are seen as capable of clearly answering problems in impartial, systematic ways rather than as the inescapably biased, ideologically based systems that they truly are (Chilisa, 2017: 814). As such, decolonising research involves questioning and refusing to take for granted Western scientific knowledge and the methods used to acquire this knowledge. It opens the door to the exploration of other knowledges and alternative methods of gaining such knowledges, acknowledging these as equally valid and meaningful (Smith, 2021; Pennycook and Makoni, 2020).

Critical autoethnography as a research methodology provides one such way of challenging the way we see language and knowledge. Rather than maintaining the outside gaze of the researcher, as has been the case with most traditional ethnographic research, autoethnography instead places the focus of the research and resulting narratives squarely on the researcher as a key insider and central character of the research narrative. It provides an opportunity to link the personal experiences and actions of the individual and those with whom they interact with the cultural, social and political influences of their environment, critically examining these influences according to current scholarship (Sparkes, 2018: 2).

As both a participant in the research being undertaken and a member of the community under study, the researcher in a critical autoethnography is in the unique position of providing an insider analysis of the resulting data (Davies, 2019). It becomes possible to disclose not only the emotions and feelings of the researcher as a central character in the narrative but also the

impact the highlighted interactions have on others who are also crucial to the narrative. The knowledge produced can highlight local experiences of language and the ways in which wider socially held ideologies about language impact individuals.

When applied to issues pertaining to the decolonisation of language and language assessment, critical autoethnography allows for unique perspectives and an alternative way of viewing assessment regimes that are often mistakenly considered valid and fair as part of a process that is glossed over as normal and inconsequential. It raises uncomfortable questions about language and power that would otherwise remain unasked.

An important part of critical autoethnographic research is the focus on the researcher and their engagement and relationship with the stories told (Chang, 2008). As such, an understanding of my identity as a white, English-speaking, Australian-born TESOL teacher is an important part of this research (Yazan, 2019). As will be seen, my identity is a critical component in understanding how I have been taught to view language and has a major effect on how I view the world.

As I undertook this critical autoethnographic research, I found that my own ideologies and attitudes of language were not only exposed but also challenged. The process of decolonising, of understanding the power that language ideologies hold over me and others and the potential impact that the ideologies that undergird my own words and actions have on those I associate with, particularly my students, has been a sobering one. The careful examination of narratives taken from my everyday working life has allowed me to view the impact of colonial ideologies, such as the monolingual mindset and native speaker ideologies, at a local and personal level. Analysing these narratives according to current scholarship has further broadened my understanding of the negative repercussions of these ideologies on both myself as a teacher of English and many of my students.

Data Collection

The narratives that follow arise from journal extracts of my own experiences as a relatively new TESOL teacher, encountering competency-based language assessment for the first time. They were recorded as soon as possible after they occurred, as I worked to document my own personal teaching journey reflexively. These narratives highlight the ways in which language ideologies have influenced my own actions and how my actions have impacted others in the context of language assessment.

Although, as the researcher, I am the focal point of the narratives that make up this critical autoethnographic enquiry, these narratives are firmly situated within the community and culture in which I live and work

(Méndez, 2013). Other people, therefore, feature in the resulting narratives, and the ways in which these individuals have been represented in this research have been carefully considered. Every attempt has been made to ensure the anonymity of individuals other than myself who feature in the following narratives.

Teaching and Assessing for Competency

In her discussion of the use of tests in language education and their use by governments to maintain power and control, Elana Shohamy (2007: 150) asks some very serious questions about language testing as a practice:

Are language tests always necessary? Do we, via our tests, contribute to an unequal world and harm social justice? Do our tests represent real language the way it is currently understood and used? Is the language we measure embedded in real and meaningful content? Do we provide legitimacy to discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and various political, social, economic, and personal agendas?

My response to these questions involves several stories taken from personal experience whilst administering end-of-unit assessments to a group of preliminary-level English language students in the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) during my first few weeks of teaching after receiving my TESOL qualification.

Shergold et al. (2019): 38) describe the AMEP as follows:

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides up to 510 hours of English language tuition to eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants to help them learn foundation English language and settlement skills . . . The AMEP and its sub-programs are intended to help migrants to participate socially and economically in Australian society.

(Note: The 510 hours available to eligible migrants have since been increased to an unlimited amount of hours or until the individual has achieved ‘vocational English’ (Department of Home Affairs, 2021a).

At the beginning of the assessment period, I was provided with a list of students in the class to which I was assigned and copies of the assessments that each student was due to sit. Class time was allocated for revision as well as the actual assessment tasks. As the class had previously been taught by another teacher, who had since left the language school, I spent some time on the phone with this teacher prior to commencing teaching. We discussed the class and her thoughts on the areas where particular students would require assistance and revision.

A large percentage of the students in the class were migrants with refugee backgrounds. Mostly women, many had little or no formal education prior to their arrival in Australia, and as a result, several of the students had limited literacy skills. In addition, some students were experiencing the effects of trauma, which left unresolved barriers to learning.

My first day of teaching went well. However, out of a class of 14 or so, only about nine students were present. I was not surprised by the low numbers, as I had been informed that many of the students disliked doing assessments and would call in sick on assessment days. I was told that many of the students found the assessments just too hard and too disheartening: It is difficult to continually fail at something, especially when passing holds the key to better English skills and the accompanying promise of economic independence in a country such as Australia. Some of the students had remained in this preliminary class for several years, and I gained the impression that most were unlikely to advance this year either (Clark-Gareca et al., 2020: 5–6).

At the end of the first morning, I was pleased to see that nearly all the students present could read and write the English alphabet, a focus of one of the assessments. I then started the students practicing other elements of the assessments. Namely, counting money, telling the time, reading sight words and listening to and identifying sounds found in English. These tasks are all considered foundational requirements in English, which will enable migrants to participate in Australian life successfully (Department of Home Affairs, 2021b). However, the tasks were not easy for the students, and most struggled to read the questions, let alone understand the content. Despite this, I received a lot of smiles and encouragement from the students. They enjoyed learning English and worked hard at the tasks given to them.

As the day went on, I felt more and more that the content of what I was teaching was inappropriate for many of the students' needs – we were practicing writing time and money values using words as well as numbers, but many of the students were not able to read what they wrote. They copied down words dutifully and, for the most part, accurately; however, these written words held no meaning for many of them. Having said this, it would be a misnomer to call the students financially or chronologically illiterate – all of them managed to get to class on time and were proficient at navigating bus timetables and bus fare payments. As a literate Australian who can barely remember not being able to read as a child, it is quite possible to forget that there are many ways to successfully complete daily tasks in ordinary Australian life without being 'literate' in the traditional sense of the word.

Throughout the lesson, I took note of the areas where the students needed further work and where my teaching could do with improvement, especially my need to communicate more clearly. I also noticed that many of the students in the class were not actually reading the content of the

spelling revision activities. Instead, they would look at the first letter of a sight word and then guess the word based on their familiarity with the list of sight words. For example, if there was a picture of an orange on a page and the students had the option to circle the word 'orange' or the word 'onion', they had a 50/50 chance of getting the question correct. Usually, they would choose the first option in the list. Many would watch me carefully for clues about which word was the correct one, as all of the students were excellent readers of body language and they put a lot of effort into determining whether they had provided the correct answer or not (Sanford, 2019).

Over the next few weeks, we started working on the actual assessments as a class. Absenteeism continued to be an issue, so I ended up asking students to sit assessments whenever they were present. Sometimes, I had several different assessments on the go as I tried to catch students who had been absent the previous day. As I had been advised, many of the students found the assessments just too difficult. However, at the end of the assessment period, I was overjoyed to see that all the students, bar one, had appeared to pass an assessment which involved an alphabet writing exercise. Each student had written the alphabet from A to Z in alphabetical order without assistance.

I went into morning tea with several other TESOL teachers and mentioned that I was pleased that my students had all managed to complete one of the assessments successfully. This statement was immediately queried by a more experienced teacher, who, upon checking my students' assessment papers, proceeded to point out issues with the assessments: "This student has written in lowercase and then shifted to capital letters partway through"; "This student's letters don't reach the top and bottom lines of the provided writing grid – they are not formed correctly".

One of the students whose work was being critiqued was quite educated and was merely a beginner English speaker – his handwriting looked a lot like my own. I was offended on behalf of my student, but as a new teacher, I saw the benefit in spending time discussing the assessment papers and clarifying marking procedures with other teachers. During the discussion, it was pointed out that the marking guide for the assessment called for correct starting and ending points for each letter, along with an image showing perfectly formed uppercase and lowercase letters on evenly-spaced grid lines. This began an exchange on whether my student should pass, fail or re-sit the assessment based upon his legible, but what I would consider 'adult', writing style.

I felt bewildered after this impromptu discussion as we were teaching and assessing adults. The highly questionable assessment was not determining my student's ability to read or write the English alphabet but was

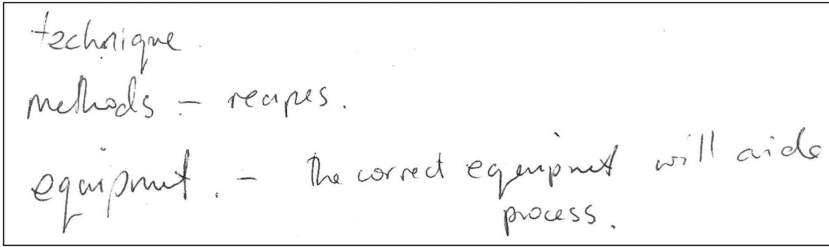


FIGURE 6.1 An example of my own handwriting which would fail the previously-mentioned test. My letters are not properly formed, and many of my letters start and finish in random places.

instead determining the student's ability to form letters according to some pre-determined, pedantic dictate. I and many other Australian professionals would have failed this handwriting test, given the state of our 'everyday' handwriting. Despite this, a preliminary-level English speaker was expected to form perfect letters and could potentially fail an assessment based on an individual teacher's interpretation of a marking guide.

Whilst some of my students may have possessed low levels of formal education, as adults they all possess life experience and a resultant general wisdom and skill at communicating in varied contexts. This assessment did nothing to encourage or validate their existing skills and the effort they had put into learning. By focussing on the correct formation of individual letters, it actually negated the sense of achievement some of the students should have felt from successfully learning the English alphabet after months of practice.

Viewing Migrant English as Deficient

Like Elana Shohamy (2007: 142), and as a life-long learner, I have an intense, personal dislike of tests, particularly multiple-choice assessments, which I believe fail to allow me to demonstrate my knowledge and abilities. During tests, I am generally so nervous that I feel physically ill. However, whilst administering these assessments to the class, I merely felt that it was a necessary evil, just part of my job description. I hardly considered the emotional stress and the negation of voice that the students in my class were experiencing. These tests gave the students no opportunity to demonstrate the skills that they had learned throughout the year; they were not even designed to allow me, as a teacher, to observe and support the students' progress. Furthermore, the distress such tests caused was clearly evidenced by the students' rampant absenteeism.

Nonetheless, the greatest difficulty that I faced during this assessment period was the way I saw my own attitudes towards the language use of the students change. As the period of assessing went on, I began to think, “This student might be able to do this, but she can’t do that”, in relation to the assessment tasks and a student’s English language abilities. My focus moved from considering what the students were able to do with their language and how they were adapting English for their own purposes to what they could not do. I began to compare them with an unfair and essentially ‘white’ monolingual measurement system (Ortega, 2019: 30–31). I also often failed to remember that it was the assessment that was unsuitable for the task, not the students’ abilities.

This attitude culminated in an ignominious event. Throughout the assessment period, several volunteer teaching assistants came and helped in my classes. On one busy day, I asked one such volunteer to assist a student who needed to complete an assessment she had missed previously due to absence. I then administered a different assessment to the remainder of the class, watching the volunteer out of the corner of my eye.

Although we have some latitude to assist students in assessments, especially regarding explaining tasks, the assessment is meant to be the student’s own work. This volunteer may have been under the impression that he was to help the student pass the assessment, as he started to provide what I considered to be far too much assistance. I paused what I was doing with the other group of students and quietly tried to ask him to tone down his efforts. He failed to understand my intimation that he was providing too much help and continued prompting the student. In desperation and a little frustration, and within the student’s hearing, I hissed, “She can’t do it. She can’t pass this test, and you should not be helping her so much”.

I still feel bad. Both the student and I knew that she was not yet able to pass this assessment, but the message I sent her way indicated that this was due to a lack of her abilities rather than an inappropriate assessment regime. The assessment was not measuring her growth as an English speaker but was instead measuring her against a monolingual standard, promoting the values and agendas of government bureaucracy (Shohamy, 2007: 144–145). However, due to the futility and complete unsuitability of the assessment task, I, too, had begun to consider her language and literacy abilities from a deficit perspective.

Although this student’s English language production skills may not have met the assessment requirements, her understanding of my message was clear. She had sat in English classes for at least two years, and she had gained an excellent understanding of the system and the implicit messages about language deficiency that were inevitably passed on. My fear of a student unexpectedly passing an assessment that she was unready to attempt had

overridden my desire to affirm the fact that, as a multilingual living in Australia, she was already a skilled language user.

As can be seen from my experience of administering assessments, competency-based assessments fail to measure the real skills of multilingual speakers and fail to comprehend the way multilinguals do language. They build anxiety and a sense of failure in many multilingual students, particularly those who have already experienced high levels of trauma and upheaval in their lives (Ortega, 2009: 201). Competency-based assessments, which work to demotivate the students who fail to pass them, and the cumulative rounds of similar demotivating experiences cause many of these students to eventually drop out of English language learning programs (Pack et al., 2022: 96).

The students undergoing these assessments were not being encouraged to extend their existing multilingual repertoires and build on their communicative skills. Although individual teachers may practice such pedagogies in their classrooms, and I, for one, attempt to do this as I teach, from my experience, it is not a pedagogical practice built into the AMEP and its assessment regime. Instead, discouraging and demotivating competency assessments are administered year after year. As part of this cycle, subtle and often unintentional but nonetheless damaging messages about students' abilities are dispensed by teachers such as myself. These messages effectively reduce these same students' self-confidence and their enthusiasm to continue learning and impact their willingness to practice English in environments outside the classroom (Lao, 2020). Such messages from teachers can be considered microaggressions. They are 'everyday putdowns' that are small but lethal negative messages regarding the language of multilinguals (Piller, 2016; Ortega, 2018).

Shergold et al. (2019: 38) note the high drop-out rate of migrants with refugee backgrounds in the AMEP program,

In recent times, this program has had unacceptably poor results, with too few participants achieving functional English at the conclusion of the program. There is also significant underutilisation of the program, with most refugees not completing their available hours. We need to understand why such a well-funded and extensive program has failed to deliver.

I am only surprised that bureaucrats wonder why this is so.

Problematising Competency-Based Language Assessment

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is the Australian Government organisation in charge of vocational training in Australia. ASQA

approves and monitors registered training organisations (RTOs) that deliver accredited vocational courses. Accredited courses, such as the AMEP English language program, are based upon units of competency, which are evidenced by competency-based assessments, such as the ones that I administered in the previous narratives. On the ASQA website (ASQA, n.d.), units of competency and their place in accredited courses are explained:

A VET [Vocational education and training] accredited course must include skills and knowledge components expressed as a unit of competency or module. To demonstrate one is competent in a unit of competency, a learner must demonstrate the ability to successfully complete the tasks set out in the unit.

As with all training programs administered by ASQA, the AMEP program uses units of competency to indicate that a student has successfully achieved the outcomes of a particular unit. I wish to point out several problematic assumptions here regarding the association of English language learning with competency, looking at these issues through a decolonising lens.

Firstly, language learning tests which measure competency are undergirded by a monolingual view of language, which considers languages as discrete and bounded and which unfairly compare the language produced by multilingual learners with that of native speakers (Shohamy, 2007: 144). Secondly, I wish to problematise the framing of language as a technical skill or resource that can be acquired for economic benefit (Kubota, 2018: 99). A major selling point of the AMEP English course is its promise of socio-economic advancement and successful integration into everyday Australian life to those multilinguals who undertake the course (Department of Home Affairs, 2019). Finally, measuring competence has, as its inverse, a measurement of incompetence (Flores, 2021: 1). If the purpose of an assessment is to prove that an individual has achieved competence in the subject matter being assessed, then the logical progression of this would mean that failure of such a test proves incompetence. The polite terminology used in accredited Australian VET courses is ‘not yet competent’, but it means the same thing (personal experience in the Australian VET education system).

In a competency-based language learning environment, it is relatively easy for teachers and students to become inoculated with the thoughts, ‘they/I can’t do this’, and even worse, ‘they/I will *never* be able to do this’. These attitudes are constructed by both evidence from assessments and the overall poor fit of the ideologies on which such language courses are based to the needs of migrants with refugee backgrounds. As multilinguals, these students should not be expected to strive towards an unrealistic benchmark of ‘functional English’ as spoken by so-called native speakers of English.

Viewing Language Assessment Through a Decolonising Lens

In their book *Language, capitalism, colonialism: Toward a critical history*, Heller and McElhinny (2017) describe the ways in which ideologies about language are fashioned through government policies, the media and education and relate these ideologies to colonialism. They highlight how power relations forged during colonial periods continue to influence modern societies. They describe how the processes and thinking that emerge from ideologies around language work to marginalise and control those whose language practices diverge from the expected norm. In this way, language becomes a tool which perpetually reinforces the power of those who ‘have’ a more prestigious language, whilst marginalising those who don’t.

In the same way, Flores (2021) describes the rationale underlying language assessments as not only promoting the welfare of the nation over the individual but also ensuring that white power and thinking remain dominant. Shohamy (2007: 144–145) links language and literacy testing with these same colonial ideologies and describes how language testing at a national level is used to further the agendas of governments and those in positions of power, at the same time creating language hierarchies; positioning the language practices of some (in the case of Australia – white, English speakers) over those of others. These hierarchies are based on ideologies which include ideas about who has access to a language and who retains the authority to define how a language should be spoken.

Standardised English language and literacy assessments, such as those that I administered to my class, fail to acknowledge the skills that multilingual English students already possess. The ideologies underlying these assessments identify back to colonial attitudes, which view colonised peoples as less or as incapable of communicating in the way that white people can (Flores, 2021: 2). Far from being empirical measurements of language, as is often claimed, Rosa and Flores (2017: 633) state that language assessments and related terms such as ‘language learner’ or ‘proficient language user’ actually perpetuate a view of whiteness that is unreal and unattainable.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (n.d., first para),

Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice – whether individual or institutional – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others.

The result of failing to acknowledge the sophisticated communicative repertoires that migrants already practice and continuously measuring their language against native speaker standards of English is, in essence,

institutionalised racism in the English language education context and everyday racism in the broader Australian context (Chun, 2016: 91).

The bureaucratic and political aspects underlying language assessments also require viewing through a decolonising lens. The Australian government, like that of many other nations, clearly views the language of multilinguals as deficient and requiring remediation (Yilmaz, 2021; García, 2017; Department of Home Affairs, 2021b; Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2019). Many of the facts and figures used in Australian Government articles, discussing the low retention rates and the lack of ‘functional’ English of the majority of those who study in the program, are based on the very testing regime that I administered in my first four weeks teaching. In this way, language testing, rather than benefiting students or teachers, has become an instrument ensuring that Australian policymakers maintain control of the language taught in the AMEP and the wider Australian education system. This further supports the view that language testing is political and is used by bureaucracies to ‘force monolingualism’ on multilingual speakers (Shohamy, 2007: 141).

At the heart of a need to decolonise a monolingual view of language learning and assessment is the recognition of the difficulties faced by those who are marginalised by these ideologies. The oppression experienced by multilingual speakers, especially those with refugee backgrounds, makes the difference between those who speak ‘native’ English and those who don’t very real (Ortega, 2018). ‘Native speakers’ of English in Australia, as well as migrants with high proficiency in English, continue to be looked upon as more intelligent, more successful, more able and more worthy (Solano-Campos, 2014). This power differential is upheld and continuously reinforced by our monolingual methods of teaching and assessing language.

A further issue is the naïve assumption that the acquisition of ‘functional English’ will automatically equate with economic security and the successful integration of migrants into Australian society. This rationale is spouted regularly in Australian Government documents discussing migration and settlement issues (Shergold et al., 2019; Commonwealth of Australia, 2017; Department of Home Affairs, 2021b). These documents link the acquisition of English with increased employment opportunities and other socio-economic benefits. However, this discussion generally reduces the equation of English language learning success in the AMEP program to the passing of competency tests (Department of Home Affairs, 2021b: 7–8). Furthermore, the need for migrants to acquire English has been boiled down to business models and financial incentives. Kubota (2018: 99) associates the push to see migrants achieve competency in English with neoliberalism and the concept of human capital, where knowledge, synonymous with English in Australia, is presumed to provide personal socioeconomic benefits. It is

this strong alliance with financial matters, rather than genuine support for the needs and requirements of individual learners, that presents one of the greatest issues with competency-based assessment (Troudi, 2020): 2).

There is no real evidence to support the association between ‘functional English’ and a migrant’s successful integration into Australia. In fact, racism and disenfranchisement, including objections to individuals speaking languages other than English in public, still occur towards migrants to Australia regardless of their levels of English proficiency (Hill, 2008; Burford-Rice et al., 2020; Dobinson and Mercieca, 2020; Piller, 2016). Economic security and independence cannot be solely guaranteed by English proficiency. It is also problematic to suggest that students who fail to learn English to the standard expected by Australian policymakers, will not integrate well into Australian society.

Furthermore, not only is learning English considered an economic necessity in Australia, but it is also perceived as demonstrating loyalty to the Australian nation (Spotti, 2017; Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). Due to Australian policymakers’ inflexible stance on what constitutes appropriate English, this creates a hierarchy, with the vague standard of ‘functional English’ as the measurement determining who is and who is not worthy of becoming an Australian citizen (Heller and McElhinny, 2017; Tracy, 2017).

As noted in my story previously, it is very difficult not to slide into the practice of viewing multilingual students’ English as deficient when assessing their language practices using competency-based assessments. In these assessments, standardised English, as spoken by a native speaker, is posited as the benchmark against which students’ language outputs are compared, with no consideration of their existing language repertoires (Kubota, 2018; Cook, 2010). Language becomes an object that can be acquired (Otheguy et al., 2019: 647). The ideology underlying this practice assumes that the goal of native speakers, like proficiency in English, should be attainable, providing students receive adequate instruction and genuine opportunities to practice English in meaningful ways. The natural conclusion, then, is to label students who fail to achieve a functional level of English as being deficient in some way (Ortega, 2018: 72). This process works against the needs of multilingual students, downplays their existing language abilities and effectively ensures they are only able to communicate using a limited part of their linguistic repertoires (Otheguy et al., 2019: 648).

In order to ensure that the language classroom remains an encouraging and fair space, it is vital teachers consider their students as successful users of language who are building on their current linguistic knowledge and skills rather than merely individuals who cannot speak English (Otheguy et al., 2019; Cenoz and Gorter, 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for decolonising language assessment through the application of an autoethnographic approach. The chapter has raised several key points on how this might be achieved.

First, it is imperative that language policy, language courses and associated language assessment regimes and also language teachers begin by acknowledging the existing language skills multilingual students possess. We must begin by viewing migrants who undertake English language learning, particularly those with refugee backgrounds, as successful language users in their own right and build our language courses upon this foundation. As TESOL teachers, it is vital that we acknowledge students' communicative successes and assessment practices should reflect this.

Second, as TESOL teachers, it is important that we understand the ideologies underlying our own practices as teachers. Despite the plurilingual practices of many TESOL teachers in Australia, the teaching pedagogies that we practice in the classroom and the language courses that we teach are still often based on monolingual and native-speaker mindsets. It is vital that TESOL teachers develop a greater understanding of and respect for the language practices of multilingual students and the reflexivity to examine the ideologies promoted through their own teaching.

Third, it is crucial that the TESOL field, in general, develops a critical awareness of the influence of government policy on language courses and, in turn, on teaching practices in the classroom. Only then will we be able to develop curriculums that are designed to benefit students, particularly those with refugee backgrounds, rather than bureaucrats.

Returning to the insightful questions asked of language testing at the beginning of this chapter, the use of competency-based assessment in language learning has very little to do with ensuring the needs of students are met and everything to do with the maintenance of power and control by policymakers. Competency-based assessments create a false picture of the language and language practices of migrants, negating their linguistic strengths and highlighting the areas where their language use fails to measure up to an unrealistic native speaker benchmark. Rather than improve the settlement prospects of migrants, as is widely touted, language learning programs that utilise competency-based tests create a divide based upon language that unfairly posits multilingual speakers as not only incompetent language users but also unworthy citizens of Australia. By failing to achieve the high levels of English required to satisfy these unrealistic ideals, multilingual speakers are viewed as lacking – in motivation, ability and loyalty to Australia and Australians.

Finally, the monolingual ideologies undergirding language teaching and assessment in Australia ensure that many English language students are not

able to reach their full potential as English-speaking multilinguals (Cenoz and Gorter, 2022: 1). Instead of gaining opportunities to expand their linguistic repertoires, such students receive subtle and not so subtle hints that their efforts are futile and their language practices are worthless. In this way, our language teaching practices, even when unintentionally resulting from the administration of ill-conceived assessments, become demotivating rather than encouraging, discriminatory rather than empowering and ceding control of language to policymakers rather than speakers.

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7

WRITTEN INTO BEING

Colonial Language Epistemologies and the Graphocentric Straitjacket

Arvind Iyengar

Introduction

In contemporary English, the meaning of education has become largely synonymous with literacy. This is evident in expressions like ‘well-read’, insinuating that someone who is intelligent or well-educated must have read widely. By extension, such a person is necessarily highly literate. In Classical Sanskrit, however, the term equivalent to English ‘well-read’ is *bahuśruta*, literally “well-heard” (Rocher, 1994, p. 12). Innate in the Sanskrit term is the notion that an intelligent or well-educated person has imbibed much of their knowledge through the oral mode, with the written form of language playing only a subsidiary role. This notion is echoed in Sanskrit proverbs of the following kind, which remain popular even today:

TABLE 7.1

<i>pustakasthā tu yā vidyā parahastagatam dhanam kāryakāle samutpanne na sā vidyā na taddhanam</i>	‘Knowledge which exists solely in a book is like money in the hands of another When occasion demands, neither is readily available’
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(adapted from Abhyankar, 2010)

The previous quote, popularly attributed to the philosopher and political strategist Chanakya (375–283 BC) (Ostler, 2016, p. 25; Trautmann, 1971), may be considered emblematic of the attitude towards the written word in

the Indian Subcontinent, particularly among the Sanskrit-proficient elite. This attitude has been characterised as paradoxical (Masica, 1996). Writing, in the sense of ‘language writing’ or *glottography* has been attested in the Subcontinent – or South Asia – for at least two and a half millennia. Moreover, the region has seen the emergence of dozens of scripts and written traditions (Masica, 1996; Salomon, 1996). Yet, oral transmission has traditionally been the primary means of teaching and learning in South Asian cultures (Agnihotri, 2008; Aklujkar, 2008; Annamalai, 2008; Fuller, 2001; Kachru, 2008; Lopez, 1995; Masica, 1996; Ostler, 2016; Plofker, 2009; Rocher, 1994). On this point, literary scholar Sheldon Pollock characterises premodern South Asian societies as “hypervalu[ing] orality” (Pollock, 2006, p. 4), in which “literacy and learning were never directly correlated” (2006, p. 82). Pollock’s sentiment is corroborated by epigraphist Richard Salomon, who notes that:

Writing played a significantly different cultural role in traditional South Asia (i.e. the Indian subcontinent) than in many parts of the ancient world . . . Oral traditions were usually more revered than written ones in [the region], and sacred texts such as the Vedas or the Buddhist Canon were originally preserved by memory rather than in written form, which was felt to be less reliable.

(Salomon, 1996, p. 371)

Masica (1991, pp. 137, 144) and Bright (1990) further note that, for more than two thousand years, the secondary nature of writing in ancient and premodern South Asia led to it being used primarily for mundane record-keeping than for high-brow literature.

Viewed from a Euro-modernist perspective, the subordinate status of writing and the prioritisation of the oral route as the preferred vehicle for knowledge transmission in premodern South Asian societies might come across as remarkable or even aberrant. Yet, the predominance of the oral mode in compiling and transmitting information and knowledge has actually been the worldwide norm for most of recorded human history (Bright, 1990; Gnanadesikan, 2009). Upon reflection, the primacy of the oral mode in human communication should not be surprising. After all, most people can acquire oracy in a language in a seemingly osmotic manner simply by being around others who speak that language.¹ This phenomenon is best exemplified by young children under the age of eight. Yet, almost no one acquires literacy in a writing system without targeted effort, even if the writing system is that of one’s professed native language (Bunčić, 2016a, p. 18). At the same time, the fact that literacy is not an innate human trait but

an intentionally acquired skill lends it connotations of status and privilege (Pollock, 2006, p. 4). Consequently, literacy becomes susceptible to being weaponised as a tool of exclusion and marginalisation to distinguish the literate elite from the orate-only masses (Kamusella, 2012, p. 69).

In this chapter, I shed light on how habits, practices, and ideologies on knowledge, language and writing that emerged in early modern Europe (1500–1800) filtered into the region's colonial enterprise, which, over the last five hundred years, has left scarcely a region of the world unimpacted. I will demonstrate how reverence for the written form of language implicitly morphed into a cornerstone of colonial ideologies, invariably setting up a collision course with the oral-primary episteme prevalent in most European colonies. Although the ensuing face-off between the colonisers' and colonised's knowledge systems disproportionately affected the latter, there were, nonetheless, notable instances of epistemological resistance, syncretism and even appropriation. This chapter brings to light the hitherto understudied impacts of, and local reactions to, colonial grapholinguistic incursions in two regions of the colonised world – South Asia and North America. In doing so, I demonstrate how these geographically distant and diverse regions nevertheless experienced similar conditions of “colonial exploitation, exclusion, epistemological extraversion . . . and marginalisation” that have come to define the metaphorical Global South (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021, p. xvii). By centring the common experiences of these disparate regions, I seek to challenge prevailing normative assumptions and praxes in language use and education, with the ultimate aim of advancing the decolonisation of mainstream discourse and understanding in these domains.

The Rise of Graphocentrism in Early Modern Europe

The status accorded to Sanskrit in ancient South Asia was comparable to that of Latin in contemporaneous Europe. In fact, the evolution of both languages over the centuries bears striking similarities. Both had their roots in the speech varieties or lects of communities who came to dominate their respective regions politically and administratively (Deshpande, 2008, p. 178; Gnanadesikan, 2009, p. 229). With time, both lects underwent gradual standardisation, codification and, eventually, *graphisation* or commitment to writing (Ferguson, 1996a, p. 41). A corollary of graphisation was *literarisation*, namely, the concomitant increase in the language's literary use (Pollock, 2006, p. 5). Consequently, standardised or Classical Sanskrit and Latin came to be employed primarily in literary, formal or High (H) domains of use. In contrast, the corresponding spoken forms – the Prakrits in South Asia and the Vulgar forms of Latin in Europe – continued to be used primarily in quotidian, informal or Low (L) contexts. Similar

processes occurred with other lects in these regions, such as Old Tamil and Ancient Greek (Gnanadesikan, 2009), with both exhibiting an H-L distinction in their Classical and everyday registers.

Here, it is imperative to note that the process of literarisation does not imply ‘written only’. Rather, literary works are better understood as folkloric compositions featuring (quasi)standardised language forms, manifesting on a fluid continuum ranging from the written and textual to the oral and performative (Pollock, 2006, p. 442). Indeed, in the Sanskritic and Latinate spheres alike, it was not uncommon for a written literary work to be popularised by reading it aloud or performing it before a largely illiterate audience (Agnihotri, 2008, pp. 281–282; Annamalai, 2008, p. 227; Pollock, 2006, pp. 306, 443).

Origins and Spread

It was the advent of the printing press in western Europe in the fifteenth century AD, followed shortly thereafter by the Protestant Reformation, that triggered a paradigm shift in that region’s collective mentality. The spread of print technology dovetailed with the Reformation’s approach of spreading its message through local lects or *vernaculars*, in the process engendering a vernacular print culture centred on religious themes (Kamusella, 2015). The rise of a new religious movement and the associated zeal, the concomitant elevation of the vernaculars into codified ‘languages’ as vehicles suitable for disseminating the movement’s ideas, and the relative ease of reproducing and preserving these ideas in print all came together to shift the epistemological spotlight from the oral mode onto the written. As a result, the written forms of these vernaculars gradually replaced Classical Latin as the H variety in their respective communities and underwent steady codification in the early modern era (Barbour & Carmichael, 2000). The rise of the vernaculars (Parker, 1983) prompted a significant realignment in popular conceptualisations of language. The written form of language came to be seen as phenomenologically primary despite being ontogenetically secondary to the spoken form. This resulted in the paradoxical outcome of codified written forms becoming references or standards for their associated spoken forms.

The subjective impression that the written manifestation of human language is intrinsically superior to its spoken counterpart may be termed *graphocentrism*. The spread of graphocentrism in early modern Europe eventually metastasised into a pervasive mentality that any language deserving of the name must have a standardised written form (Kamusella, 2012, pp. 68–69). By extension, the standardised spoken register of the language was one that aligned with and reflected the written form. A high level of

competency in the standardised written and spoken forms would eventually become the yardstick for proficiency in the language. In this manner, the written form of language came to be considered primordial, and the spoken form subordinate to it.

The rise of Romantic Nationalism in late eighteenth-century Europe sowed in the popular European imagination the notion of cultural or ethnic groups as distinct nations (B. Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983). What began as an anti-imperialist emancipatory movement that glorified folk customs – including language – evolved into a call for cultural and, eventually, political self-determination for self-styled nations. At the heart of the idea of nationhood was language, evinced by the Latin maxim *gentem lingua facit* “language makes a people” (Kamusella, 2013, p. 835). It followed that, for a people to be linguistically defined, they needed to be affiliated with a single, unique mother tongue. This led to several languages being ‘created’ in early modern Europe – a process eventually replicated in European colonies worldwide (Kamusella, 2012, 2015; Makoni, 2012). When amalgamated with the ideology of graphocentrism, the existence of a codified written language, distinct in script or orthography from other written languages, emerged as a key ingredient for nationhood in early modern Europe.

The Nationalistic-Graphocentric Nexus

Over the nineteenth century, nationalist movements took hold across Europe, and empires began to give way to polities founded around the principle of nationhood – the purported nation-state. With it came the entrenchment of the principle of ‘one state, one nation, one language’ (Judge, 2000). As expected, most nation-states that emerged declared their respective language – the standardised written code invoked as an identity marker of nationhood – to be the national or official language. The erstwhile multilingual, multi-ethnic empires of Europe were, thus, replaced by a patchwork of mostly self-proclaimed monolingual nation-states, each justifying its existence on the basis of a supposed common language used by its people.

Evidently, the existence of neatly bounded monolingual groups of people was more myth than reality. Every nation-state had within its borders linguistic and cultural minorities whose existence undermined the credibility of the nation-state’s founding narratives and posed a potential threat to the sociopolitical power of the dominant majority – the titular ‘nation’. The problem was often addressed by brute-force assimilation policies involving public bans on the use of minority languages and coercion to learn, speak and write the majority or national language (Kamusella, 2015, pp. 31, 32, 65, 73). In short, linguistic repression helped maintain the tenuous façade

of the monolingual nation-state. If a state had multiple official languages, it was frequently because none of the peoples or nations within its borders had managed to dominate the others and, consequently, had to share political power. But even in such states, there often existed internal borders demarcating the territories of its constituent nations, in each of which the respective nation's codified language dominated (Barbour, 2000; Howell, 2000). Such multinational states were not multilingual in the true sense; rather, they embodied multiple monolingualisms (Banda, 2009; Heugh, 2003; Pennycook, 2010).

The normalisation of the nation-state promoted the normalisation of individual and collective monolingualism – and monoliteracy – in the national language, despite all of them being contrived and imposed conceptual constructs. This 'cart before the horse' mentality has been succinctly summarised by Bunčić (2016a) thus:

Just as monolingualism was mistakenly considered normal because of the nation-state, the invention of the printing press made people think that every language had (and had to have) a uniform orthography [i.e., written form].

(Bunčić, 2016a, p. 16)

The aftereffects of monolingualism and graphocentrism becoming bedfellows in the popular European imagination also permeated the region's ideology towards its colonies. Although several European colonies around the world began as trade endeavours, most eventually morphed into politico-military enterprises seeking to conquer their trading partners. Where moral justification for such conquests was required, it was common to encounter appeals to the alleged superiority of the colonisers' civilisation (Ndhlovu & Kamusella, 2017), a tangible manifestation of which was written language. Metaphorically speaking, the heady conceptual cocktail of monolingualism and graphocentrism appeared to induce an ideational stupor, wherein the existence of a written language was considered the hallmark of sophisticated or 'civilised' societies. In contrast, unwritten lects were considered symptomatic of backward or 'savage' societies, and the varieties themselves were relegated to the status of mere dialects, no matter how linguistically and epistemologically rich they might be (Aker, 2014, 2024). In an egregious perversion of this mentality, the economic development of Northern societies by exploiting the resources of their Southern colonies was nonchalantly attributed to the avowedly monolingual-graphocentric nature of the former. In short, the colonial mind came to associate fluid multilingualism and phonocentrism with economic, cultural and intellectual backwardness (Batibo, 2005, p. 58; Ndhlovu, 2008, p. 138).

Notwithstanding the ascendancy of the monolingual-graphocentric exemplar in Europe, the phenomenon remained an exception to the global norm at the time. By and large, human societies around the world continued to have a relationship with language and knowledge of the kind that European societies did prior to the advent of the printing press and the Reformation. Admittedly, regions around the world exhibited a steady increase in the use of written language since around 1000 AD, notably in East Asia (Gnanadesikan, 2009). Yet, there appears scant evidence worldwide of nationalistically motivated impositions of monolingualism or, more importantly, a volte-face from a phonocentric to a graphocentric episteme of the kind attested in early modern Europe.

Missionary Grammars and Graphocentrism

Viewed against the predominantly phonocentric communication practices prevalent at the time, the graphocentric turn in early modern Europe was an anomaly. However, it was not a negative development per se. Whereas the fusion of graphocentrism with nationalistic monolingualism had ramifications for several communities worldwide, its early adoption by Christian missionary efforts did result in some fortuitous epistemological outcomes. Following on the heels of the Reformation, European missionaries of various Christian denominations, often operating on the sidelines of European mercantile and exploratory ventures, took with them the practice of graphising and literarising spoken-only lects to various parts of the world (Priolkar, 1958, p. 2; Zwartjes, 2011, p. 10). In their quest to replicate the Reformation-inspired model of popularising their religious doctrine in the local tongue, the missionaries committed local lects to writing for the first time, in the process creating some of their earliest known records (Gleason, 1996). Many of these records went on to appear in print, creating a distinct genre of missionary grammars (Zwartjes, 2011).

One Language, One Script: Colonial Graphocentrism and its South Asian Legacy

Over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European mercantile undertakings worldwide progressively mutated into colonising ones. Since economic interests were at the heart of many colonial efforts, issues of language were initially on the periphery. At best, it was of interest for commercial and military-strategic purposes (Bhatia, 1987; Friedlander, 2006). As mentioned, the primary stakeholders in matters of language in the early years of the colonies were typically Christian missionaries. Such was the case in South Asia, which emerged as a region of interest for several European powers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Emergence

The first movable-type printing presses were brought to South Asia by European Christian missionaries (Priolkar, 1958, pp. xi, 2) in the late 1500s to further their aim of spreading their religious message in local lects and written form for maximum impact. However, in South Asia, they had to consider the additional dimension of local script (see Section 1). Consequently, they went about cutting types in several South Asian scripts and, in the process, created the first print publications in them. These European undertakings had a lasting impact on South Asian linguistic and knowledge traditions. On the one hand, the Europeans' attempts to study and disseminate knowledge in and of South Asian vernaculars helped document these previously overlooked lects. According to Bhatia (1983), the extraordinary sophistication of the Sanskrit grammatical and literary tradition proved to be an own goal of sorts:

The preoccupation of Indian scholars with the classical language, Sanskrit, . . . led them to neglect altogether the modern vernaculars of India. . . . It fell to Europeans to initiate the task of writing grammars of modern Indian vernacular languages in order to meet their own communicative, colonial, commercial, and missionary needs.

(Bhatia, 1983, p. 2)

On the other hand, the Europeans' graphocentric approach to language and their casting of types for the hitherto infinitely variable local script varieties fossilised the latter's shapes and forms, arresting further variation (Masica, 1996, p. 774). This had the effect of establishing South Asian scripts as discrete bounded entities, paralleling the emergence of standardised and codified languages as discrete bounded entities in post-Reformation Europe (Kamusella, 2012, 2015). In Daniels' (1996, p. 884) words, the introduction of printing using movable type made scripts and characters easily reproducible, but also made them largely immutable. With time, the typographical crystallisation of script forms fortified the now-normative South Asian belief of 'one language, one script' – henceforth OLOS.

By the early nineteenth century, the British had emerged as the dominant European colonising power in South Asia and began setting up administrative systems in their own mould. For instance, they set up local schools to provide education in vernacular languages but modelled these schools on British or European ones by imparting instruction in codified South Asian languages and scripts. These vernacular schools further solidified the colonial-era European constructs of monolingualism and graphocentrism. Consequently, the South Asian tradition of using classical and vernacular

languages in mutually exclusive domains and the oral-primary transmission of language and knowledge became significantly diluted (Khubchandani, 1997, pp. 287–288). That said, the grafted-on South Asian version of graphocentrism remained distinct from its European counterpart in featuring OLOS.

Notwithstanding the availability of school education in South Asian languages, English remained the language of higher-order administration in Britain's Subcontinental territories. As a result, English became ever-increasingly associated with socioeconomic advancement and political power in the region over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Political independence for many of Britain's South Asian colonies in the late 1940s did little to change the situation. In an ironic reproduction of colonial-era monolingual-graphocentric policies, the governments of the newly independent countries in the region indulged in superficial administrative manoeuvres to accord status and prestige to codified forms of local languages (Khubchandani, 1997). Regardless, English has continued to remain the elite language in the Subcontinent and dominates in several socioeconomically significant domains, including education and business.

Administrative and Sociopolitical Impact

The graphocentric straitjacket imposed during colonial rule in South Asia has had profound and far-reaching impacts on daily life in the region. Curiously, it has so far been largely ignored in lay and academic discourse – perhaps itself an indication of the phenomenon's omnipresence and normalisation in the region.

Arguably the most palpable impact of graphocentrism is the now-ubiquitous belief in South Asia that a language worthy of the name must have a written form, ideally standardised and codified. The establishment of this belief has brought with it an increase in the prevalence and status of the written word and a simultaneous diminishing in the value of oral traditions. An accessory to this process has been the partial ingress of monolingual ideologies, neatly summarised by Devy (2021) thus:

Print technology diminished the existing oral traditions. New norms of literature were introduced, privileging the written over the oral, which brought in the idea that a literary text needs to be essentially monolingual.
(Devy, 2021, p. 36)

The administrative and political fallouts of the monolingual-graphocentric mentality are most conspicuous in present-day India. Following political independence, the new government at the helm set out to reorganise the

country's multilingual and multi-ethnic British-era provinces along linguistic lines. By giving speakers of different languages their own respective territories, the Indian government hoped to assuage local desires for autonomy and encourage a harmonious socio-political coexistence. However, the model adopted was the nineteenth-century European one of so-called nations coalescing around a monolithic language with a codified written form. Unsurprisingly, the new linguistic states that came to characterise independent India were strikingly reminiscent of European nation-states, featuring political borders intended to be isoglossic. In other words, lects that were relatively codified and could claim a written literary tradition were considered "languages" and used as loci for redrawing state boundaries (Devy, 2021, p. 36). Lects that were largely unwritten were ignored, no matter the richness of their oral traditions. As a result, codified and written languages became totems for groups desiring to attain political power, resulting in European-style linguistic imposition in post-Independence India. A similar process ensued in neighbouring Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Linguistic imposition in these regions was countered by resistance movements, most prominently by supporters of the Tamil and Bangla languages, both of which boasted rich literary traditions. All the while, minority languages remained on the sidelines, and their speakers were forced to acquire proficiency in the official or dominant language(s) in their respective regions in order to attain socioeconomic mobility.

Notwithstanding these developments, English has persisted at the top of the sociolinguistic pecking order in South Asia, and spoken and written proficiency in the language continues to be a prerequisite to socioeconomic rise (Khubchandani, 1963, p. 45). Moreover, and unlike in Europe, the OLOS mentality has meant that proficiency in multiple written languages often entails acquiring literacy in a new script, which adds to the burden of schoolchildren as well as adult learners. In Europe, centuries of graphocentric rationalisation have left the region with only three scripts – Roman, Cyrillic and Greek (Kamusella, 2015, p. 91). In contrast, the comparatively recent and haphazard ingress of graphocentrism into modern South Asian pedagogical traditions has resulted in regional script varieties becoming codified but not numerically reduced beyond a point. Consequently, a school-age child in present-day Sri Lanka might have to learn the Sinhala, Tamil and English languages in their respective scripts. Similarly, an aspiring youngster in Pakistan's Sindh province might feel compelled to acquire proficiency in Sindhi, Urdu and English in their respective scripts and orthographies. All the while, unwritten languages remain marginalised as the utilitarian demands of modern life and the valorisation of written languages leave little time or inclination for oral transmission. In this manner, the monolingual-graphocentric ideology, despite having its roots in the idea

of self-determination and linguistic preservation, has ended up paradoxically disrupting linguistic diversity.

Sociolinguistic Impact

Semiotic Associations

Whereas the monolingual-graphocentric approach has entrenched the OLOS mentality in South Asia, certain languages in the region nevertheless continue to be written in multiple scripts. Often, in such cases, each script is identified with a particular user group defined along ethnic or religious lines. For instance, Urdu written in the Arabic script and Hindi written in the Devanagari script have become indiscriminately associated with Muslims and Hindus, respectively. This is despite Urdu and Hindi being near-identical in terms of grammar (Bhatia, 1987, pp. 119–120).

Regrettably, Northern scholarship may unwittingly reiterate simplistic associations between scripts and social groups, in the process propagating broad-brush semiotic or indexical stereotypes within academic circles. Thus, one commonly encounters scholarly discussions of the Arabic script supposedly indexing ‘Muslimness’ across South Asia (King, 2001). It is rare to find similar expositions of the fact that, in Bangladesh, 91% of whose 165 million residents are nominally Muslim (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022, pp. vii–viii), there continues to be widespread official and popular support for writing the Bangla language in its longstanding native script. In fact, there has been no noteworthy contemporary attempt among Bangla-speaking Muslims to graphise their language in the Arabic script (Salomon, 2007, p. 110). Along similar lines, scholarly works may state that the Sindhi language is today written in the Arabic, Devanagari and Gurmukhi scripts by Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, respectively (Bunčić, 2016b, p. 188). Yet, the Sindhi graphosphere provides scant evidence for a religiously conditioned association between a literate Sindhi speaker’s denominational affiliation and their choice of script (Iyengar, 2021, forthcoming).

Language Maintenance

The near-simultaneous rise of graphocentrism and print technology in Europe resulted in printing presses, typewriters and eventually computers being designed to support European writing systems – namely, alphabetic ones. As the primary beneficiary of mechanisation and innovation, the alphabetic Roman script has become synonymous with technology, modernity and so-called development, including in parts of the Global South. Consequently, attempts to graphise unwritten languages around the world

often involve the Roman script as the default option. Indeed, the Unicode Consortium, which is responsible for the eponymous digital font encoding standard, explicitly recommends against creating new characters or scripts to graphise a language (D. Anderson et al., 2023):

Devising a new [script] means you will not be able to use modern technology for it and you will need to rely on non-standard fonts and software while waiting for the international character encoding bureaucrats to get the new characters into the international standard.

(D. Anderson et al., 2023)

Evidently, Unicode's recommendations are motivated by pragmatism and altruism. Yet, their stance also reveals how people involved in language maintenance efforts often have to genuflect to existing graphocentric technologies and ideologies. This situation represents a perverse example of the proverbial tail wagging the dog.

More broadly, the omnipresence and prestige of graphocentric ideologies have implicitly lured communities desirous of maintaining their unwritten languages to develop a written form and, ideally, a body of written literature. While there is much debate among linguists and educationists on how to best involve communities in graphising their language, the action of graphisation per se is generally seen as incontrovertible. The presumed imperative of graphising an unwritten language as part of language maintenance efforts appears to be conditioned in large part by graphocentric hegemony, characterised by Bright (1990, p. 146) as the "cult of the book". After all, in the European experience, codified glottography helped facilitate religious reform movements, the exchange of scientific ideas, and, eventually, the spread and maintenance of an empire. As a result, written language in the Global North has come to be indexically associated with economic and intellectual progress and, consequently, so-called civilisation.

Unfortunately, academics, activists and policymakers are yet to engage rigorously with the question of what minority communities in the postcolonial Global South are actually going to do with a standardised version of their language, especially its codified written form (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021). Graphising a previously unwritten language may contribute to in-group pride but usually does not eliminate the community's perceived need to become proficient in the sociolinguistically dominant language. Furthermore, in South Asia, the pervasiveness of the OLOS mentality often spurs language maintenance activists to devise new scripts from scratch, with the aim of giving minority languages a distinct graphical-visual identity (Zide, 1996). However, as described in Section 0, such attempts may increase the literacy load on the minority community's members, in particular,

school-age children. If community opinion on the script is divided, it may even undermine maintenance efforts.

The sad reality is that well-meaning attempts in the Global South to revitalise or revive minority languages by graphising them do not, for the most part, meet with the success their advocates envisage (Kamusella, 2012, p. 75, 2015, p. 17), simply because they fail to address the community's most pressing socioeconomic needs. In this regard, graphocentrism embodies the trickster habitus associated with colonialism (Ndhlovu, 2019). All too often, efforts to graphise a language and use it in as many domains of life as possible amount to little more than misguided attempts at replicating early modern Europe's course of economic growth. Moreover, in the South Asian context, graphocentrism acts as a red herring in obscuring the fact that language use in the region has historically entailed domain complementarity.

Domain Complementarity

The historical trend in South Asia has been to employ specific languages for specific purposes or domains of use (Kamusella, 2012, p. 80). Put differently, language choice in the region has traditionally been use-based, in contrast to the user-based ethnolinguistically-oriented patterns of language use that emerged in early modern Europe (see Section 0). The use of distinct languages in distinct domains has been termed *domain complementarity* (Timm, 1981). In the historical South Asian context, Sanskrit was the H variety most widely harnessed in formal or literary domains, while local spoken vernaculars constituted the L varieties employed for quotidian purposes. Such use of distinct registers in distinct domains was mutually exclusive; it was relatively rare to find the H variety of language used in L domains and vice versa. Furthermore, the oral mode of language was predominant. The use of writing was limited and generally restricted to L domains (Ferguson, 1996b, p. 87).

The colonial-era establishment of standardised, codified and graphised versions of South Asian languages significantly displaced the region's classical languages as vehicles of knowledge and learning (Khubchandani, 1997). Much like in Europe, the newly codified forms of South Asian vernaculars emerged as the new H varieties. However, since these codified vernaculars were closely associated with a standardised written form, their establishment also implanted the ideology of graphocentrism. Consequently, writing in South Asia went from being associated with L domains to being linked with the H variety of language, albeit not to the same extent as in Europe (Ferguson, 1996b, p. 87). Regardless, since acquiring literacy took time, effort and money, proficiency in the codified written form of a language has remained out of reach for many. In Ferguson's (1996b, p. 87) words, literacy in South

Asia remains “widely regarded as primarily an aspect of formal schooling rather than a resource for everyday living”.

The piecemeal superimposition of writing as an H activity coupled with the substratal persistence of domain complementarity might explain, to some extent, contemporary South Asian patterns of technology adoption and use. While email never became as popular in the region as it did in the Global North, mobile phones and, more recently, multimodal instant messaging (IM) apps have been adopted with gusto by all sections of society. These trends in technology adoption make sense when juxtaposed with the region’s historical trends in language use. Email is centred around the written form of language far more than IM apps are. Consequently, email intrinsically requires its users to have a relatively high level of written language proficiency. In contrast, IM apps permit users to combine written language with audio-visual elements such as voice messages, images and videos. In this regard, the ability of instant messaging apps to allow direct oral communication between users, unmediated by the written form if desired, dovetails with the historical regional preference of using the oral mode for informal communication (Kelly & Iyengar, 2020). In short, the popularity of IM apps in South Asia may stem from a combination of low literacy thresholds as well as harmonisation with the region’s historical trends of language use and information exchange.

The apparent elevation of writing in South Asia to an H activity with the simultaneous maintenance of oral-primary communication in select contexts thus represents a tacit merger of colonially imposed graphocentrism with the region’s longstanding traditions of domain complementarity. In this respect, it is an example of how regions in the postcolonial Global South have implicitly nativised their relationship with the written form of language and with graphocentrism, albeit with outcomes distinct from the Northern experience.

The Empire Writes Back: Colonial Graphocentrism and its North American Legacy

Perhaps the most noteworthy example of a colonised people adopting and adapting the graphocentric approach to suit their own needs is the rise and spread of Indigenous writing systems in North America – known to its original inhabitants as Turtle Island. In this context, Sequoyah’s invention of the Cherokee syllabary is well-known and documented as one of the rare instances in world history of a writing system being invented from scratch by a hitherto illiterate person (Gnanadesikan, 2009; Scancarelli, 1996). Similarly, starting in the 1840s in what is today Canada, several communities of

the Cree peoples enthusiastically took to a new missionary-promoted script for writing their traditional languages. Known as Syllabics, the script proved immensely popular among the Cree, who used it extensively for everyday practical writing. For instance, they would carve messages in Syllabics onto tree barks to inform passers-by about food sources in the area (Murdoch, 1981, pp. 1–5). Similar Syllabics-based systems were subsequently devised to write the languages of the Inuit and Carrier (Dakelh) peoples, with comparable outcomes (Dorais, 2010, p. 177; Poser, 2003, p. 2). In all these communities, literate members would actively teach the script to friends and family in informal settings. The emic adoption and spread of the Cherokee and Syllabics-based systems were so rapid that, within a few years of their introduction, the Indigenous peoples in question had surpassed the region's European colonisers in literacy rates (Gnanadesikan, 2009, p. 139; Rogers, 2005, p. 249). Despite this extraordinary success, colonial policies of repression and assimilation from the late nineteenth up until the mid-twentieth century ended up greatly curtailing these writing systems' everyday use. Nevertheless, they continue to command considerable symbolic pride among their communities (Dorais, 2010, p. 179; Gnanadesikan, 2009, p. 142; Poser, 2003, p. 9).

The speed and success of these Indigenous scripts and writing systems have prompted contemporary scholars to reassess the phenomenon from various perspectives critically. Of particular interest is the question of Syllabics' origins. Was it originally invented single-handedly by an English missionary to graphise Cree languages, as the dominant narrative goes? Or was the system based on an Indigenous idea that was ultimately codified and typeset by missionaries? Considering the phonological accuracy and compactness of Syllabics-based writing systems, not to mention their typological uniqueness (Harvey, 2006; Iyengar, 2023), there is increasing scholarly consensus that the original concept must have had Indigenous input (Dorais, 2010, p. 177; Harvey, 2003; Stevenson, 2000).

The swift adoption and spread of these Indigenous writing systems also accentuates the practical value they had for their users. With reference to the Canadian context, Murdoch (1981) highlights how Indigenous and Euro-Canadian communities may have different expectations of a writing system's attributes and purpose:

Efforts to carry [lexico-orthographic] uniformity beyond a community to a regional or pan-Cree usage, have met with no success at all. It should be realized that when "uniformity" is taken beyond limits practical to a community of Cree speakers, it no longer serves the interest of that Cree community but rather the interests of those [persons] of a more formal perspective, usually Euro-Canadian.

(Murdoch, 1981, pp. 64–65)

Thus, the Indigenous users of Syllabics-based writing systems did so primarily with utilitarian aims in mind, mirroring precolonial South Asian L usage (see Section 1). The former's grapholinguistic utilitarianism continues into the present day, evinced by their multifaceted and layered adoption of scripts and writing practices. Certain Indigenous communities in Canada continue to use and teach their Syllabics-based writing systems, although Roman-based writing systems have also been developed in parallel. Other Indigenous communities have never adopted Syllabics to write their languages and have instead embraced augmented versions of the Roman alphabet (Burnaby, 1985).

Most importantly, Indigenous communities in Canada do not usually subscribe to exclusionary or antagonistic linguistic views that pit their traditional languages and writing systems against the dominant ones of English and French. Rather, their approaches to language maintenance and use exhibit a large degree of pragmatism and an inclination towards consensus, standing in stark contrast to the monolingual-graphocentric ideology espoused in Canadian government policy at various levels. Federally, the country follows a policy of official bilingualism in English and French, which, in reality, is a case of multiple monolingualisms. Eight out of the country's ten provinces are officially monolingual in either English or French, with government attitudes towards the non-official language ranging from tolerance to hostility. In contrast, the country's three territories – where Indigenous peoples constitute the majority or a significant minority – are all officially bi- or multilingual, with one of them recognising eleven languages (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2020). They are also the only Canadian polities to recognise and support languages written in Syllabics. While the territories' policies may still be critiqued as examples of multiple monolingualisms, there does appear to be a correlation between the size of the Indigenous population in a region and the linguistic inclusivity expressed in its laws, not to mention the levels of multilingualism in its overall population (Statistics Canada, 2023).

These observations reiterate the need to revisit questions of language maintenance through a critical decolonial lens. In particular, they invite us to ask how we may encourage genuinely plural and sustainable language use in spoken and written forms while safeguarding against mistakenly interpreting multilingualism as multiple monolingualisms. To this end, pre-colonial Indigenous and Southern practices of context-specific, fluid and inclusive language use may serve as models worth emulating and deserve to be rigorously but respectfully researched.

Conclusion

In revisiting and critically evaluating the impacts of colonially imposed graphocentrism on the Global South, it is imperative that such endeavours

do not degenerate into indiscriminate Europe-bashing. As Devy (2021, p. 34) notes, it is simplistic to portray every European or Northern belief as “socially perilous”. Indeed, certain Northern concepts disseminated during the colonial era, such as reason and equality, proved novel and emancipatory for historically subjugated peoples in Southern societies (Devy, 2021, p. 35). That said, it is equally absurd to assert that every colonial European imposition was necessarily beneficial for colonised peoples. Among the impositions with a chequered legacy is graphocentrism. For those on the receiving end, graphocentric policies were neither wholly positive nor entirely negative.

Prominent among the benefits of graphocentrism are the written records of previously unwritten texts that emerged as a result. The intrinsic drive to graphise and document spoken varieties and the establishment and strengthening of local literary traditions in written form helped create relatively tangible and durable records of humankind’s linguistic and cultural heritage. The focus on the written word also facilitated communication across time and space, which had immense practical value for hunting communities like the Cree, Inuit and Carrier peoples of present-day Canada.

The conspicuous downsides of graphocentrism stem from its fundamental foreignness in the societies it impacted. The indiscriminate grafting of this alien epistemological approach was often at odds with local phonocentric approaches, resulting in unforeseen outcomes. Among them is the OLOS mentality in South Asia, axiomatically expressed as a script giving birth to a language. The mentality has also exacerbated religio-linguistic and ethnolinguistic divisions in the region, epitomised by the contrived portrayal of Hindi and Urdu as distinct languages based on their distinct scripts. The visual discreteness offered by distinct scripts may also have played a part in linguistically-motivated civil unrest in East Pakistan and Ceylon, which eventually ballooned into civil wars. Furthermore, the exclusionary nature of the OLOS mentality results in symbolic disadvantages for minority language communities like Sindhi speakers in India, who continue to use and prefer different scripts to write the language (Iyengar, 2018). This has led to the occasional symbolic sidelining of written Sindhi, exemplified by its omission from Indian rupee notes, purportedly due to space constraints (Iyengar, 2021; Iyengar & Parchani, 2021).

Nonetheless, postcolonial Southern communities worldwide have displayed remarkable fortitude and innovativeness in sustainably blending colonially imposed graphocentrism with their own phonocentric epistemological traditions, conspicuous examples of which I have analysed in this chapter. In being able to compartmentalise where, why and how they use written language, the peoples in question have broken some of the restraints of the conceptual graphocentric straitjacket imposed by colonial thinking.

Regardless, further efforts are required to restore a symbiosis between different forms of language in everyday use (see Akter and Iyengar, Chapter 5). One hopes that increased awareness of graphocentrism as a discrete construct that is the product of a particular epistemological tradition will help “rediscover” (Davis, 2021, p. 117) local oral traditions worldwide and give them their due while also viably harnessing graphocentric communication where appropriate.

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Related Topics

Related to the practice of domain complementarity is the concept of niche languages, which refers to the sustainable, harmonious and non-competitive use of languages in specialised domains. For more on this subject, see Akter and Iyengar (Chapter 5).

Note

- 1 Such osmotic acquisition through sustained exposure also applies to signed languages, which, however, warrant separate treatment. This chapter is restricted to the oral and written modes of human language for reasons of space and scope.

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8

INTERROGATING TRICKSTER DISCOURSE OF COLONIALITY IN REGIMES OF LANGUAGE TESTING¹

Finex Ndhlovu

Introduction

Australia's immigration policies have always been an unsettled area of political disputation since the promulgation of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (Cth), which was part of the 'White Australia' policy. White Australia policy was designed to place certain restrictions on intending immigrants perceived to be a threat to Australian interests (Tavan, 2005). The policy imposed limited acceptance of immigrants from other parts of the world and favoured applicants from selected European countries. Asian racial groups were the main target of this legislation. Although it was amended 14 times before its abolition in 1958, the Immigration Restriction Act remained the guiding principle for Australian immigration policy for the period 1901 to 1958 (York, 1992; Sherrington, 1980; Smith, 1979; Hollinsworth, 1998; Lake, 2005; Ndhlovu, 2008, 2014). Section 3(a) of the Act prohibited immigration into Australia by any persons who failed to write out a dictation test of 50 words in any European language prescribed by an immigration officer. The dictation test was a discursive construct ostensibly designed to be failed and to exclude people whose political and racial affiliations were considered undesirable. Language and citizenship tests that started during the formative years of a federated Australia have continued to feature prominently in political and public debates on Australia's citizenship and immigration laws. They are part of the ongoing global project on the superiority of whiteness and the triumph of Euro-North American coloniality that hides and reveals its trickster machinations – in equal measure (Ndhlovu, 2018, 2019).

Therefore, even when the definition of the test domain is appropriate for a given evaluation purpose, the name of the test may still shape the way results are interpreted by various evaluation audiences as well as the test takers themselves. What does it mean, for instance, to be tested on Australian values and history after 10 or 15 years as an Australian permanent resident? What political meanings can be read into Australian citizenship and Australian values, particularly when considered within the context of a test? How do different people interpret the notion of being conferred citizenship based on a test whose domain is narrowly defined – both in terms of the medium (exclusively in the English language) and content (limited to a set of perceived Australian values, whatever they are)?

This chapter discusses intersections between global coloniality and the use of language tests as technology for racial and political exclusion in Australia since 1901. It argues that contrary to claims made about their objectivity, fairness and impartiality, language and citizenship tests are, in fact, exclusionary and subjective. They are intricately connected to the broader political project of global coloniality – the obsession with creating hierarchies of humanity (Ndhlovu, 2019). The focus is on how language ideologies are used as gatekeeping mechanisms and weapons for normalising diverse racial groups to some imagined subjective Australian national linguistic and cultural norms. Through a close analysis of the dictation test that was introduced in 1901 and the Australian values and history test (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007/2017), the chapter weighs into hotly contested debates on mutations of race and racism in Australia. It brings to spotlight subtle and overt forms of discrimination hidden behind liberalism discourses such as ‘migrant integration’, ‘social inclusion’ and a range of other immigration-related measures. Another important discussion point is one around the persistence of the nationalist imaginary of Australia as a country that is perceived as having its own ‘foundational myth’ into which all new waves of migrants and refugees must ‘integrate’. Problematic concepts such as ‘migrant integration’, ‘Australian way of life’, ‘un-Australian’ – among others – are interrogated to show how these concepts do not sit well within the multiplicity of cultures and traditions of people who call Australia home (Ndhlovu, 2019).

Trickster Habitus and Global Coloniality

The analysis that follows rests on the three concepts of global coloniality, trickster discourse and habitus. The concept of ‘coloniality’ originates from the work of decolonial theorists such as Mignolo (2000, 2002, 2011); Quijano (1998, 2000); Grosfoguel (2005, 2006); Ndhlovu-Gatsheni (2012,

2013a, 2013b, 2015), among others. ‘Global coloniality’ is an enduring colonial project tied to the spread of Euro-North American modernity, the international world order and the contemporary capitalist system. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a: 6), “the concept of global coloniality is useful in teasing out the mythology of a decolonized world as well as unravelling the rhetoric of modernity”. Ndlovu-Gatsheni identifies those specific factors that have ensured that non-desired racial groups from the Global South and “other peripheral zones of the world remain under colonial situation long after the end of direct colonial rule” (ibid.: p. 6). Global coloniality, therefore, refers to a pattern of comprehensive and deep-reaching power spread throughout the world. It is about how, even when the formal process of colonisation has ended, there remains a form of power which produces, uses and legitimises differences between societies and forms of knowledge (Banazak and Ceja, 2010: 115). An additional point is that, unlike post-colonial studies, coloniality takes a much broader focus. It problematises colonial power as a continuum that transcends the colonial era and whose presence continues to influence and affect current social realities, including discourses on language and language policies. This implicates the centrality of colonial matrices of power and the tricks they play in the (post)modern world system.

Speaking nearly five decades ago, Toni Morrison (1975: 6) characterised these subtle manifestations of global coloniality in the following terms:

The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language, so you spend twenty years proving you do. Somebody says your head isn’t shaped properly, so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Someone says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing.

This is a compelling critique of the machinations of racism and global coloniality that impose an endless burden of proof on non-desired racialised others. Everything about the non-desired others (their languages and language abilities, cultures, intellect, their humanity and so on) is subjected to microscopic scrutiny in search of evidence to support racial stereotypes and perceptions about series of ‘lacks’, ‘absences’ and ‘deficiencies’. Such deficit hypotheses as lack of literary traditions, lack of proficiency skills in hegemonic languages of the nation-state and perceptions about backward and ‘uncivilised’ cultural traditions abound. These perceptions of global coloniality about the non-desired others are traceable to Euro-modernist racial

ideologies that organise people from different parts of the world into hierarchies of humanity in which white racial groups occupy the highest rung.

In a foreword to the 2008 edition of Frantz Fanon's (1952) *Black Skin White Masks*, Ziauddin Sardar captures the ongoing racialisation project of global coloniality in the following terms:

We are presented with a series of statements, maxims if you like, both obvious and not so obvious: . . . the black man wants to be white, the white man slaves to reach a human level. We are left with little doubt we are confronting a great deal of anger. The resentment takes us to a particular place: a zone of non-being, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, where black is not a man, and mankind is digging into its own flesh to find meaning . . . Fanon's anger has a strong contemporary echo. It is the bitterness of those demonstrating against the Empire, the superiority complex of the neo-conservative ideology, and the banality of the "War on Terror." It is the anger of all whose cultures, knowledge systems and ways of being that are ridiculed, demonized, declared inferior and irrational, and, in some cases, eliminated.

(Sardar, 2008: iv)

Sardar goes on to caution against the subtle cultural oppression of non-desired others under the guise of building nationally 'cohesive' and 'integrated' societies. He argues that dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilisation. Neither is it about assuming the attitudes of *the master* (read, those born into privileged zones of being such as whiteness) who has allowed *his slaves* (read, prospective citizens being naturalised through language tests) to eat at his table. Rather, it is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing. This is essentially about being oneself – linguistically, culturally, politically, religiously or otherwise. But the trickster habitus of global coloniality, operating in the form of language and citizenship tests, stands as an albatross, the rite of passage into the zone of being.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) introduced the concept of habitus to capture those dispositions that may generate actions or practices that are highly spontaneous and inventive. Bourdieu popularised 'habitus' in social theory as "a viable analytic tool for the job of accounting for the cognitive components of action" (Lizardo, 2004: 1). Lizardo further explains that Bourdieu's use of the concept of habitus relates to habits of thought and learning inculcated especially through institutions. This is to say, "habitus is an acquired system of schemes that allow for everyday instances of perception, categorization and the production of action and most importantly for the production of mundane judgments" (ibid.: p. 4).

This effectively makes the concept of *habitus* inseparable from processes of the differential distribution of power and associated social and political hierarchies such as those we find in contemporary societies: binaries of citizen/non-citizen, national/foreigner, indigenous/non-indigenous, (permanent) resident/non-resident and so on. These constitute the *habitus* that anchors discriminatory and otherwise unjustified language and citizenship tests examined in this chapter. This is a conundrum that rests on another – that of the proverbial trickster.

The complex mythological character of the trickster appears in folk stories among most Indigenous and traditional societies around the world (the spider, the hare, the coyote, the raven). The trickster generally comprises numerable contradictory traits – intelligent, wise, foolish, perverse, heroic, malicious, cunning and so on (Robertson, 2008; Dorsey, 2002; Schmidt, 1995). It is this ambiguous, equivocal and duality of character embodied by the trickster that makes this mythical figure a fitting analytical frame for understanding the subtleties of language and citizenship tests. The myth of the trickster contains useful insights about the way meaning is conveyed in human societies (Grădinaru, 2012: 85). Trickster discourse is both destructive and creative – in equal measure. Trickster discourse is also about “risk taking, boundary testing, deception, and cruelty in an effort to teach culturally appropriate attitudes and behaviours” (Robertson, 2008: 75). When coupled with Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, the proverbial character of the trickster generates a nuanced explanatory paradigm for unpacking the complex mechanisms of global coloniality. Global coloniality is the trickster hidden behind language tests (the *habitus*). Arguably, though the trickster holds the possibility for the co-existence of multiple meanings and multiple narratives, it is often the case that only the dominant and hegemonic narratives of the most powerful prevail. This is a key lesson that we learn from the deployment of language and citizenship tests as technology for governmentality, disciplining and punishing (Foucault, 1972 & 1979) the non-desired racialised other.

In what follows, I draw on the foregoing framework to read new meanings into Australia’s language and citizenship testing regimes. I use insights from the decolonial school of thought together with the notion of trickster *habitus* to support the argument that language and citizenship tests have historically been used as convenient technology by central authorities to exercise power and control over non-desired individuals and groups alike. I demonstrate that tests are “used in powerful ways, leading to their detrimental effects and their uses by those in authority as disciplinary tools” (Shohamy, 2001: 24) to achieve political agendas, such as gate-keeping non-desired, racialised others.

The Dictation Test of 1901

Introduced in 1901, the dictation test was used as the means to exclude 'undesirable' intending immigrants, that is, those people whom successive Australian governments regarded as politically or morally undesirable (York, 1992: 4). Prospective immigrants were required to pass a language examination in English or any other European language with which they were not necessarily familiar. Thus, potential immigrants who were 'undesirable' by virtue of their nationality or race, for example, were not directly excluded on grounds of their race; officially, it was only because of their language skills that they were not permitted entry. As McNamara and Roeveer (2006: 160) observe, *care was taken* to ascertain which languages the person in question did know, and then the test was given in a language that the person did not know. Predictably, the person would fail the test and then be excluded on that basis. This means non-desired people were linguistically and socially constructed for purposes of exclusion.

The rigour and effort exerted in establishing the linguistic identities of prospective immigrants were not motivated by the principle of fairness to ensure the person is tested in the language he/she knows best; rather, it was the contrary. This shows the dictation test was a political tool for advancing the cause of the 'White Australia' policy, which was itself part of the broader project of global coloniality designed to exclude non-white racial groups. Cases involving the abuse of language tests for political purposes in Australia are well documented (McNamara, 2005; McNamara and Shohamy, 2008; McNamara and Roeveer, 2006). York's (1992) detailed analysis of data from annual returns on persons admitted and refused entry into Australia for the period 1901 to 1957 shows that the largest groups refused entry into Australia in any single year were Chinese (459 persons excluded in 1902); Maltese (214 persons excluded in 1916) and Italians (132 persons excluded in 1930) (York, 1992: 16). In all these cases, admission was refused on grounds of failing the dictation test. The first Prime Minister of Federal Australia, Edmund Barton, expressed the hidden political and racial agenda of the dictation test in the following terms:

The moment we begin to define, the moment we begin to say that everyone of a certain nationality or colour shall be restricted, while other persons are not, then as between civilised powers, amongst whom now must be counted Japan, we are liable to trouble and objection . . . I see no other way except to give a large discretionary power to the authorities in charge of such a measure [the dictation test].

(Commonwealth of Australia, 1901: 3500)

The idea of giving the dictation test in a way that would appease Australia's and Britain's allies while simultaneously achieving the intended goal of excluding 'undesirable' people received majority support in federal parliament (Tavan, 2005). From the beginning of 1901, the dictation test was administered to targeted individuals, particularly those with political views contrary to the British-Australian values espoused by the 'White Australia' policy. Gerald Griffin, an Irish-born communist New Zealander, was excluded in 1934 based on a dictation test which was used to achieve pre-conceived political goals. Because of his communist ideological inclination, Griffin was not welcome in Australia. Although he was fluent in Irish and English, the authorities chose to administer the dictation test in Dutch, a language that Griffin was not familiar with (McNamara and Roevers, 2006). As expected, he failed the test and was subsequently deported.

Another well-known case in which political exclusion was camouflaged by the dictation test is that of Egon Kisch, a Czech Jewish communist writer who was refused entry into Australia by the Lyons government to attend an anti-war congress in 1934. The government first sought to exclude and deport Kisch on the grounds of his communist political beliefs. However, when he jumped ashore from a ship attempting to avoid deportation, the authorities arrested him and administered a dictation test. Because Kisch was fluent in many European languages, including English, the authorities chose to administer the test in Scottish Gaelic, a language with which he was not familiar. Kisch failed the test, the reasonableness of which was successfully challenged in the High Court (McNamara and Roevers, 2006: 160). However, since the dictation test was merely a smokescreen and the government was intent on excluding him, Kisch was eventually refused entry on other grounds. Egon Kisch's case marked an important turning point in the use of the dictation test for immigration purposes in Australia.

The previous examples demonstrate the extent to which the dictation test was a key hallmark of colonial political discourse on racial, ethnic and political exclusion during the formative years of hegemonic white Australia. The cited cases highlight "the dishonest nature of the test, which was a test designed to be failed" (York, 1992: 5). During the heyday of the 'White Australia' policy, the political intent of language tests was often deliberately hidden behind what appeared to be an objective mechanism – a test.

This analysis lays bare the non-transparent political issues that were at play in securing the power and hegemony of 'White Australia'. The dictation test seems to have served its intended purpose very well. It proved highly effective as a way of keeping out politically and racially undesirable people. Nevertheless, a combination of changing circumstances in post-World War II Australia led to the softening of the 'White Australia' policy and the subsequent abolition of the dictation test in 1957 (Tavan, 2005; Lake, 2005).

However, stringent immigration and naturalisation conditions like those of the dictation test remain in present-day Australia. The Australian history and values test is one such example.

The Australian History and Values Test

The Australian history and values test was introduced in 2007. It is a computer-based test consisting of 20 multiple-choice questions drawn randomly from a large pool of questions on the Australian way of life, the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship and Australian history and geography. Prior to 2007, applicants were required to attend a compulsory oral interview and establish that they were of good character. The interviewer, an officer of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship would: (i) check the written application and personal documents; (ii) assess whether the applicant understands the nature of the application; (iii) assess whether the applicant has an adequate knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship; and (iv) assess whether the applicant has a basic knowledge of the English language.

Under the new regime, Australian citizenship applicants must successfully complete a citizenship test before lodging an application. In other words, the test is an eligibility criterion, and the application cannot go ahead if one has not passed it. Three crucial assessment criteria are used to determine successful completion of the test: (a) applicants have to demonstrate that they understand the nature of the application; (b) applicants have to demonstrate that they possess basic knowledge of English by successfully completing the written test in the medium of English; and (c) applicants have to demonstrate that they have adequate knowledge of Australia and the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship.

Arguably, assessment criterion (b) betrays insistence on English language proficiency skills as the overriding component in the revised citizenship test. English language proficiency becomes the very first barrier that closes out prospective Australian citizenship applicants who are otherwise competent in multiple languages other than English. This makes Australian citizenship a preserve and a privilege for only those who have adequate command of the language of access, which is English. The citizenship test has come to reflect the history of Australian attitudes towards non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants.

As if the test was not bad enough, the Australian Federal Government amended the history and values test in April 2017 by introducing tougher English language testing for immigrants (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007/2017). Whereas previously, the testing of applicants' English language skills was integrated into the Australian history and values test (see preceding discussion), the two things have been decoupled in the amended

test. That is, prospective Australian citizens are now required to sit two separate tests that gauge: (i) their knowledge of Australian history and values; and (ii) their English language proficiency skills. Furthermore, whereas previously, applicants were expected to demonstrate basic knowledge of the English language, the new regulations require applicants “to demonstrate competent English language listening, speaking, reading and writing skills before being able to sit the citizenship test” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007/2017: 6).

The policy document titled *Strengthening the Test for Australian Citizenship*, links the rationale for the new changes to concerns around Australian national security.

Recent terrorist attacks around the world have justifiably caused concern in the Australian community. The Government responds to these threats by continuing to invest in counter-terrorism, strong borders and strong national security. This helps to ensure that Australia remains an open, inclusive and free society . . . The Australian community expects that aspiring citizens demonstrate their allegiance to Australia, their commitment to live in accordance with Australian values, and their willingness and ability to integrate and becoming contributing members of the Australian community.

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2007/2017: 4–5)

The new requirement for a separate English language test must be understood within the context of broader concerns around ‘national security’, ‘terrorism-related crime’ and ‘integration discourse’ (Ndhlovu, 2018). In a later section titled ‘English Language Testing’, the new policy stipulates that “[a]spiring citizens will be required to undertake separate upfront English language testing with an accredited provider and achieve a minimum level of ‘competent’” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007/2017: 9). There is absolutely no doubt that English is a useful language in Australia and that people need to have this language in order to be able to do most everyday social and economic transactions. However, the requirement for a ‘competent’ command of English, which is equivalent to the level required for university entry (IELTS band 6), is a step too far. The Australian political environment in which migrants’ legal status is perennially a prominent issue of national debate may influence the underlying feelings of mistrust as new migrants establish their new homes.

Every time the Australian citizenship debate comes up, the issue of English language proficiency skills of prospective citizens is brought into the mix. Most political players, the media, political commentators and community groups automatically join the debate, which is often always around the

question of whether the level of English being insisted upon is reasonable or not. Most language testing experts, community organisations and political commentators say the revised English language requirements are unreasonable and inordinately harsh. But the two important questions that are rarely addressed are about the rationale for bringing the issue of English language skills into the citizenship debate – in the first instance. What problem does the decision to raise the bar for English language skills seek to resolve? Is there any empirical evidence to suggest that people who have lived in Australia for decades as permanent residents suffer from a lack of English proficiency skills that supposedly prevent them from full social participation?

In their submission to the Australian Government at the time when the citizenship changes were being proposed, three international experts in language testing from the University of Melbourne had this to say:

The current insistence on ‘competent’ English changes the requirement into means of exclusion for many would-be-citizens. The symbolic function of English underlying the changes is now being exploited politically to draw a line between ‘us’ English speakers and ‘them’, which is unnecessary and divisive. The role of language in citizenship requirements is often justified on practical grounds (‘you need English to function in Australian society’). While some knowledge of English can reasonably be expected, the question is how much. Research has shown that in a multilingual and multicultural society such as ours, people can function adequately within their own multilingual networks, and at the same time contribute effectively to the society with relatively low levels of English.

(Knoch, McNamara and Elder, 2017: 3)

This critique of the inordinate English language proficiency requirement points us to the endemic politicisation of migration and citizenship by successive governments dating back to the early 1900s. The rationale for raising the bar for English language skills requirements on the grounds of national security and counter-terrorism is poorly argued. It, in fact, contradicts then immigration minister (now leader of the opposition) Peter Dutton’s November 2016 claims about second and third-generation Lebanese-Australians as being over-represented in terrorism-related crimes.

The advice I have is that out of the last 33 people who have been charged with terrorist-related offences in this country, 22 of those people are from second and third generation Lebanese-Muslim background. The reality is Malcolm Fraser did make mistakes in bringing some people in the 1970s and we’re seeing that today. We need to be honest in having that

discussion. There was a mistake made. Lessons from past migrant programs should be learnt for people settling in Australia today.

(Dutton, 22 November 2016)

If second- and third-generation descendants of immigrants are most likely to be involved in terrorism, then strengthening English language requirements is not the panacea. The second and third-generation descendants of Lebanese-Australians in question were born and raised in Australia, which means their first language is Australian English and their proficiency skills in the language are even way above the competence level. Therefore, if the perceived link between low levels of English language skills and propensity to commit terrorism-related crimes exists, how does the Australian Government reconcile the glaring contradiction between its policy and the immigration Minister's claims about descendants of Lebanese immigrants? Arguably, linking English language skills to counter-terrorism and safeguarding national security is a desperate attempt to justify the unfair targeting of the non-desired other. There is no objective correlation between knowledge of the English language and propensity to be involved in criminal activity – beyond mere bigoted impressionistic claims and assumptions founded on hierarchies of humanity produced by the imperial project of global coloniality.

The rationale for the 2017 decision to administer a tougher English language test to Australian citizenship applicants who have lived in the country for many years as permanent residents is debatable. If their level of English is so bad to warrant administering a language test, how have these people been functioning for all the years they have lived in Australia as permanent residents? Knoch, McNamara and Elder (2017) drew the government's attention to the duplicitous nature of the English language test for citizenship. In particular, they pointed the laser light to the redundancy of the language test. Many Australian citizenship applicants will have previously applied for permanent residency through various pathways, such as skilled migration, and, to meet the requirements for these permanent migration schemes, applicants had to sit and pass a test to prove their English language ability. Knoch, McNamara and Elder (2017: 4) conclude their critique by advising that

there is no evidence that any of these people would lose their English language skills while working in Australia. On the contrary, their skills are more likely to develop over time as a result of exposure to English and opportunities for English use in the community.

These expert arguments bring to bear the underlying political and exclusionary motivations for testing English language skills for citizenship.

Language tests are a political exercise that has absolutely nothing to do with perceived concerns around criminality and failure to integrate into the community. Rather, these language tests have everything to do with subjective normative assumptions about being and becoming Australian. For, what have English language proficiency skills got to do with loyalty to Australia and abiding by its laws and way of life? This troubling question rests on a set of other related questions.

There seems to be an implicit assumption that high English language proficiency skills equate to being a good and loyal Australian citizen. But is this really the case? What does this say to Indigenous Australians whose threshold of English language skills may be below the 'competent' level being insisted upon? Does this mean Indigenous Australians are not Australian enough? There is yet another fallacy here about English, which is that English is *the* language of Australia and that all other languages are migrant languages. This is obviously not true because English (in whatever form, shape or variety) is a migrant language in Australia. Until the arrival of the first white settlers in 1788, there was no English language in Australia. This is a well-known historical fact that does not even require references to back it up. There were over 250 indigenous languages in Australia at the time. Most of them have succumbed to nearly two and half centuries of linguistic imperialism, linguicide and subtle cultural assimilation. But some still exist and are viable. Therefore, I would argue that if we really do want to tie language skills to Australian loyalty, why not insist on knowledge of at least one of the remaining Indigenous languages? This would be a more reasonable expectation because all people in Australia (including those from the hegemonic Anglo-Celtic extraction) are migrants or descendants of migrants, except the Indigenous people.

Conclusion

What we learn from the preceding analysis is that the triumph of English in Australia's migration policy is about the politics of perpetuating and legitimating unequal power relations. Because overt racial or ethnic exclusion is now increasingly frowned upon in present-day societies, English language tests have come to represent subtle means of closing out individuals and racial groups of people with 'questionable' identities. This, however, is not a language issue but a political matter camouflaged as language-in-migration policy. Australia's language-in-migration policies have consistently posed a serious threat to the principles of social inclusion, cultural recognition and equality in a country that prides itself as one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world. Starting from the early 1900s to the present, Australian citizenship continues to be simplistically considered a social values

matter, with uncritical attention being paid to the place of the language question in the whole matrix.

In the preceding pages of this chapter, I have argued that there is a clear pattern in the history of Australian migration policy that demonstrates the coloniality of language (Ndhlovu, 2020; Ndhlovu and Makalela, 2021) in determining parameters for inclusion and exclusion. The analysis of the dictation test and the Australian values test revealed the various forms of subtle cultural oppression, political exclusion and discrimination of ‘unwanted’ people that go unchallenged because of the power and authority of language tests. These language testing regimes do not have as much to do with English proficiency skills but the political exigencies of subtle cultural normalisation, discipline and governmentality (Foucault, 1979). English language proficiency assessment in citizenship tests is part of a broader political project of global coloniality: the desire to impose and enforce the normative values of a Euro-modernist world system. Language proficiency tests are the preferred technology for actuating these goals of global coloniality because they have enormous authoritative symbolic power.

In Australia, fallacies about English, whereby proficiency in English erroneously equates to being ‘Australian’ have not been challenged enough. What gives English the political influence it currently enjoys is the fact that it is the language of the dominant ‘superior’ race and carries the symbolic power of whiteness in Australia and globally. The (ab)use of language testing regimes throughout the history of contemporary Australia tells the story of how global coloniality and racism have consistently assumed the proverbial character of a trickster who seeks to outwit and evade detection. Like the proverbial trickster, language tests are ubiquitous, but their pervasive effects are rarely noticed and thus remain largely unchallenged. The soul of the trickster in global coloniality is its supposedly liberal, all-inclusive and accommodating discourse that hides realities of endemic discrimination and the processes of racialisation at play.

Note

- 1 I thank *Social Alternatives* journal for granting permission to reproduce portions of material in this chapter that first appeared in *Social Alternatives* 28(4): 26–34.

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PART 2

Critical Reflections, Empirical Studies, Applications



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9

DECOLONISING LANGUAGES AND LITERACIES IN EDUCATION

The Case of Kenya

Rose Njoki Mutuota and Mutuota Kigotho

Introduction

Decolonial thought lays emphasis on the person who tells the people's story. For many centuries, the dominating cultures have told the story of the dominated/colonised. It has been done mainly through language – written, oral and symbols. Language has been a vital tool in carrying forward colonial legacies of silencing Indigenous voices. The education systems in many colonised countries have borne the hallmark of colonial forms of literacy. Subsequently, a colonial curriculum has been a dominant feature that calls for reform in school education and tertiary institutions. A shift in mindset is required – from a colonial perspective to a freer mindset that accommodates other literacies, including those from the Indigenous people. Drawing on the example of Kenya, this chapter suggests that decolonising languages and literacies education must start with liberating one's mind (Thiong'o 1986). In Kenya, strategies have been put in place by activists and proponents of change to decolonise language and literacy practices of individuals and communities. The Kamirithu Community Theatre is one such example. The group has staged plays written and directed in the Gĩkũyũ language. Another example has been an increase in local music artists who perform at parties, clubs and family gatherings using a wide range of local language repertoires and literacies to challenge and unsettle the normative colonial canon. The decolonised literacies that we discuss in this chapter go beyond language and include community assets such as a community's interconnectedness/relationships; the use of the circle and semi-circle in community meetings and schools, the use of storytelling, riddles, songs and proverbs

to transmit knowledge. A decolonised approach to language and literacy education means that children will identify with their cultures. It means equipping children with culturally relevant tools and strategies for finding local solutions to local problems. We conclude that countries of the South must incorporate local funds of knowledge to inform school literacy pedagogy because local communities know their context better than outsiders.

Many countries in the Global South are grappling with the question of how to decolonise Education systems. Scholars from the Global South, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) and Smith (2012) have advocated for decolonisation in the Global South to free the nations from the colonial power structures that were created to benefit the former colonisers. This includes languages and literacies in education. In his book, *Decolonising the mind* (1986) Thiong'o argues that liberation includes decolonisation of the mind. Decolonial thinkers have argued that decolonisation means undoing and unlearning the coloniality of power, knowledge and being. Coloniality of knowledge investigates knowledge production, that is, 'who generates what knowledge and for what purpose' (Sobelo 2013, p. 11). Coloniality of power, on the other hand, examines how the current power structures were created. The coloniality of being explores the treatment of people from the Global South as the 'other' – less human creatures and the elevation of whiteness over blackness by the Global North (Sobelo 2013).

Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 244) differentiates colonialism from coloniality by explaining that:

Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.

Sobelo (2013, p. 11) adds that to decolonise, the Global South needs to understand 'the invisible vampirism of technologies of imperialism and colonial matrices of power that continue to exist in the minds, lives, languages, dreams, imaginations and epistemologies of modern subjects in Africa and the entire Global South'. The Global South has a responsibility to undo the hegemonic creation of the Global South as the 'other,' that is, different and

inferior, by reinstating the importance of the languages, culture and literacy practices of their communities.

In Kenya, colonial ways are tightly enmeshed in Gĩkũyũ society through Christianity, language, education, dress and food, amongst others. Coloniality has caused an imbalance in Kenyan society, ‘making it lean too far towards Northern culture, language, and attitudes’ (Mutuota 2019, pp. 213–214), creating cultural hybridity. Hybridity is described by Bhabha (2012) as the creation of a people who, due to their colonial experience, are without identity, a people who are in between. Like the people described in V. S. Naipaul’s (1997) *The Mimic Men* and Fanon’s (1967), *The Wretched of the Earth* the colonised are changed by the colonial experience and can no longer recognise themselves.

Using a decolonial perspective, this chapter makes a case for decolonising language and literacies in Kenya by discussing them in relation to *the colonality of knowledge*, *the colonality of power* and *the colonality of being* (Sobelo 2013). Decoloniality starts with the knowledge of ‘existential realities of suffering, oppression, repression, domination and exclusion’ (Sobelo 2013, p. 15). Maldonado-Torres (2011, p. 1) further explains that decoloniality is the task of undoing ‘relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world.’ Researchers in the Global South have the onerous task of spreading awareness among the people about the depth and spread of coloniality and suggesting pathways out of the grip of the global North’s control of their knowledge and knowledge production as well as education policies.

In exploring the decolonisation of language and literacy in Kenya, we attempt a critique of language and literacy from a decolonial perspective. We look at ‘language and literacy’ as a form of coloniality of knowledge, as a form of coloniality of power and as a form of coloniality of being. We also discuss the case of the Kamirithu project, which sets an example of decolonising language and literacy through a community project.

Positionality

This chapter is written from the position of academics working in universities in the Global North who were born and brought up in the Global South. The two authors are interested in Indigenous knowledge and the decolonisation of educational spaces because it is when children start school that decoloniality is instigated and perpetuated. The methods include the prohibited use of their local languages at school, prioritising books written by outsiders whose context is based on the Global North over books written

by Africans which describe the African context. We aim to complement the work of other scholars who seek to decolonise the education space by showing how decoloniality occurs in language and literacy education in Kenya and by suggesting intervention strategies that could be used in the Global South in decolonising education.

To decolonise language and literacy in education, we need to understand how coloniality exists in language and literacy in education. In this chapter, we adopt the definition of literacy used by Bass II and Sibbersson (2015, p. 7):

Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups . . . As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities and social trajectories of individuals and groups.

In other words, literacy is the ability to read and write, use language in ways suitable to a specific context and the ability to make meaning through various modalities.

Language and Literacy in Kenya: A Form of Coloniality of Knowledge

Coloniality of knowledge investigates knowledge production, that is, ‘who generates what knowledge and for what purpose’ (Sobelo 2013, p. 11). Kenya is rich in indigenous knowledges that were used in education, food production, medicine and in all other spheres of life. For many years under colonial rule, this knowledge was not valued and was deemed useless. Indigenous ways such as storytelling, song and dance are a vehicle through which the community educated their children, passed on important community messages and learned the ways of the group. In Kenya, this knowledge production was discouraged and, in some instances, prohibited. The colonialists argued that Indigenous songs were evil. Stories and songs based on the ways of the coloniser were promoted and used in schools. The authors of this chapter grew up reading books such as *Cinderella* (Perrault 2013), *Rapunzel* (Grimm 1997) and others, like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain 1884), which were donated to Kenya by the British Council. The books presented characters and places that looked nothing like us or the communities in which we grew.

Colonisation caused the destruction of Indigenous flora and fauna and introduced species of trees and vegetation that have caused challenges on the African continent (Maathai 2006). Knowledge of medicinal trees has been diminished because it was discouraged by the colonialist and because people do not use their local languages which carried this important knowledge.

The effects of colonisation are still felt in all spheres of education almost 60 years after Kenya attained independence from Britain. This is what Maldonado-Torres (2007) refers to in the previous as coloniality. Thiong'o (1986) and Maathai (2006) have long argued that indigenous knowledges need to be valued and taught to the young.

For example, the education system has an overreliance on Western scholarship and Western curriculum 'experts' to guide the Kenyan curriculum. For example, the current curriculum introduced in 2021, which was developed with the help of the British Council (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) 2017). We place experts in quotes because these people may be knowledgeable in the subject areas with regards to their foreign contexts, but they are not knowledgeable in the Kenyan context. This is an instance of knowledge production from the Global South not being valued as much as the knowledge from the Global North is. Until recently, the curriculum developers favoured 'classics' for high school literature. These are books by authors such as William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens. These books uphold Western thought and practice and ignore indigenous knowledges, values and practices.

Research conducted in Kenya (Mutuota 2019) shows that the literacy capital that the children bring from home is not exploited and often not valued by the teachers in the classroom. Students who join a school with the ability to count in their own ethnic languages but cannot count in the language of instruction – English, are not considered literate by their teachers. González et al. (2006) use the term 'funds of knowledge' to refer to the knowledge and lived experiences that students bring to the classroom. The Kenyan learner's funds of knowledge include their culture and lived experience which are connected to their oral traditions. They include stories, songs, riddles, proverbs, non-verbal communication, their national, ethnic and family identity and their history and sense of identity. When teachers draw on students' funds of knowledge, they enable students to use the knowledge they already have (Flint et al. 2020).

The use of ethnic languages in schools is an important tool that, if exploited, starts children, not from a place of deficit but from what they know. United Nations (2019, p. 1) declared 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, arguing that languages are 'at the heart of each person's identity, cultural history and memory'. This is further emphasised by Thiong'o (1986, p. 15) who points out that 'language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history.' He further points out that 'language carries culture and culture carries language, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world' (p. 16). This explains the loss of culture when a language is no longer spoken. In research in Kenya,

teachers reported that students who attend Kenyan schools that are based on the British system speak English at school and home (Mutuota 2019), which explains how parents are knowingly and unknowingly supporting the loss of the local languages. Other studies (Bunyi 2005; Trudell & Piper 2014) indicate that parents and teachers preferred the use of English instead of local languages at home and school.

Language and Literacy in Kenya: A Form of Coloniality of Power

Coloniality of power relates to the control and exploitation of the Global South by the Global North, which is often carried out through policy and development packages sent to the Global South. The colonial binary created by the colonisers of the metropole/periphery and Europeans/others also promotes the language of the metropole as a superior language to those languages spoken by the 'other.' The use of English as the language of instruction in former colonies is not a situation unique to Kenya. It is repeated in many countries of the Global South formally colonised by Britain, such as Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

Although Kenya has two official languages, Swahili and English, English is the language of instruction in schools, which gives English and the owners of the English language power over people's culture because 'language is the carrier of culture' (Thiong'o 1986). The problem in the Kenyan situation lies in the language policy which has continued to favour English as the language of instruction since its independence. Indigenous languages are prohibited in schools and are only used in rural schools where teachers code-switch between English, Swahili and the local languages to help students understand concepts (Mutuota 2019). Language is at the heart of identity, and using one's local language in education boosts their self-esteem (Mutuota 2019). In their study of language use in primary schools in Kenya, Sure and Ogechi (2008) found that schoolteachers preferred to use English as the language of instruction from class one to class three even when the policy allowed the use of local languages in these classes. Policy-makers have argued that choosing one of the dominant local languages, such as Gĩkũyũ or Luo, over other local languages would be seen by other communities as paternalising.

Thiong'o's shift from the use of English to his native Gĩkũyũ language in his writing and play production was a result of his realisation of the power of language as a colonising agent. Thiong'o's books written in Gĩkũyũ language include *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (1980b) and *Caitani mutharaba-ini* (1980a). Thiong'o (1986, p. 13) states that 'language, any language . . . is a carrier of culture.' Language carries and informs about the people, knowledges, values

and practices. As discussed later in this chapter, Thiong'o, in his *Kamirithu* production, uses a language (Gĩkũyũ) that most people attending the performances would understand (Ndigirigi 2007). This gives power to the local languages and the people.

Kenya continuing to use English as an official language and a language of instruction in schools is the coloniality of power at play. Tanzania is a leading light in Africa as far as decolonising language in the Global South. In Tanzania, the language of instruction in institutions of learning from kindergarten to university is Kiswahili (Swahili).

Great efforts to decolonise language and literacies in Kenya has come not from the government machinery but from the public and visionary individuals such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Other attempts at decolonising language and literacies in Kenya have been through theatre and the rise of ethnic language television stations such as Inooro radio and television stations, Kameme radio and others. In the case of Kenya, decolonisation of language and literacies accelerated due to the efforts of activists in local communities. However, the government has had policies for decolonising the education system since Kenya attained independence from the British in 1963. It is the implementation of these policies that has been problematic. At independence, the Kenyan government favoured the use of English as a language of instruction, possibly because they did not want to elevate one ethnic language over another but, in so doing, elevated the language of the coloniser above the local languages.

Kenya students continue to study Kenyan land features that still carry colonial names, such as Lake Victoria situated between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, named after a British monarch. The continued use of such names only cements the power of the coloniser in the country.

Language and Literacy in Kenya: A Form of Coloniality of Being

Coloniality of being refers to the treatment of people from the Global South as different and lesser beings than the people from the Global North (Sobelo 2013). Hence, the knowledges of the Global South are not considered important. Legacies of colonisation in Kenyan schools include school uniforms, lining up instead of the use of the circle/semi-circle and buildings. Indigenous knowledges are used to a very small extent and are often not encouraged in schools. The colonialists had a mission to destroy the identity of African people, to 'control, through culture, how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world' (Thiong'o 1986, p. 16). The colonised, having been told that their culture was evil and their language not worth instruction in schools, adopted the culture of the coloniser.

To show how deep the coloniality of being is, it is worth looking at how some schools advertise themselves in the media with reference to the British curriculum taught in the schools. Two examples are the Braeburn school and the Brook house school in Nairobi. Braeburn is advertised as ‘The Braeburn Group of International Schools is a group of co-educational international schools offering British/International curricula in Kenya and Tanzania’ (Braeburn Schools 2023). While the Brook house school advert reads, ‘our mission is to deliver world-leading, modern UK education underpinned by traditional values to achieve academic excellence and personal fulfilment’ (Brookhouse School 2023). In both cases, the schools identify with the colonialists.

In the following section, we discuss the Kamirithu Theatre and its role in the decolonising language and literacies in Kenya.

Kamirithu: A Decolonial Project

In 1976, Thiong’o opted to take theatre to the rural audience at Kamirithu because of the restrictions of colonial structures placed on performances of Gĩkũyũ plays at the Kenyan National Theatre. This was 13 years after Kenya attained independence, yet many government and community institutions, such as the Kenya National Theatre, were still governed by the colonialists either as the front managers or as the people who made decisions behind the scenes.

The colonial government had in the 1950s demarcated a four-acre plot for a recreation centre for the Kamirithu people living in colonial village. Thiong’o (1986) explains that there had been various uses for the plot, from a youth centre for the Kamirithu youth to a carpentry training centre, before it became Kamirithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre. The participants of the Kamirithu Community Education Centre included peasants, workers, businessmen and university lecturers like Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ngugi wa Mirii (Thiong’o 1986)

When, in 1975, an elder in the community decided to get the villagers together to renovate the dilapidated centre, one of his objectives for the centre was to ‘uplift the literacy levels of the community’ (Ndigirigi 2007, p. 167). Kamirithu became a literacy centre. It provided the opportunity ‘for adult education to educate and develop people’s literacy’ (Ndigirigi 2007, p. 139). According to Thiong’o (1986), the theatre at Kamirithu was performed in an open space, as were performances in pre-colonial times when the Gĩkũyũ people sang, danced and told stories in the open space. Kamirithu was, therefore, a decolonial project that reconnected people to their roots. Thiong’o (1986, p. 42) states that ‘Kamirithu was not an aberration, but an *attempt* at reconnecting with the broken roots of African

civilization and its traditions of theatre. . . . Kamirithu reconnected itself to the national tradition of the empty space, of language; of content and form.'

It is important to bring to the reader's attention the significance of the choice of Kamirithu as the place for Thiong'o's decolonial project. Kamirithu was a remnant of colonial villages set up by the British during the colonial era 'as a way of cutting off the links between the people and the guerrillas of the "Kenya land and freedom army," otherwise known as Mau Mau' (Thiong'o 1986, p. 34). Before the emergency period when these colonial villages were brought into effect, people from different ridges could not come together to dance and sing as they had always done in the past.

At the time that the Kamirithu theatre started operating in 1976, the village had not risen from the ashes of decoloniality. Thiong'o (1986) gives us a glimpse of what Kamirithu looked like in 1977.

The population of the village was approximately 10,000 people. They comprised, landless people and those poor working-class people who worked on farms and industries such as Bata shoe company, Uplands Bacon factory and British American Tobacco owned by British settlers or multinational organisations, as well as unemployed, plus part-time and full-time prostitutes and petty criminals.

(Thiong'o 1986, p. 35).

The readings were open and attracted huge crowds, and the plays were watched by people coming from outside Kamirithu (Ndigirigi 2007, p. 169), which shows the reach of the project in decolonising the masses by spreading awareness of their plight. Decoloniality starts with people being aware of the issues that plague them. Ndigirigi states that 'others came from the surrounding areas, some from Nairobi and others from as far as Muranga, Nakuru, and Nyeri, a hundred and twenty miles away.'

At Kamirithu, the literacy committee discussed the issues that plagued the village, such as causes of unemployment, landlessness, low wages, poor transport, lack of water and medical facilities (Ndigirigi, p. 168). The participants also learnt to read and write (Mirii, 1979). According to Mirii (1979), 45 of the 55 students who enrolled in the literacy program in June 1976 could read and write (in Gikūyū) after 224 hours spread over six months. This shows the power of learning in one's language.

According to Ndigirigi (2007), the Kamirithu project gave agency to the people, not just those who were acting but the spectators who watched the rehearsals, hence promoting the literacy of all those present. Some spectators pointed out how some lines in the play should be performed. The story was about them and their community. It is worth noting here that the play production followed Freire's method where the teacher played the role of

a facilitator because the participants were more familiar with the conditions in the village. One of the most important aspects of the Kamirithu project in decolonising literacy and language was embracing the local communities' funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 2006). The people of Kamirithu brought a collective voice about what was ailing their society.

The Kamirithu project played an emancipatory role in allowing people to get into reflective thinking about their plight (Freire 1973). For Thiong'o, the denial of the use of the Kenya National Theatre and the realisation that the people who controlled it were colonisers presented a big problem; Kenya was still under the grip of the colonial powers even though Kenya was now independent.

As discussed later in this chapter, Thiong'o and the people of Kamirithu in the Kamirithu project spread mass consciousness about the plight of the masses in their village and the rest of Kenya. They had initiated the process of decoloniality among the Kenyan masses. Kamirithu was the birth of many other performances in ethnic languages.

As evidenced by the Kamirithu project, there is a need to use culturally relevant learning material drawn from the community and have community consultation to draw accurate historical accounts that are agreed upon by the community and that are not about the history written by outsiders. Kenya's policymakers can borrow a leaf from the Kamirithu project because literacy development in oral communities is a 'communal event involving diverse groups of people: children learn from adults and other children through casual chatting, storytelling and songs, sometimes in public space' (Gándara et al. 2021). To decolonise languages and literacy, Kenya must start with a plan of decolonising the education system. Phasha et al. (2017, p. 4) ask some important questions in relation to decolonising education in Africa which apply to the Kenyan context:

How do we decolonise education and the school curriculum in Africa?
How do we subvert the structures and processes of educational delivery (structures for teaching/learning/administration of education) that end by creating sites of marginality and exclusion in learning process?

Language and literacy in Kenya should be guided by the cultural knowledge of the people and bear the Kenyan context.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explained the complexity of decolonising languages and literacies in education in Kenya. Understanding coloniality and how it affects the Global South demands that it is 'unmasked, resisted and

destroyed' Sobelo (2013, p. 11). There are various ways Kenya could accelerate the decolonisation of language and literacy education. A good beginning would be to use local talent to write education policies and stop relying on borrowed policies that do not align with the local contexts. As Mirii (1979, p. 12) states, 'donor agencies represent the interests of their governments' – the Global North. Using texts telling authentic stories drawn from the lived experiences of the people in Kenya in classrooms will change the colonial narrative. Mirii (1979, p. 12) further explains that foreigners cannot write programmes relevant to Kenya's national interests.

Digital technologies can be used to provide a space for promoting the use of indigenous languages and literacies in the classroom and the curriculum. There is also a place for community theatre that uses local languages of English to promote decolonisation. These platforms need to be supported by a policy that prioritises indigenous languages and cultures. It was through the colonial language policy that Indigenous Kenyan languages were marginalised and considered/treated as inferior and backward. It is important that policies are drafted that enhance the place of Indigenous languages at a national level. The government of Kenya needs to put more effort into the decolonisation of language and literacy education. The irony is that these policies and government reports continue to be produced in English. There is an imperative for Kenyan and African researchers and policymakers to rise above the expectation that only the Global North can meet the challenges in the Global South. Governments, policymakers and researchers need to believe in their ability to make policies suitable for the African context.

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10

SITUATING DECOLONISATION OF LANGUAGES AND LITERACIES EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

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Background – The South Pacific Islands

The South Pacific comprises 16 countries; these are American Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, Tahiti, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna, and Western Samoa (Coxon and Munce, 2008: 149; Goundar, 2023a: 33). To highlight decolonisation and educational inequalities in the South Pacific, it is prudent that we sketch the historical and social-cultural background and contexts.

The Pacific Islands comprise three ethno-geographic groupings – Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia. Micronesia includes the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, the U.S. Territory of Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Historically, Micronesians descended from seafarers who populated the island atolls between 2000 BC and 500 BC (Stanford University, 2014). The Polynesia triangular region stretches from Fiji and Tonga to the west, Easter Island to the east, Hawaii to the North, and New Zealand to the south (Lotherington, 1998: 65). The Samoan islands were populated more than 2,000 years ago, and subsequent migrations settled the rest of Polynesia further to the east. In the Melanesia region, Tonga was settled about 500 BC whilst Fiji was settled by both Polynesian and Melanesian people around 1500 BC (Stanford University, 2014).

In 1567, Alvaro de Mendana de Neyra named a series of islands Solomon, and another Spaniard, Pedro Fernandez de Queiros, named Tahiti and Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides) in 1606 (Thomas, 1993: 236).

Dutch navigator Willem Cornelis Schoten named the Tongan group in 1616, and his fellow countryman, Abel Janzoon Tasman, named Fiji (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2004: 35), New Zealand, and the Australian island Tasmania in 1643. A century later, in 1768, a Frenchman, Louis Antoine de Bougainville, landed on the Samoan islands (Goundar, 2023a: 33). Thomas (1993: 236) notes that the Cook Islands were named in 1773 by Britain's Captain James Cook, and he also named New Caledonia in 1774 along with the Hawaiian group in 1788.

Theories on Educational Inequalities

This chapter drew upon the work of two theorists on educational inequalities, namely Amartya Sen's (1985) capability approach and renowned sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital. Inequality in education can manifest in three ways: access to education such as school enrolment, experiences of education, for instance, examination performance, and outcome of opportunities leading to employment or further education (Hart, 2019: 584). Two different approaches are debated by Sen and Bourdieu in relation to students having access to resources and how cultural capital influences education. Sen argues that having access to resources does not guarantee that an individual will achieve what is expected, even though they may be provided with the means of doing so. For example, if someone is provided with a laptop and internet access, it is of no use to the student if they do not have the knowledge and skills to operate the device. Hart (2019: 584) sheds more light on Sen's work:

the existence of a school (resource) does not necessarily assure educational success for an individual. The benefit lies in how appropriate the resource is to the learners' needs. For instance, if the language of instruction is not what the learner aims to be taught in, then the system falls short. In Sen's capability approach, commodities may include availability of educational institutions and trained teachers whereas capabilities could refer to the freedom to be educated by enrolling in one of these institutions and participating as a learner.

Bourdieu established the concept of different forms of capital, which refers to the understanding of a body of commodities and resources that may be converted into capabilities (Goundar, 2023a: 23). He argued that an individual's social position is not only influenced by economic capital but also by other forms of capital (Hart, 2019: 587; Nash, 2000: 76), such as social, cultural, and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, social capital is accrued through social networks, family, and wider community interactions

(Hart, 2019: 587), whereas cultural capital refers to the possession of strong educational capital that has also inherited strong cultural capital, a dual title to cultural nobility, the self-assurance of legitimate membership, and the ease given by familiarity (Bourdieu, 2010: 166–167).

Another argument that Bourdieu puts forward is that, despite individuals gaining cultural capital through educational credentials, the significance of their differential ability to convert cultural capital into other forms of capital matters more. For instance, two individuals gaining qualifications from the same institute may yield different rates of profit from their scholastic investment (Bourdieu, 1986: 243). Combining Bourdieu and Sen's framework, Hart (2019: 591) points out that school funds can be used for additional activities to build learners' cultural capital along with supporting the development of future capabilities, such as considering the distribution of resources and encouraging policymakers and practitioners to strive to ensure that, as far as possible, individuals are free to choose a life they have reason to value.

The learners' background is a crucial factor in experiencing education. There can be in-country or regional differences (Goundar, 2023a: 24). For example, rural schools are less likely to be connected to the internet, thus having limited information on current developments in education. The same learners, when enrolled in universities in urban areas, will have difficulty accessing computer-based resources when compared to students from urban centres (Hart, 2019: 593). When young people transition from schools to universities and the wider world, educational and social inequalities are evident (Hart, 2019: 593) due to the conversion factors outlined earlier. As an outcome of the education system, some may manage to secure employment through work experience and job opportunities through family or university networks.

Furthermore, some inequalities may be traceable to personal attributes such as race, gender, age, and disability (Hart, 2019: 593). Therefore, efforts should be made to open universities so that multiple and diverse knowledge, including students' funds of knowledges, are taught in schools and universities – what decolonial theorists call 'ecology of knowledges' (Harland and Wald, 2018: 617–619; Leibowitz, 2017; Wheelahan, 2015: 753). Harland and Wald (2018: 617–619) argue that concerns about different knowledge types are also important to higher education and training and also to primary and secondary education, where learning is often seen as a means to an end, usually advancing to the next level of study or finding employment. Wheelahan (2014: 134) attests that even in the context of higher education curricula for the professions, students must gain epistemic access to knowledge production in their field. In support of this, Morrow (2009) perceives disciplined inquiry as a prime epistemic value in teaching social science students

to become participants in the field, and epistemic access is gained through research and inquiry-type experiences that form the backbone of a curriculum for powerful knowledge. According to Cross and Atinde (2015: 311), students struggle with the expectation to think at a theoretical level and relate knowledge to various circumstances through an unfamiliar medium of instruction. Yet, previous educational research (Chowdhury, 2012; Makulloluwa, 2013; Nation, 2003) has proved beyond reasonable doubt that students learn better and do well in their studies when the medium of instruction is one of the languages they know best.

Precolonial Education in the South Pacific

In the South Pacific before the 1500s, the most prominent functions of education were those of explaining to the next generation the roles people played in society and teaching the young how to perform both the roles they were obliged to adopt and ones they were free to choose for themselves (Thomas, 1993: 236). During the precolonial period in the Pacific, teaching and learning took place by observing and participating in family and community life (Goundar, 2023a: 34). Thomas (1993: 234) points out that due to a lack of writing systems, islanders developed rich oral traditions for transmitting history, folklore, religion, and personal-social values from one generation to the next. From childhood through adolescence, the young in many Pacific societies learned the history and literature of their culture by listening to adults relate legends, quote proverbs, and recite the lineage of their ancestry and that of the chiefs of their village and region (Thomas, 1993). To summarise how education took place in the South Pacific in the precolonial era, Thomas (1993: 234) explains:

all education for the males such as farming, cooking in an outdoor oven, fishing among the reefs and in the open sea, sailing and hunting roles consisted of on-the-job training, begun in early childhood, and culminating in the adult years. The special skills required for boat building and house construction were learned through an apprenticeship system that demanded years of supervised instruction. For young women, the skills of producing cloth and mats could be picked up at home from older women without the need for extended apprenticeship required of a novice builder. From the females, the young girls mastered the skills of weaving a simple basket, preparing *pandanus* leaves and weaving them into floor mats, and selecting the proper leaves to stuff a pig for roasting.

Goundar (2023a: 34) describes that in the precolonial days, education was a participatory activity that was carefully embedded in the daily lives of

South Pacific people. Even though these century-old patterns of culture were interrupted when foreign colonialists arrived (Thomas, 1993: 236), Pacific societies today still display strong vestiges of indigenous educational methods. This is particularly evident in villages remote from urban centres or in the smaller islands (Lotherington, 1998: 65; Nabobo-Baba, 2014: 92; Reilly, 2004: 479). Education was carried out at home and through community activities prior to the arrival of the Christian missionaries and travelers. Children learned through listening, observing, imitating, and practising what their elders did (Puamau, 2001: 111); the elders would relate stories and legends to the young, which would explain their history, their origins, their value systems, and their view of the universe (Baba, 1991). For example, formal schooling in Fiji began in 1835, soon after the arrival of the first missionaries (Goundar, 2023a: 43). Puamau (2001: 111) states that initially, Fijians were required to read the Bible, which had been translated into the vernacular language, but English soon became (and continues to be) the language of instruction, official communication, administration, politics, and law.

Languages and Literacies Education in the Colonial Era

The emergence of ‘literacy’ in the South Pacific emerges because of European Christian missionaries’ idea of scholarship and knowledge needing to be in writing. It has been noted that education in the colonised Pacific was greatly influenced by Western Christian missionaries and colonial administrators (Nabobo-Baba, 2014: 87; Sharma, 1996: 32). The missionaries translated the Bible and hymns into local languages and established churches in which local leaders assumed important roles as pastors, deacons, and catechists (Thaman, 1993a: 250; Thomas, 1993: 238). In the Sunday and village day schools, children and adults studied Christian doctrine, reading, and writing, which was usually in the vernacular, calculation, some geography, and world history. According to Thaman (1993a: 250) and Thomas (1993: 238), missionaries were typically the first to establish formal education in the South Pacific. Gradually, the church-sponsored schools were supplemented or supplanted by secular schools under the auspices of each region’s colonial government.

The curriculum used in these secular institutions differed from that of the church schools by adhering more closely to the course of study found in state schools of the colonialist’s mother country by adopting textbooks from the colonialist’s homeland (Koya-Vaka’uta, 2016: 2) and by placing less stress on religious doctrine (Thaman, 1993a: 250, Thomas, 1993: 238). As a result, Thaman (2009) and Nabobo-Baba (2014: 89) argue that the education delivered was culturally undemocratic; that is, they did not

take into consideration the way most Pacific people think, learn, and communicate with one another. One of the key issues in schools during the colonial period was the language of instruction. In many places, the missionaries used a Roman alphabet along with punctuation and pronunciation based on the symbols and sounds from the foreigners' home language in attempting to transpose the local spoken language into written form (Thomas, 1993: 238). However, Bray (1993: 342) stated that since communities were sparsely populated or difficult to reach, casting reading matter into a local language was often impractical. For example, in Papua New Guinea, the number of languages exceeds 850 (Bray, 1993: 342). Due to this, a pidgin form of English evolved, causing instruction in many primary schools during much of the twentieth century to officially be in English (Caston, 1993: 321), but in practice, in a variant of pidgin (Bray, 1993: 342; Thomas, 1993: 238).

In the South Pacific colonial days, the language of instruction varied by grade level, with the local dialect dominant in primary grades and colonialists' language servicing as the principal teaching medium in the upper-elementary or secondary grades (Thomas, 1993: 242; Thaman, 1993a: 239). Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, this colonial pattern of education continued with foreign colonialists continually holding top administrative, supervisory, and instructional positions, while indigenous islanders assumed the roles of teachers and teaching assistants and were generally assigned to primary school rather than secondary (Thomas, 1993: 242). After the colonies gained political independence by the mid-1960s (Thaman, 1993b: 251), the authority or governing had been transferred to the South Pacific states that included Fiji, Western Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Kiribati, and others (Thomas, 1993: 243). Thaman (1993a: 251) highlights that English was the medium of instruction, and pupils were forbidden to speak their native tongue while at school.

The colonial government in Fiji established schools for European children with the best-qualified teachers, facilities, resources, and supervision, which followed the establishment of several more schools to cater to the chiefly elite Fijian families (Puamau, 2001: 111). The local management committees constructed schools for Indo-Fijians, and the local provisional council established schools for indigenous Fijian children. Puamau (2001: 111) emphasises that colonial racialising practices and their 'discriminatory manifestations' left huge gaps in the quality of education for all but the Europeans.

Current Constitutional Statutes and Colonial Histories

The 1960s saw the establishment of numerous higher education institutions in the Pacific, including the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji

(Nabobo, 2001: 56). According to Kandasamy (2014: 26–27), Fiji has 68 higher education institutions, which include the three largest universities in the country: The University of the South Pacific, Fiji National University, and University of Fiji. Even though independence provided the opening for educational change, Koya-Vaka’uta (2004: 37) argues that the colonial influence on education is entrenched in educational practice that is evident in the maintenance of content-based and examination-driven approach as well as the preference for English as the sole MOI. Socio-cultural factors such as the home background of the students, their ethnic background, gender, class, cultural deficiencies, and school/institutional disadvantages are identified as major determinants for educational inequalities in the South Pacific (Puamau, 1999: 100; Goundar, 2023a: 45). Attitudes, impact on children when they live away from home to attend school, rural poverty, parental ignorance, and substandard school facilities are other factors, too.

Despite decolonisation, the curriculum is still Western-based, with an emphasis on academic-type subjects (Puamau, 2001: 100). English language, English literature, science, and social science subjects still form the main disciplinary bases for schooling. Puamau (2001: 100) claims that during colonial times, a Western-type education was imposed on the colonial subjects, and so began a process that would ensure that the colonised subjects became as ‘Western’ as possible. This process has continued unabated since decolonisation occurred and demonstrates to a large extent the profound psychological impact of colonialism (Puamau, 2001: 100). In 1969, requests were made to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1999) in New York by several island governments to improve the quality of their education through the establishment of a Curriculum Development Unit to develop school curricula of greater relevance to the context and needs of South Pacific countries (Bishop, 1990; Sharma, 1996: 32).

In 1970, a regional secondary curriculum project based at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji, funded by UNDP and executed by UNESCO, began (Thaman, 1993b: 251). The aim of this project was to provide more relevant curricula for Pacific Island schools (Nabobo-Baba, 2014: 84) through regional workshops, meetings, and forming curriculum teams. By 1976, Fiji, Tonga, Western Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Cook Islands (Thaman, 1993b: 252), and many other Pacific countries established a Curriculum Development Unit. Table 10.1 summarises the 16 countries of the South Pacific’s present constitutional status and their principal colonial rulers.

Looking at the present status of these South Pacific countries, Reilly (2004: 479) points out that Polynesian countries such as Samoa have proved to be relatively successful postcolonial states, providing stable government, policy continuity, and steady but unspectacular economic growth, notwithstanding

TABLE 10.1 Present statuses and colonial histories of South Pacific countries

<i>Country</i>	<i>Present constitutional status</i>	<i>Principal colonial rulers</i>
American Samoa	Unincorporated U.S. Territory	U.S.A. (since 1899)
Cook Islands	Self-governing in free association with New Zealand	UK (1888–1901); New Zealand (since 1901); self-government since 1965
Fiji	Independent sovereign state	UK (1874–1970)
Tahiti	Overseas Territory of France	France (since 1847)
Kiribati	Independent sovereign state	UK (1892–1979)
Nauru	Independent sovereign state	Germany (1888–1914); Australia (1914–1968)
New Caledonia	Overseas Territory of France	France (since 1853)
Niue	Self-governing in free association with New Zealand	New Zealand (since 1901); self-government since 1974
Papua New Guinea	Independent sovereign state	UK (1884–1906); Germany (1884–1914); Australia (1914–1975)
Solomon Islands	Independent sovereign state	UK (1893–1978)
Tokelau	Dependency of New Zealand	UK (1889–1925); New Zealand (since 1925)
Tonga	Independent sovereign state	Treaty gave UK control over foreign affairs (1901–1970)
Tuvalu	Independent sovereign state	UK (1892–1978)
Vanuatu	Independent sovereign state	Anglo-French Condominium (1906–1980)
Wallis and Futuna	Overseas Territory of France	France (since 1887)
Western Samoa	Independent sovereign state	Germany (1899–1914); New Zealand (1914–1962)

Adapted from Bray (1993: 333–348)

an ongoing dependence on foreign aid. In comparison, much of Melanesia is plagued by poor state performance, with negative economic growth, ethnic conflict, weak governance, and military coups, all signalling the failure of states to provide basic security and public services to their citizens (Reilly, 2004: 479). Each of the four independent Melanesian states – Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu – have suffered army mutinies in recent years; Fiji has experienced three coups; and Papua New Guinea has faced armed conflict in Bougainville and, more recently, the Southern Highlands (Reilly, 2004: 479). Lotherington (1998: 65) explains that currently, postcolonial educational policies in South Pacific Island nations continue to alternate between the security of instituted colonial models and the pressing need to shelter and nourish Pacific cultures and languages.

According to Ndhlovu (2022: 9), a key goal of decolonising as a discourse and a praxis is to deal with the ‘morally unacceptable, economically unjustifiable and politically untenable’ injustices that Indigenous and other colonised peoples have endured for hundreds of years. This is still prevalent as in examining the medium of instruction, Lotherington (1998: 66) attests that

throughout the South Pacific, education is provided principally in a colonial language: English in the majority of countries, French in past and present colonial territories, and Spanish in Rapanui. There is English-stream language education in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (Melanesia); the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Western Samoa (Polynesia); Kiribati and Nauru (Micronesia).

She points out that most countries in the Pacific have now moved from a purely transitional model into a more supportive maintenance curriculum.

However, the Solomon Islands is reported to be using a brief vernacular introduction to what is predominantly English submersion education (National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition, 1995: 4). As a consequence of the political sanctioning of English in education and the mass media, a lower status accrues to vernacular languages, and, in some communities, English is reported to be making inroads in the domains of vernacular languages (Sperlich, 1995). English continues to play a pivotal role in these countries after colonisation. Singh (1996: 11–12) provides the present overview of the language situation in some South Pacific Island countries:

English holds a varying place in communities across the Pacific, ranging from virtual nonexistence outside of the classroom, as is the case in smaller, outer islands across the Pacific, to common, everyday use, as in urban areas of Vanua Levu – Fiji or Rarotonga – Cook Islands. So, access to the language in which academic literacy demands are made is quite

unequal and may be very limited. Continued educational support for the mother tongue – if indeed the major vernacular is the mother tongue of all students – is minimised in a language maintenance program. However, Pacific Island countries are clearly moving towards increased support for vernacular literacy acquisition aided by initiatives such as the Basic Education and Life Skills (BELS) program, which provides in-service education for Pacific primary teachers and includes as one of its primary foci, literacy education.

Contrary to the findings of Lotherington (1998: 66), Singh (1996) argues that the majority of countries providing bilingual education are Polynesian. In these countries, a single vernacular is often spoken in the community, e.g., Samoan in Western Samoa. Even where more than one vernacular is used within the country, as in the Cook Islands or Tonga, a single vernacular takes national prominence, for example, Cook Islands Maori, Tongan. Other vernaculars tend to be provincially used in outer islands, e.g., Pukapukan on Pukapuka in the Cook Islands. Although it is a more supportive approach to bilingualism, education in its Pacific manifestation still faces the basic problems of transition (Lotherington, 1998: 66). In the fundamentally monolingual contexts of Polynesian and Micronesian primary schools, it is unnatural for everyone in the classroom to convert to a second language (Lotherington, 1998: 66–69). The national language policy of Vanuatu stipulates that education is to be conducted in English or French (Lotherington, 1996a). However, the supportive conditions needed for the successful implementation of immersion education are not met in either of these Melanesian countries (Lotherington, 1996b). In the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, English is not used in the community as it is in Fiji, so the language must be learned in the classroom.

Finally, Lotherington (1998: 70) highlighted that educational policy and language policy in the Pacific at present still concedes too much to internationally focused economic aspirations, is socio-economically driven, is geared towards language proficiency, literacy skills, educational attainments, and the recreational pursuits of visual media in English, the language of international trade. For this reason, Ndhlovu (2022: 9) clarifies that ‘decolonising requires an explicit commitment to restorative, cognitive and social justice for the victims of global coloniality – that darker side of the hidden rhetoric of modernity, civilisation, progress and development’.

Educational Inequalities in Primary Education

A crucial component that needs to be looked at in promoting education equality in the South Pacific is the curriculum. Luteru and Teasdale (1993:

299) argue that all Pacific Island Countries (PICs) perceived curriculum development as the most potent tool for making education more relevant to local needs. For example, in Kiribati, the main challenge for curriculum development is how to balance the needs of the bulk of students who spend the rest of their lives working mostly in the traditional subsistence sector against those who will work in the modern sector (Kiribati National Planning Office, 1988: 240). Luteru and Teasdale (1993: 299) point out there are differences in the skills required for the two sectors; the informal subsistence sector needs cultural knowledge and vocational skills, whereas the modern sector needs more formal academic and technical qualifications. In order to address this, Kiribati has been focusing on activities of the curriculum unit, mainly at the primary school level (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 300). They have involved local teachers in producing materials and distributing new syllabi that aim for a more realistic and relevant education (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 300; Thaman, 1993b: 257). South Pacific educationalist Thaman (1999: 69) argues:

Pacific people have their own cultures and associated cultural identities that they perceive to be unique. Their worldviews are closely connected to their *vanua/ples fonua* concepts which are inadequately translated to mean 'land' or 'place', but which embody social and spiritual as well as physical dimensions. Formal education continues to reflect the tensions between Western and indigenous knowledge, values, and understandings, creating challenges to educators as well as development planners.

This links to the educational inequality theory of 'hermeneutical injustice' that Morreira (2017: 290) claims exists when the institutions do not recognise the knowledge and cultural capital that first-generation students bring with them as valid. Ndhlovu (2022: 11) sheds more light on this, he argues that:

The praxis of decolonising varies depending on the type of colonialism that is being unsettled and disrupted: whether external colonialism (whereby a foreign power gains territorial control of another for purposes of resource exploitation and so on), internal colonialism (whereby a section of the community within the same territory is colonised by the more powerful members of that territory) or settler colonialism – whereby foreigners gain control of other territories for purposes of both resource exploitation and occupying the territories as their permanent home.

(11)

Similarly, in Vanuatu, it has been reported that between 75 to 80% of children who entered primary school leave at the end of that cycle because the issue of the most appropriate curriculum is unsolved (Vanuatu National Planning & Statistics Office, 1989: 17). Looking at Vanuatu's linguistic background, it has inherited separate English and French language systems from colonialism, together with Bislama, that has become the *lingua franca* (Coxon and Munce, 2008: 152; Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 300). Apart from these, Luteru and Teasdale (1993: 300) observed that there are at least 100 separate indigenous languages. In the same way, about 80% of Western Samoan and Tuvaluan (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 300) school leavers depart at the end of the primary school cycle, which both countries have attributed to what is taught in primary schools must be relevant to local needs and enable people to live productive and satisfying lives.

Likewise, Cook Islands is placing increasing stress on a 'Polynesian Way' curriculum. The former Prime Minister of Cook Islands, Sir Geoffrey Henry, argued that

the educationists who designed our education system appear to have wanted a system that would teach us to be suitable New Zealand residents, to achieve standards that would serve not our needs so much as that of the New Zealand economy.

(Henry, 1992: 13)

In 1989, the government proposed introducing several new components into the school curriculum, including agriculture demonstration farms and plots, fishing classes, self-employment training, religious education, and health education (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 1989). Luteru and Teasdale (1993: 300–301) firmly believe that local participation in curriculum development is essential and that teachers are the best group to lead this task.

Educational Inequalities in Secondary Education

An evident form of educational inequality affecting the secondary education of students in the South Pacific countries is inadequate facilities and teaching resources. Luteru and Teasdale (1993) point out that these countries do not have facilities on par with those found in developed countries; for example, in Kiribati, most villages have a concrete floor for their locally constructed school building, and basic furniture such as a blackboard, desks, chairs, and tables. Further, in a survey carried out by the Kiribati Ministry of

Education, it was found that 75% of classrooms were ill-maintained, 120 of the 462 teachers did not have tables or chairs, 4,000 students had no desks or chairs, and 39% of classrooms were of temporary construction (Kiribati National Planning Office, 1988: 243). Along with this, it was discovered that French-medium schools in Vanuatu generally are better equipped than their English counterparts (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 301). The growing population entering the school systems has put pressure on both the central governments as well as local islands and village communities for additional facilities (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 301) and adequate equipment as areas of top priority.

In Fiji, a shortage of teachers in mathematics, science, and commerce (Nabobo, 2001: 65) largely took place after the two military coups in 1987 and the phasing out of pre-service secondary teacher training in the mid-1980s due to a situation of impending oversupply (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 302). As a result of the military coups, emigration of the best-qualified teachers seriously depleted the teaching service and led to an acute shortage of qualified personnel (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 302). In a study conducted by Voigt-Graf et al. (2007) on teacher migration, it was found that 251 teachers migrated from Fiji in 2007 with two of the key reasons given as better opportunities for children elsewhere and unfavourable working conditions. Following the 1987 coups, the Fiji Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (1991) reported that in 1990, there were 621 graduates with no formal teacher education qualifications, and an additional 462 teachers who had neither post-secondary education nor teacher training.

According to Voigt-Graf et al. (2007: 219), teacher migration in most cases has been permanent, causing South Pacific islands to lose valuable human resources, which has negative effects associated with skilled migration. A shortage of teachers due to emigration increases educational inequalities, and more teacher training recruitment would need to take place to fill this gap (Goundar, 2023a: 50). On a similar note, Lingam (2012: 10) explains that teachers with little knowledge and skills teaching in rural contexts are likely to adversely impact the education of rural children who are already at risk. He emphasises that teachers need adequate professional preparation during their initial teacher education program to teach in rural schools (Lingam, 2012: 1). Narsey (2004) explains that teachers' lack of knowledge and skills in handling multi-class teaching could be a contributing factor to the poor learning outcomes of rural children. In order to improve the quality of education in rural schools and not disadvantage the students, Lingam (2012: 10) recommends that teacher training institutions in the South Pacific need to reflect on their pre-service teacher preparation courses and include training to work in rural schools.

Educational Inequalities in Higher Education

An acute educational inequality facing Pacific education is the lack of qualified teachers who are willing to remain in the profession. Competent and trained teachers are pivotal in raising and maintaining the standard of education in a country. Due to a shortage of qualified teachers, the governments of the South Pacific have had to recruit teachers who fall short of meeting the minimum standard (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 301–302). Teacher training in Vanuatu, Fiji, and Western Samoa requires full completion of secondary education and then three years' admission at teacher training institutions as set by Boards of Education (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 302; Goundar, 2023a: 42). Luteru and Teasdale (1993: 302) argue that in order to tackle this issue, governments need to make the benefits of teaching more competitive with other professions. Failure in doing so is already resulting in qualified and experienced mathematics, science, and accountancy teachers from Fiji, Tonga, Western Samoa, and the Cook Islands emigrating to New Zealand, Canada, and Australia (Luteru and Teasdale, 1993: 302). Coxon and Munce (2008: 152–153) state that other setbacks linked to recruiting teachers in Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu are the remote schools located in scattered, isolated islands, infrequent visits from the Ministry of Education to ensure standards are maintained, along with delays in payment of salaries.

The policymakers ought to make the curriculum more relevant to the needs of the Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Coxon and Munce (2008: 152) argue that the current curriculum is overcrowded with factual content and coverage of curriculum in preparation for exams becoming the teacher's key task rather than having any cultural or real-life relevance. The significance of examinations over other more practical and cultural knowledge and skills which are highly relevant to life in Pacific communities is being marginalised because it is neither easily examinable nor deemed academically important (Coxon and Munce, 2008: 152). The emphasis imposed by the examination-orientation curriculum makes it challenging for teachers or teacher training institutions to develop a more creative and interactive teaching and learning environment. Nabobo-Baba (2014: 85) makes a crucial claim:

in 1997, in the training of teachers at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji and elsewhere in the Pacific Island region, a major goal of the UNESCO Chair in Pacific Education and Culture was to see the review and future planning and implementation of curricula at USP and elsewhere in the twelve countries it served in the region improved markedly in the area of the contextualisation of teaching and learning. Together

with this was the agenda to decolonise the curriculum and its processes as well as to critique inequalities and disparities within our Pacific societies hence the need for reform.

In the mid-1990s, the University of the South Pacific introduced a course called Education and Society with the aim that the students would turn out one day as graduates strong in their understanding of histories, past as well as that of the future they help carve (Nabobo-Baba, 2014: 86). However, it is yet to be evaluated if this training impacted changes to the curriculum utilised in Pacific Island Countries. In support of Nabobo-Baba (2014), Koya-Vaka'uta (2016: 4) adds pivotal findings:

[The] current mainstream educational paradigms are based on what the global north or developed world considers worthwhile learning and teaching approaches and our models of Teacher Education are much the same. This means that the bulk of what we teach and learn in our schools and at our universities and colleges in the South Pacific, is what has been conceptualised and developed *in* and *for* the western world. The challenge for Teacher Educators therefore is to critically analyse the extent to which students are exposed to Pacific content and contexts of teaching and learning; indigenous educational ideas, epistemologies and pedagogies, and preferred teaching and learning styles.

The youth population of the South Pacific is approximately 1.5 million between the ages of 15 and 24 years, and a large number of them are either unemployed or underemployed (Coxon and Munce, 2008: 151). In some South Pacific islands, Coxon and Munce (2008: 151) claim that up to seven times as many young people are seeking work each year as there are no new jobs available. This, in turn, acts as a contributing factor to poverty. The key reason for this youth problem is educational inequality caused by a lack of appropriate education and training that realistically links with further training and employment/self-employment opportunities in the formal or informal sectors (Coxon and Munce, 2008: 151). UNDP (1999: 52) states that this fuels frustration, dissatisfaction, and unemployment, which then leads to social problems and the outflow of skills from the South Pacific region. Therefore, Koya-Vaka'uta (2016: 9) attests that in teacher training, a distinction ought to be made between 'education' and 'training' where education emphasises the link between epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy, while training is primarily focused on imparting practical 'teaching strategies' and content. She (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2016: 15) further adds that quality teacher education must de- and re-construct human capital theories and theories of adult learning in the South Pacific from a Pacific standpoint

that consciously and selectively draws from evidence-based practice in the Global North but only if, when, and where appropriate.

Decolonising Education in the South Pacific – Facilitating Educational Equality

Primary school curriculum plays a pivotal role in engaging students, but in the South Pacific islands, the educational structure from colonial influence is causing inequalities (Goundar, 2023a: 46). Bourdieu (1977: 115), a French philosopher and sociologist, emphasises the point that schools which do not value the ‘realities, language and dignities’ of their students are guilty of ‘symbolic violence’. Sultana (1993) points out that these schools are violent and powerful in their labelling of who a school failure is, and it is the experiences they provide for students who are ‘different’ that marginalise and exclude them. Symbolic violence, then, is the power to dominate the disadvantaged groups by imposing ‘instruments of knowledge and expression of social reality which are arbitrary but unrecognised as such’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 115). As Bourdieu put it:

The culture of the elite is so near to that of the school that children from the lower middle class . . . can acquire only with great effort something which is given to the children of the cultivated classes – style, taste, wit – in short, those attitudes and aptitudes which seem natural in members of the cultivated classes and naturally expected of them precisely because they are the culture of that class.

(Bourdieu, 1974: 39)

In supporting Bourdieu’s work, Puamau (1999: 108) and Goundar (2023a: 46) argue that the educational structures present in the South Pacific are an inheritance from British colonisation with their alien ideologies, epistemological bases, and orientations representing a form of symbolic violence. The curriculum, pedagogical methods, and assessments do not value the cultural knowledge, expertise, and wisdom that students in Fiji bring to the classrooms (Puamau, 1999: 108; Goundar, 2023a: 46). Sharma (1996: 32) states the formal education system introduced by the Christian missionaries and subsequently by the colonial government in the early nineteenth century destroyed traditional educational patterns. In his book *Deschooling Society* (1971), Ivan Illich made similar observations as Puamau; here, he provides a comparison of what constitutes the traditional education system and its value:

incidental education cannot any longer return to the forms which learning took in the village or the medieval town. Traditional society was

more like a set of concentric circles of meaningful structures, while modern man must learn how to find meaning in many structures to which he is only marginally related. In the village, language, architecture, work, and family customs were consistent with one another, mutually explanatory and reinforcing. If an apprenticeship never became a master or a scholar, he still contributed to making shoes or to making church services solemn. Education did not compete for time with either work or leisure.

(Illich, 1971: 22)

According to Chand (2015: 82) and Puamau (1999: 108), Puamau (2001: 110), the fact that English is the language of schooling, official communication, administration, commerce, law and, politics, along with the tokenism given to the teaching of the vernaculars in the South Pacific, bears testament to the dominating presence of colonial authority and power. The curriculum, pedagogies, and assessment system are still 'western' in focus and are, in many cases, considered too foreign, inappropriate, irrelevant, and impractical (Puamau, 1999: 108).

Even though there has been some measure of localisation of the content to include materials on the South Pacific, Puamau (1999) believes that the focus is still very academic, theoretical, and fashioned after New Zealand and Australian curricula. Chand (2015: 87) states that little progress has been made by the Ministry of Education in implementing multilingual education in primary school classrooms in Fiji. In his study, Chand found that the curriculum developers faced challenges such as a lack of expertise staff at the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), poor recruitment of staff and tenure, lack of access to resource materials, and lack of research and consultation with academics, stakeholders, and teacher (2015: 89). Chand (2015: 91) explains that the CDU is not equipped with the necessary resources, there is no library where guides on the curriculum development process can be sought, and it does not have adequate infrastructure facilities. Koya-Vaka'uta (2004: 47) reiterates that the current content-based, examination-driven focus of the education system in the South Pacific needs to change and that diversity must be addressed in education to better prepare students for the realities of a diverse society and the world.

In decolonising to promote educational equality in the South Pacific and encourage what students learn at all levels of education, Nabobo-Baba (2014: 92) suggests that books written by Pacific educators for secondary and higher education be utilised so that students are better engaged with real life and relevant curriculum. These books are *Tree of Opportunity* (Tau-feulungaki et al., 2002), *Rethinking Vanuatu Education Together* (Sanga et al., 2004), *International Aid Impacts on Pacific Education* (Sanga, 2005), and *Ta Kupesi* (Lia et al., 2006). Other books include a book on *Knowing*

and learning: A Fijian Approach (Nabobo-Baba, 2006), and lately, a book on rural and remote schools in Udu, *Rural and Remote Schools in Udu, Fiji-Vanua, Indigenous Knowledge, Development and Professional Support for Teachers and Education* (Nabobo-Baba et al., 2012). In particular, Nabobo-Baba (2014: 92) explains that the Udu book highlights how graduates teaching in these schools apply their learning in such an indigenous context and touches upon indigenous development via indigenous processes of land gifting and kinship relationships.

The key regional areas of priority for concern that can improve educational inequalities, identified by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2009) as cited in Koya-Vaka'uta (2016: 5), are:

1. Access and equity: To address disparities and ensure equal participation of disadvantaged groups across the rural-urban divide, including gender issues and other disadvantaged groups.
2. Teacher supply: The number of trained and competent teachers and their teaching methods.
3. Teacher education: The need to improve pre-service and in-service teacher education.
4. Curriculum: The quality and relevance of curriculum materials.
5. Pacific foundations: The need for contextualised and relevant Pacific curricula.
6. School infrastructure and administration: To improve School buildings, school management, leadership, and school culture.
7. Assessment: The validity and reliability of assessment.
8. Financing of education: The need to reprioritise education in national budgets.

Most of these concerns, such as 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7, need to be addressed in secondary education because it will lead to higher education. Koya-Vaka'uta (2016: 8) points out that in order to do this, we must learn to value and encourage Pacific theoretical and methodological frameworks in our teaching and research undertakings. In support of this notion, Ndhlovu (2022) states that decolonising as a methodology requires us to concede space to other ways of knowing, to be open-minded, and to be willing to learn from others. Hamdan (2009) extends this view; he attests that decolonising as a methodology constantly reminds us of the need to see anew to explore unfamiliar sociohistorical contexts. In 2013, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was endorsed following community consultations. The vision of education articulated in the NCF is:

To provide a holistic, inclusive, responsive and empowering education system that enable all children to realise their full potential, appreciate

fully their inheritance, take pride in their national and cultural identity and contribute fully to sustainable national development.

(Crossley et al., 2017: 876)

Crossley et al. (2017: 880) claim that the future of the NFC is unpredictable as the Ministry of Education has not taken the framework practically. They also highlighted that, in their study, teachers claimed their voices have been missing in consultations on policy matters. Teachers felt they were being treated as machines and not allowed to think or voice their ideas in the policy-making stages (Crossley et al., 2017: 880). However, these were matters under the previous government. It will be interesting to observe how these inequities are addressed by the current Fiji government (Goundar, 2023b: 7).

Since 2014, the Fijian government has provided a free education scheme which allows parents to send children to school without paying the school fees (Prasad and Asa, 2014). This scheme extends to free bus fares for families with financial constraints to pay transportation costs for their children (Goundar, 2023b: 4). Parents have been able to take advantage of this scheme, especially families from remote areas who previously were unable to send their children to school due to financial burdens (Prasad and Asa, 2014; Sharma et al., 2016: 398). An important finding from Prasad and Asa (2014) is that 85% of the students indicated that they would opt for further education even without a scholarship. This is a credit to the free education scheme, which has been effective in addressing educational inequities that children in primary and secondary schools face (Goundar, 2023b: 4). After the 2022 general elections in Fiji, the People's Coalition government has also given assurance that they will continue the free education scheme, which no doubt will be a welcome move by parents, students, and schools alike (Goundar, 2023b: 6).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of educational inequality theories, which includes Morreira (2017), Amartya Sen's (1985), and renowned sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) work. After which, it looks at Pacific Island countries such as Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna, and Western Samoa in order to illustrate the way education was disseminated in the pre-colonial era and how colonisation changed the education system. Despite the end of colonisation in South Pacific countries, there is evidence of a colonial education system in the curriculum. It is prudent to categorically consider decolonising education in the South Pacific to remove educational inequalities that dominate the language and society today. The most

common forms of educational inequalities concern the curriculum, lack of resources, language of instruction, and shortage of teachers in schools. The consequences of colonisation in education and the need for decolonising the teaching materials, mainly in the South Pacific, are pivotal to promoting educational equality. Drawing on literature, I provided suggestions for reducing or overcoming forms of educational inequalities in the South Pacific from a decolonising perspective. Some of these include reassessing the quality and relevance of curriculum materials, the need for contextualised and relevant Pacific curricula, and looking at the validity and reliability of assessments.

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11

UNSETTLING COLONIALITY OF LANGUAGE

English in Contexts Colonized by Other Languages

Hamza R'boul

Introduction

Political instrumentalization allows for fathoming the states' channeling of their failures to signal a true (post)colony by sustaining masked 'liberal' and 'progressive' language policies that helplessly clutch English as a political card that would gather a wide endorsement. To exemplify these insights, this chapter unpacks language planning and policies in Morocco as a Southern space that has been grappling with its postcolonial positionality and epistemic dependency on French (the ex-colonial code). This chapter argues that some peripheries are making use of the coloniality of language by advancing English as a decolonial option to undo the lingering legacies of colonial languages such as French, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian. That is, some peripheries are replacing linguistic colonialism with linguistic coloniality. These rhetorics would enact an epistemological twist in transcending language as an end in itself for gaining more capital to exercise a power-literate analysis that situates the global growth of English within the framework of coloniality.

Veronelli (2016) advanced the coloniality of language as a theoretical framework for unraveling linguistic power relations as consequences of the linguistic effects of what Anibal Quijano (2000) referred to as the coloniality of power. Veronelli defines the coloniality of language as "a process of racialization of colonized people as communicating agents (ie, as potential interlocutors) that begins with the conquest of America and nowadays" (p. 34). While this interpretation delivers nuanced interventions into the debates on the historical interlacement between colonialism, race, ethnicity

and language in America, we may need to develop more contemporary characterizations that modify the epistemological underpinnings and coverage of coloniality of language to designate the current subtle workings of language as (a) a ‘concealed’ colonial strategy contingent on the promise of socioeconomic capital which is ultimately hindered by the sheer racial, linguistic, cultural and epistemic hierarchies and (b) a political instrument that states and colonial structures employ as a part of a larger disinformation industry for manipulating the public’ imagination of the core issues and the supposed solutions. That is, the coloniality of language works through a chain of onto-epistemological reverberations that starts with the supremacy of a linguistic pattern (English in this case) established by the power asymmetries between the Anglo-sphere and the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023) and continues with the states’ political instrumentalization of the populist discourses that express warm approval of English as a magical solution to their sociolinguistic, economic and educational complexities.

This perspective is particularly related to the peripheries where English does not have a colonial legacy, and it is advertised for its decolonial affordances in spheres previously colonized by other colonial languages such as French, Spanish, Russian, etc. Therefore, the coloniality of language could enact a more contemporary and holistic analysis that is employed within a wide range of spheres, concerns and problematics when it is defined to capture “the enduring systems of power that have been established by the linguistic othering of non-native speakers. It refers to the centrality of English [among other colonial languages] in producing hegemonic practices and manifesting/implementing colonial dynamics of power” (R’boul, 2022a, p. 149). This chapter seeks to showcase the states’ political maneuverings in capitalizing on the neoliberal and globalizing gravities of English as cogent and compelling rationales to manipulate the public to endorse particular policies and decisions. In this way, the states make use of the coloniality of language (English) to propel their political agendas rather than constructing language planning and policies that simultaneously attend to the most pressing core issues and cast off the colonial baggage. The premise here could be that subscribing to a more convoluted amalgamation of language, power and politics that benefits from the wide endorsement of English in spaces previously colonized by other languages is more ‘convenient’ and less costly than centralizing decolonial impulses that would place a substantial pressure on the state to reconsider its economic, political and relational policies.

This chapter joins the critical body of literature that is developing alternative epistemologies into the sociopolitical and sociolinguistic intricacies of English in the peripheries (Heugh et al., 2021), reflecting the exigency of nuanced knowledges in accounting for the peripheries’ multilingualisms,

postcolonial malaises and vulnerabilities to colonial workings (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021). Throughout this chapter, the coloniality of language is examined through its overarching implications into the peripheries' epistemological positionalities as they are reflected in the states' political/language planning and policies. In particular, political instrumentalization allows for fathoming the states' channeling of their failures to signal a true (post)colony by sustaining masked 'liberal' and 'progressive' language policies that helplessly clutch to English as a political card that would gather a wide endorsement. To exemplify these insights, this chapter unpacks language planning and policies in Morocco as a Southern space that has been grappling with its postcolonial positionality and epistemic dependency on French (the ex-colonial code) (R'boul, 2023a). This chapter draws on the coloniality of language as an analytical lens for reading new meanings into Morocco's language policy conundrums. These rhetorics would enact an epistemological twist in transcending language as an end in itself for gaining more capital to exercise a power-literate analysis that situates the global growth of English within the framework of coloniality (Hsu, 2015).

The Art of Deviation: Pathos and Symbolically Opposing What You Cannot Disrupt

Over the last few years, there have been major conflicts between Morocco and France, with some reports discussing how the French and Moroccan governments fell out of love (Bobin, 2022). Morocco-France bilateral relations may be perceived as a love/hate relationship given their strong economic and political relationship which is characterized by frequent simultaneous and/or alternating allying and/or frictions. Yet, these recent turbulences were unprecedentedly convoluted that some journalist pieces were asking whether Moroccan-French relations have reached the point of no return (Alaoui, 2022). The 'affection' between France and Morocco has been unsettled by the restrictions on Schengen visas issued to Moroccans, the Moroccan Sahara and Emmanuel Macron's revived political closeness to Algeria (a prime regional rival). Paris made the decision to halve the granting of visas to Moroccan citizens, citing the reluctance to take back illegal immigrants in an irregular situation in various French cities. France's visa restriction has been described as "unjustified" by the Moroccan government and "a great blunder" in intellectual and journalist circles (Africa News, 2022, para 5). Other sources of Moroccan resentment include the inconclusive position of Paris concerning the disputed territory of the Moroccan Sahara exercising a wait-and-see policy. The Sahara is fundamentally a "national cause" (para 7) and the ultimate criterion by which foreign relations are shaped and determined; that is, any social, political, economic, linguistic

and educational partnerships are made in endorsement of Morocco's territorial integrity as declared by King Mohammed VI.

The European Parliament advanced a resolution criticizing the manacles and censorship of the press and expression in Morocco, specifically harassing and imprisoning journalists and activists; shortly after, the Moroccan parliament publicly denounced this unwarranted and intruding decision and subsequently announced the formation of a parliamentary committee to reconsider and reevaluate relations with the European counterpart (Mejdoup, 2023, para 5). Journalist pieces have unraveled some European countries' political ambivalence over the Sahara question and the European Parliament's adopting an intrusive resolution targeting Morocco, which reflects Europeans' immutable imperialist mentality, particularly France's neo-colonial policies over Africa (Bennis, 2023). France denied every suspicion of a conspiracy against Morocco, shirking any responsibility in the hostile campaign targeting the North African country at the European Parliament, noting that the French government had "nothing to do" with the parliament's resolution (Kasraoui, 2023a). Morocco, which won independence in 1956, has its grievances with France given the lingering colonial gaze through which it is perceived as a postcolonial sphere that it is still expected to attend to its ex-colonial regime. These tensions are not, in fact, solely driven by divergent political weals; they also permeate the geopolitics of identity and linguistic/cultural sovereignty. Moroccans recognize their struggles in signalling a real post-colony that has undone any colonial ties, situating the country at the receiving end of the colonial-like relations with Europe.

Hassan Aourid, a former official spokesperson for the Royal Palace, explained that the growing influence of pan-Arabism and Islamism in Morocco meant there are some voices and segments in society for whom France is more than any other western country and whose colonial wounds have not been recovered yet; it is seen as an enemy who committed massacres and colonized Morocco (AFP, 2022, para 7). Multiple opinions and reports stressed France's diminishing leverage in Africa as its influence eroded in recent years by new competitors, evidenced by the spread of English and the strong approval of adopting English as a medium of instruction (EMI) as well as the presence of China's soft power through the controversial Confucius Institutes. Hajar Azell, a Moroccan novelist, indicated that the younger generations, in particular, "have seized on English because it is the language of new technology and social networks, but also because French is seen as the language of the elite" (para 15). Nevertheless, all these discourses are practically symbolic and only appeal to the public's emotions and distress, sidetracking the current socioeconomic challenges that they tend to attribute to France and the French language. The state and

politicians are consciously distracting the public's attention from the core issues and presenting France as a scapegoat. While some politicians exercise some 'verbal' defiance and ostensibly vehement opposition of colonial legacies within the vital sectors of diplomacy, economics, language, culture and education, the current state of affairs displays contradictory policies and traditions whose primary rationale is to deviate from the core issues and to convince the public of the government's nationalist rhetorics and concern for the people.

Since 1956, France has been Morocco's leading economic partner and the largest foreign investor ahead of Spain (a previous colonizer as well). Despite these 'advertised' political tensions and the growing competition in commerce and investment, France-Morocco bilateral trade volume has grown. Bilateral trade surpassed 13 billion Euros in 2022, which is a 24% rise from 2021, according to data published by the French Embassy in Rabat. The report confirmed that French exports to Morocco boomed by 40% to 6.5 billion Euros in alignment with Moroccan exports to France, which increased by 12% to nearly 7 billion Euros. Yet again, some opinions maintained that the new trade protocol signed by the governments of Spain and Morocco may challenge France's position as the foremost economic partner (Escalonilla, 2023). Moreover, undeterred by the endeavors for localization and Arabization, French culture remains quite popular among the Moroccan elite, most of whom were trained in French institutions; for instance, the majority of ministers (who tend to 'oppose' France and the French language) in the current government, praised for their technocrat orientation, graduated and obtained their degrees from French institutions. Abdellatif Miraoui, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, holds a PhD in Engineering Sciences from the University of Franche-Comté and used to be a professor at the University of Technology of Belfort-Montbéliard, France. These complexities are reflective of the state and politicians' maneuvers in manipulating public opinion, especially considering how nationalist rhetorics are subtly employed to appeal to people's poignant postcolonial hardships.

Thousands of protesters marched in various Moroccan cities, denouncing the "high cost of living and political repression" amid soaring inflation and rising social discontent. Around 3,000 people were chanting, "the people want lower prices . . . The people want to eliminate despotism and corruption" during the largest rally in recent months (AlArabiya News, 2022, para 1–2). Coinciding with the twelfth anniversary of the February 20th Movement, which crystallized the Moroccan version of the "Arab Spring", hundreds of people took to the streets to protest against the dangerously inconsiderate rise in the cost of basic food products (La Prensa Latina, 2023). There have also been demonstrations against normalized relations

with Israel. People gathered in front of the Moroccan parliament to decry Morocco's normalization of ties with Israel in a manifestation of strong support for Palestine. The demonstrations took place in several cities two years after the resumption of diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel (Africa News, 2023). Several protests were organized across the country as part of a social campaign to condemn the surging price spikes affecting citizens' purchasing power. Protestors ascribed the social crisis, high cost of living and exorbitant fuel prices to the dearth of government effective measures and action to tackle the situation (Kasraoui, 2023b). Hamid El Mahdaoui, a nationalist journalist known for his strong critique of the Moroccan government, argues that the state capitalizes on these supposedly political plots against Morocco by France and Europe to deviate the discussion from the core issues that people have protesting against and which the country has been grappling with.

These arts of deviation are reflective of the state's hopelessness rather than political ingenuity in redressing the core issues. The state may be making use of nationalist rhetorics, given its recognition of the difficulty of undoing the colonial legacies that they are willing to project a false imagination within which Morocco is a doing and speaking subject rather than taking reactionary impulses whose decentering potential is circumscribed by the profound dependency on the other. Colonialities are substantially powerful in that they paralyze the decolonial possibilities of the postcolonial spheres as they have left limited crevices through which emancipation could meagerly slip. While these nationalist and decolonial rhetorics may procure substantial succor from the people, they practically enact ersatz policies that seek to symbolically unsettle postcolonial entanglements rather than actively undermine the unlawful violations and unsystematic policies that reproduce corruption and engender ineffective strategies than account for the surface symptoms rather than addressing the core issues. Drawing on these insights that map the broader political and social intricacies that entail the employment of pathos and nationalist discourses to deflect attention from the core issues, the following section unpacks the state and politicians' endeavors in promulgating the decentering capacities of English as well as its possibilities in undoing the ex-colonial code and ensuring socioeconomic capital to people by means of official linguistic standing as a *lingua franca* and a medium of instruction in education. The following section (a) deconstructs this frenzy of endorsement and effusive approval of English among the state and public and (b) unravels how Morocco, as a space situated within the Global South(s), is making use of coloniality of language to advance its political interests and present policies that center language as the fundamental reason/solution for its postcolonial positionalities in general and challenges within education per se.

Replacing One Master with Another: English-instead-of-French Discourse

The momentum that nationalist rhetorics have received since 2011, with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (the ruling party of Morocco from 2011 to 2021 and which advocates for political Islam), coupled with the deteriorating political relations with France have propelled discourses that call for embracing English instead of French as the nation's first foreign language (R'boul & Belhiah, 2023). The underlying rationales for such a sociolinguistic shift with its attendant political and symbolic implications are that English is benign and benevolent given the lack of colonial legacies and its potential to unsettle the hegemonic understandings that French exudes within its reproduction of social inequalities (R'boul, 2022b). Officials, stakeholders and scholars continue to set the 'scene' and establish cogent arguments for English superseding French (Errihani, 2017; Kachoub, 2021). Scholars specialized in language planning and policy build on the assumption that English would allow Morocco to attend to the contemporary unyielding circumstances of globalization and neoliberalism (Soussi, 2021). A number of studies investigating language attitudes in Morocco have stressed the impact of the ideological framings of modernity as they underpin the general 'sanguine' narratives promoting English and TESOL in Morocco (Chakrani, 2013). Relevant scholarship has revealed that French and English have been seen as high-prestige languages performing modernity, liberty, secularism and status-bearing significance (Benzehaf, 2021; Chakrani & Huang, 2014), while Arabic, Moroccan Darija (vernacular) and different varieties of Amazigh tend to reflect cultural embeddedness, locality and conventionalism.

These narratives are substantially endorsed by the public. A lot of individuals demand English replace French as the country's first foreign language on news outlets, TV, YouTube and in local discussions among people in houses, cafes and circles (The New Arab, 2021). Drawing on my ethnographic accounts as a citizen, student and teacher, the public seems readily willing to relinquish French for the sake of English, with little attention paid to the status of local languages. The attitude here is that since people have seen, experienced and felt the atrocious colonial policies of France, English is ultimately innocuous, supported by the discourses emphasizing English as an "international language", "language of the world" and "language of science". Also, while the French indexes prestige, English seems to represent a higher social standing as people started to downplay the status of the French in the world and celebrate the powerful leverage of the Anglo-sphere. These arguments are increasingly corroborated at the expense of the voices calling for language revitalization and the maintenance of minoritized languages,

particularly the Moroccan vernacular and Amazigh language (Belhiah et al., 2020). That is, the regulated status of local languages is broached and made legitimate only when the debates are about French but waved aside when English is discussed. French and English represent deep-seated colonialities of language with diverse histories, trajectories and workings. Yet, in Morocco, the coloniality of English appears to be more ‘bearable’, ‘admissible’ and ‘sustainable’. Since the local languages may not offer the necessary capital to keep abreast of the socioeconomic developments that are largely sustained by English, the state and the public are willing to subscribe to another master/coloniality of language as long as it ascertains accessibility to international affairs, systems and structures.

The state recognizes these intricacies and capitalizes on them to ‘sell’ the notion that since Arabic and Amazigh have not been able to undo the dominance of French, then English would probably be more effective in handling this ‘nationalist’ mission. This way, the state, evidenced by its large advocacy of English, can attend to the nationalist/decolonial impulses and deflect attention from the core issues such as mismanagement, unproductive financial plans, unsystematic policies and inability to sustain desired economic development. In particular, these discourses have reverberated into English-in-education policy as English is advertised as a supposedly magical solution for unsettling the ex-colonial code (French) in education. French has indeed contributed to the reinforcement of socioeconomic disparities due to unequal access. For instance, a lot of university students had to drop out or change their majors because they were studying scientific and technical subjects in Arabic in high schools, shocked by the courses being delivered entirely in French at the university level. While financially comfortable families can send their kids to French-mission schools, private institutions and language centers to attain proficiency in French, middle-, working- and lower-class families have been struggling to ameliorate the linguistic competence of their children. That is why quick navigation of social media debates would reveal the effusive approval expressed by the middle, working and lower classes towards English as a seemingly emancipatory apparatus with linguistic, educational and sociopolitical liberties.

In 2019, after years of Arabization, the Ministry of Education (MoE) mandated the use of French as a medium of instruction in public secondary schools to teach technical and scientific subjects (mathematics, physics and biology) as the language has already been in use in universities. The decision was made by the former minister, Saïd Amzazi, who was criticized by Islamists and conservatives who have been fervent defenders of Arabization. The minister claimed that the use of French is dictated by Morocco’s economic interests that stipulate good command of French. He further clarified that the decision ascertains consistency to the educational system in the pursuit

of redressing the dropping out of the university and enabling students to continue their scientific studies without any hurdles posed by French (The North African Post, 2019). MoE explained that this measure is intended to “correct the imbalances within the Moroccan educational system” (Allilou, 2015, para 2). On the other hand, this decision has been labeled by several educators and professionals as an “unanticipated move” (Para. 3) as it turns a blind eye to the debates over adopting English as a medium of instruction in Moroccan schools over French.

Three years later, in 2022, MoE announced that English would be adopted as a medium of instruction, teaching technical and scientific subjects at all primary and middle school levels instead of French. The ministry’s spokesperson noted that “the ministry believes that the English language can become the first foreign language within two years”. The ministry established a seven-year plan to implement EMI gradually in the country’s public primary and middle schools. Teachers of scientific subjects will receive six to eight hours of training each week in the hopes of exercising the ministry’s new plan. While many celebrated and praised the new pro-English direction, a number of teachers and parents expressed some concerns over the ministry’s back-and-forth plans. Hasnae, a middle school teacher of mathematics, expressed that “as a teacher who studied French at university. I put a great effort into learning how to teach mathematics in Arabic. Then we went back to France. And now I must learn English. This is unacceptable” (El Atti, 2022, para 8); Fatima, a mother of a primary school student stated “I support the English decision. But hopefully, that will not change after a year or two again. This affects our children’s future” (para 9).

Moreover, MoE has already implemented EMI policy in some of its universities as a ‘genuine’ linguistic and epistemic break from the Francophone ecologies (Belhiah et al., 2020). The ‘break’ is again substantiated by the fact that English does not have a colonial legacy in Morocco (Buckner, 2011), which has contributed to the romanticizing of its representations, capital and ontological appeal. That is, the state and the people’s understanding of hegemonic dynamics are contingent on colonialism as an administrative policy with little attention to coloniality as a subtle system that interweaves the linguistic, the cultural and the epistemic in complex logics and structures. From this particular premise arises the very efficiency of the coloniality of English as a supposedly benign linguistic pattern that offers decolonial potential in undoing linguistic dependency and the lingering colonial-linguistic structures in postcolonial spaces that were previously colonized by other colonial languages such as French, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian, etc. In Morocco, the coloniality of English remains insipid since these hopeful discourses to move simultaneously beyond French and rectify the deficiencies in education coincide with the calls for granting more

visibility to local languages to counteract neoliberal demands (Ben Haman, 2021), ignoring how the coloniality of English per se is predicated upon the ideologies of racial capitalism and neoliberalism which present English as the only linguistic possibility of modernity, prosperity and progress (R'boul, 2022c). The coloniality of English is considerably powerful that some peripheries are willing to sustain its hegemonic understandings as long as they can benefit from its capital. For the sake of this capital, they are willing to overshadow its colonial implications and overemphasize its decolonial potential. The peripheries are between the claws of the colonialities and they are willing to opt for the one that entails less harm with the least colonial representations in the public's minds and psyches.

The coloniality of global English in Morocco is interlocked into local and global language ideologies permeating the political narratives around Arabization and Francophonie that reenact interwoven linguistic colonialities and unsettled ambivalences (Kabel, 2021). Language and medium of instruction are spheres where the political agency is taking place as they cannot be separated from politics; any analysis that foregrounds language as a mere tool is reproducing a surface intervention that would perpetuate the naïve consideration of how people's discourses, attitudes and their sociocultural rationales are not molded by the wider political trajectories and rhetorics. The coloniality of English is remarkably influential that the peripheries must capitulate and contrive comforting explanations that would soothe the reflections of coloniality on the peripheries' minds and psyches. The coloniality of English in Morocco could be unpacked by deconstructing the intricacies and contradictions of anti-colonial nationalism in the country that are complicated by socio-political processes and local networks (Ait Mous, 2013) and the political instrumentalization of English that accounts for the complex issues that Morocco has been struggling with. At this point, the coloniality of English in Morocco is made invisible as the state and the public are fixed on its decolonial potential in undoing the ex-colonial regardless of its imperialist semiotic patterns with linguistic and neoliberal governmentality (Martín Rojo & Percio, 2019).

It is a case of unsettling linguistic colonialism (French) by linguistic coloniality (English). It is a case of undoing one master with another. It is a case of replacing one master whose colonial agendas have been painfully felt with another master whose colonial workings are complex, implicit and subtle. Politicians, scholars and people continue to engage in analytical frameworks that simplify the issue of multilingualism in Morocco to separate monolingualisms operating within their spatial, cultural and epistemic circles (R'boul et al., 2024); this implies that the colonial frames of analysis into language planning and policy have not been unlearned since foreign languages are seen as an end in themselves rather than means for propelling

the country's development. The popular attitude here is that language policies may reproduce "inequalities of multilingualism" (Tupas, 2015), mainly with regard to French, not English. The state and politicians appeal to the public's emotions by making use of this assumption to distract attention from the core issues. Colonialities of language are adamant and they intrude on people's reasonings because they cripple the very possibility of moving forward using local languages. They deliver the notion that by speaking English, one can enjoy the perks of the Americans or the British. Coloniality of language also problematizes peripheral multilingualism (Pietikainen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013) in the peripheries because it distorts the discussion and thwarts the very possibility of thinking rationally and critically since everything is bound by socioeconomic capital. We cannot deny that politicians, scholars and people may not believe in the usefulness of the local languages (Arabic and Amazigh), even implicitly, that they seek to have their grip on colonial languages as long as they are lucrative, beneficial and unproblematic (R'boul, 2022b).

While Morocco is a multilingual sphere, the processes of peripheralizing and centralizing languages are omnipresent as they are malleable according to how the legacies of colonialism are pronounced/confronted and how power relations are reshaped and repronounced differently as the socio-political fabrics of Morocco are changing and developing (R'boul & Belhiah, 2023). Academic scholarships are required to reflect more agency and criticality since the dominant discourses within the state and the public are largely endorsed by scholars and professors themselves (Belhiah, 2022; R'boul, 2022d). The main argument here is the prospects of decolonizing through English overshadow the coloniality of language and the state capitalizes on this thesis by gradually assigning more official recognition to English as the nation's second language, which ultimately reverberates into the public's opinions. This is an effective tactic by the state and politicians as they harness the coloniality of language to deflect people's attention from the core issues within a Southern country that has been grappling with its postcolonial positionality and which may not have established a true post-colony yet. The continuous advocacy of these rhetorics would result in the (re)colonization of Morocco in the long run; the first step would be embracing English and then seeking alternative allies in the Anglo-sphere, which has been manifested in the gushing celebration following the USA's recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over its Sahara. While the available critical literature questions the benevolent implications of English in the peripheries, the coloniality of language is rendered ultimately potent given the country's vulnerabilities against western powers and empires. The greatest success of the coloniality of language is that it convinces the peripheries that they can undo one colonial linguistic pattern with another.

Coloniality of Knowledge and Language Impeding Alternative Perspectives

A fundamental epistemological trajectory paving the way for the coloniality of language is that language planning and policy in postcolonial Africa still derives analytical approaches and understandings from homogenizing standard language ideological frameworks (Ndhlovu, 2020). Realizing this particular point of departure would allow the peripheries to act upon the notion that foreign languages would always infiltrate economic, political and developmental issues, which alert both scholars and decision-makers to establish discourses and praxis of language policy in a manner that concurrently accounts for all these perspectives. These intricacies are substantially relevant when the English and EMI are discussed, given their immense colonial implications and leverage, e.g., Erling's (2016) study on English education in India and Ghana and the necessity of drawing on 'sustainable additive multilingualism' to mobilize students' mother tongues in education and Kuchah's (2016) study on the use of EMI in Cameroon and how it is politically positioned within the postcolonial complexities of French- and English-speaking ideologies in the country. Any intervention or analysis of multilingualism in postcolonial Africa needs to consider "the linguistic aspects of the process of dehumanization through racialization that is constitutive of capitalist relations of power" (Veronelli, 2012, p. iv) which have ultimately been inculcated in some African nations and individuals' minds and psyches.

The positioning of EMI or any other language-in-education policy has to be anchored in decentering endeavors to speak back while attending to neoliberal conditions; that is, exercising some agency that interweaves the linguistic, the political and the epistemic to disrupt western constructs of language; this specifically relates to multilingualism as a rather epistemic terrain where knowledges about languages and their users are made and practices, so as to enact interventions and perspectives that are underpinned by the southern sociolinguistic ecologies (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021). While academic discourses may assign some sense of straightforwardness and smoothness in implementing such a vision, there is an exigency for a postcolonial critique of linguistic normativity and language practices within schools and beyond. The vision can be exercised by critically engaging with how Southern knowledges and multilingualisms can lend themselves to alternative theorizations to construct alternative analyses into the intersections of language, society and decolonization of education in the peripheries (Makoni et al., 2022). For instance, the revised Moroccan constitution of 2011 designated Arabic and Amazigh as the nation's official languages, but in practice, the sociolinguistic landscape is fundamentally different. Darija

(the vernacular) and Amazigh are, indeed, the main linguistic codes of communication among people. This condition warrants a profound examination of how languages shape social realities but not the other way around in a continuous renewal of colonial structures that the state assumes directionality of its language policy without attending to the core ontologies within the people's minds and psyches.

Morocco is an interesting case because the state and the public assume that by speaking French and English, they would be able to enter modernity while at its exteriority. Being situated within the margins of modernity could be explained by how people learn English in order to benefit from its capital, but this benefit is rarely realized due to colonial-like relations among the Global North and South and the processes of racialization, e.g., native-speakerism. The coloniality of English in Morocco is exacerbated by epistemic asymmetries as reflected through the state and the public's rhetorics and actions as they clutch to simplistic and surface analyses which are aggravated by unstructured and unclear language policies. While the populist discourses attribute the spread of English in the country to the academic and socioeconomic factors (R'boul & Saidi, 2024), there is a need to examine, for instance, how students at schools that adopt EMI challenge, reenact and/or reformulate the current understandings of multilingualism that flow through cultural, translingual and organizational practices. While French is a compulsory course starting from the third grade, public school students' first formal exposure to English is not until the ninth grade. In private schools, students may start learning French and English as early as kindergarten. All these variables contribute to shaping people's perceptions of languages and how they are indispensable to their progress and status.

Again, Morocco's ambivalent language policies are precipitated by the lack of strategic continuity and long-term approaches in linguistic planning through the different terms of government and their agendas, as well as the competing interests of Moroccans. In particular, several factors impeded the continuation of the English Baccalaureate program. First is the lack of adequate training for instructors in EMI pedagogy, as many teachers did not master English and were not able to teach in English. Second, the instructors had no option but to adopt the same syllabi used for the Arabic and French curricula. There were no textbooks in English, and the instructors were forced to translate the Arabic and French ones. Finally, after graduating, some students were not granted admission to some university majors because they reportedly lacked the required mastery of French since they had studied subject content in English. All these issues caused the English Baccalaureate to be suspended only three years after its inauguration (Belhiah, 2022). Moreover, the English Baccalaureate program was designed and administered by the British Council. Yet, this organization did not have

full-time staff or a qualified task force based in the country that have deep knowledge of the Moroccan educational system and the sociocultural particularities of the nation. The British Council primarily relied on 'JIJOESs' (Jet In Jet Out Experts) coming from the UK (Alderson & Scott, 1992). These realities exemplify how the coloniality of knowledge and language are inextricably linked and sustain each other's adamancy.

We need critical knowledges that understand how the dehumanization of the colonized and enslaved populations has been perpetuated through the coloniality of knowledge, which is made unwavering by the coloniality of language; knowledge dictates how we approach language and language, in turn, maintains the colonial-like within knowledge intact. While the contempt for the colonized people's languages and social ways of making sense may not be explicitly labeled or dealt with as expressions of their inferior nature, mainstream literature exports analytical templates of multilingualisms and language in society from the Northern spheres to Southern spaces. These asymmetries within knowledge may reproduce inaccurate characterizations of language and multilingualism in the Global South(s) because they are based on rigid standards of western logics and understandings. For instance, the conception of the coloniality of language is required to undergo epistemological modifications in order to account for how English functions in Morocco as a decolonizing apparatus that also allows politicians to deflect attention from the core issues by citing how English (linguistic coloniality) could undo French (linguistic colonialism). The argument implied here is that while there is a connection between the reduction of the colonized populations to a status of non-humans, the promulgation of monolingual linguistic ideology that promotes neoliberal logic in assessing the value of languages conceals the colonial oppression rationally, dialogically and discursively (Veronelli, 2016).

What could be suggested here is that scholars and decision-makers would be better able to map relationalities among languages and their ontological representations in Morocco through alternative theorizings of multilingualism that are driven by situated ways of knowing that do not necessarily seek to abide by mainstream theories. These alternative narratives are purposefully meant to develop this sense of epistemic sensitiveness to the historical, sociolinguistic and sociopolitical specificities of these spheres. As scholars and educators, we may argue that epistemologically delinking from the dominant rhetorics that cripple a deeper appraisal of our language planning and policy is essential. This adds to the breaking with imperial logics of teaching and research so as to foreground senses, logics, modes of being and practices that do not exist in the spatial imaginations of Euro-modernist frameworks but exist in the other spheres that remain unpopular, under-researched and unexplored (Ndhlovu, 2021). The skewed geopolitics of

knowledge in language-related fields, e.g., ELT, TESOL, applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, complicate the existing structural intricacies within the peripheries, which may, in turn, impede the postcolonial and decolonial interventions into language planning and policy (R'boul, 2023b).

Conclusion

The sociolinguistic complexities within Morocco warrant a nuanced understanding of the coloniality of language and how it subtly functions as a decolonial apparatus. While the capital that English may entail is substantially drawn upon as the fundamental rationale for its use, the Moroccan state and politicians argue for English as a benign and benevolent alternative to French (the ex-colonial code). Their discourses employ some distraction strategies by accentuating language as a central issue rather than redressing structural inequalities and unsystematic language policies that precipitate possibilities of re-colonization through another language/system. Morocco is within a linguistic quagmire where colonial languages are necessary since the local languages do not offer comparable international coverage and/or access to global affairs. The state and politicians recognize that the coloniality of English has more leverage than that of the French, and the public has a positive attitude towards its presence and spread. That is, the state and politicians capitalize on the coloniality of language to sell the notion that English would not only undo French and its reproduction of socio-economic disparities but also contribute to Moroccans' capital and prospects. The coloniality of language here unfolds through different dynamics, which stipulates some epistemological flexibility in making sense of the very notion of the coloniality of language. This is particularly relevant with regard to how the coloniality of English is immensely powerful that the peripheries are making use of it to distract the public and convince them of their nationalist rhetorics (to promote political agendas) while engaging more deeply with the neoliberal and globalizing intricacies that perpetuate coloniality of power, knowledge and being.

The decolonizing potential of English in spaces that had been previously colonized by other colonial languages offers new contours into the coloniality of language as well as the sociology of language. There is a need for further studies that unpack the processes within these logics of utilizing the coloniality of English to cast off another colonial legacy simply because English does not have a colonial administrative history in a certain place. Spaces previously colonized by French, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian may choose to overfocus on unsettling linguistic colonialism that they are willing to embrace linguistic coloniality because its representations are not

as conspicuous nor as harmful as those of colonial languages that are associated with massacres, slavery and atrocity. This is a project that I hope to elaborate on further, and this chapter could set some ground for future discussion on the coloniality of English within decolonization. It is indeed interesting yet dangerous that English has infiltrated postcolonial spheres' decolonial impulses as well as nationalist rhetorics, although it is often associated with American expansionism. This chapter has unraveled the frustrations, challenges and aspirations within Morocco as a southern context that has been struggling with the lingering colonial systems and logics that have problematized its decolonial endeavors, unless they are propelled by other colonial structures with more power and leverage. The argument here could be that if a space is grappling with a form of colonialism/coloniality in all cases, they should rather opt for the form of coloniality that looks innocuous at the surface and which ensures most capital to the country and the people.

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12

FROM SPARK TO FLAME

Decolonising Linguistics and the Creation of First Nations Medical Media

Glenys Collard and Celeste Rodríguez Louro

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Australian Aboriginal English (AE), a post-invasion contact-based variety used by approximately 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021a: 5). The existence of AE rests on the forced encroachment of English into ancestral First Nations communities since the British invasion of 1788 (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, Under contract: Chapter 1). At least 400 traditional First Nations languages were spoken in what we now call Australia before the invasion (Bower, 2023: 56). Today, it is estimated that only between 20 and 25 First Nations languages will be passed on to the next generation (Karidakis & Kelly, 2018: 106). Against this backdrop, AE stands as a powerful encoder of ethnic and cultural identity.

There are two parts to this paper. Firstly, we describe the cross-cultural research model that allowed us to document AE as used in *Nyungar boodjar* (the Nyungar term for “Nyungar country”) in Southwest Western Australia. This research is the first to document sociolinguistic aspects of AE yarning – a First Nations cultural form of storytelling and conversation – which we used to capture the voices of those rarely featured in sociolinguistic research. Our First Nations-led fieldwork not only made it possible to document these voices for sociolinguistic research into storytelling. The recordings also allowed us to understand the importance of storytelling for AE speakers, specifically, its role as a culturally appropriate means to convey information and share knowledge.

In the second part of the paper, we address the longstanding erasure of AE from the medical media by presenting our collaborative work with the Heart Foundation and the Pilbara Aboriginal Heart Health Program. First Nations people in Australia are almost twice as likely to die from cardiovascular disease than non-First Nations Australians (Smith et al., 2021). Despite this sobering statistic, medical media targeted at First Nations communities had been produced, until 2020, in standardised Australian English (a majority mainstream variety of English in Australia). When we were approached by the Heart Foundation to work on a suite of heart health videos, we proposed a First Nations-led model to produce medical media solely in AE. In this piece, we reflect on the process that allowed Collard to author two video scripts fully in AE and to apply the practice of yarning to the presentation of the information to ensure that the medical message was presented in a culturally safe way. Taken together, these practices allowed us to ignite a spark of change by making First Nations-led work part and parcel of the process of designing community-oriented medical materials.

This chapter is organised as follows. In Section 2, we introduce the relational ethic underpinning our work. In Section 3, we describe the yarning methodology we designed to conduct our sociolinguistic fieldwork in Southwest Western Australia. This work allowed us to lay the groundwork for our collaborative consultancy with the Heart Foundation and the Pilbara Aboriginal Heart Health Program. We describe the process of developing culturally sensitive medical resources for First Nations communities in Section 4. In Section 5, we reflect on these processes, including how they contribute towards the “praxis” of decolonisation (Ndhlovu & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *In prep.*: 1), and how the work presented here honours the linguistic and cultural futures of First Nations people.

A Relational Ethic

In the framing chapter of this volume, Ndhlovu and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2024: 2) comment on the call for “relational ways of being and seeing the world” as they pertain to “thinking with (not simply about)” diverse people and ways of knowing. This relational ethic has been a foundational tenet of our work together since we embarked on sociolinguistic research in Southwest Western Australia in late 2018. The project, funded through an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) to Rodríguez Louro (2018–2022), sought to examine variation and change in Australian Aboriginal English (AE), an enregistered post-invasion contact variety “spoken by the majority of Aboriginal people throughout Australia” (Eades, 2014: 417). Collard joined the project as an L1 user of AE and a Nyungar research associate with over 35 years of

experience in the area of First Nations education, particularly the role of AE in the school. This time, however, we were looking to record AE speakers in their “home” settings, that is, domains in which they would use vernacular language freely and comfortably, away from the institutional contexts (such as schools and the courtroom) that the existing literature on AE had traditionally focused on (e.g., Eades, 2012; Malcolm, 1973–1977). Additionally, we knew that First Nations leadership would allow us to collect sociolinguistic data in a culturally sensitive fashion. In fact, at the start of our fieldwork, it became apparent that we would need innovative methods to collect our sociolinguistic materials in a way that honoured First Nations’ ways of being and doing in the world. These frameworks would allow us to engage with Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012: 120–121) “Indigenous Research Agenda” through “self-determination”, an ongoing process of choice over what should be shared and how.

We knew from the outset that a decolonial approach, or at least one which attempted to be as decolonial as possible, would be key in working with speakers of AE who come from minoritised backgrounds. We also wished for our research to be actively reparative, or at the very least, to inflict the least possible harm on speakers and their communities (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, *Under contract*: Chapter 1). As our project took off, we were motivated to think outside the box or, as Ndhlovu and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (Ndhlovu & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *In prep.*: 2) explain, to think “without a box”. This “no box” model became crystal clear as suggestions from established non-First Nations sociolinguists began to trickle in. Settler sociolinguists proposed we should adapt the sociolinguistic interview – a canonical method of data collection in sociolinguistics (see Labov, 1966) – to suit the cultural needs of our field site. However, we struggled to find a culturally appropriate way of using a sociolinguistic interview with the AE-speaking community. Instead, we followed Collard’s guidance to use yarning, a First Nations cultural way of storytelling and conversation, to collect our data. In the process of establishing it as a method of data collection, Collard explained that yarning is a helpful means to “transfer knowledge”. It is also something that AE speakers can “tell” or “spin”. Additionally, it may relate to a seating arrangement, a “corner”, or a “circle”. It is also a thing that the “mob” (people) can “have” (i.e., as in the expression “to have a yarn”).

Our decision not to use a sociolinguistic interview rested on the fact that First Nations people generally find direct questioning inappropriate and offensive. For example, Eades (1993: 185–186) explains that “Aboriginal people throughout Australia, whether they speak a traditional language or Aboriginal English, frequently use a range of indirect means of finding out information” because “it is considered rude in Aboriginal cultures to question people about many things, or to put them on the spot”.

In addition to using yarning as a method of data collection, we also relied on a two-way, collaborative research model where our cross-cultural perspectives were valued and honoured (Collard is a Nyungar woman; Rodríguez Louro is a migrant settler woman). First Nations leadership allowed us to develop culturally sensitive research methods. It also made it possible for speakers to feel guided as they shared stories which have historically been cast away and erased from the public imagination. In fact, yarning is a culturally appropriate conduit for the transmission of the types of mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional experiences that First Nations people are likely to value (Latimer et al., 2020: 107).

Even though yarning is not altogether different from the use of storytelling as a method of data collection in fields such as sociolinguistics (e.g., Labov, 1972) and anthropology (e.g., Ochs & Capps, 2001), and while our work together may be reminiscent of field linguistic research informed by consultants and participants (Meakins et al., 2018: 28–29; Rice, 2010: 29), our research does differ from these traditions in privileging Collard's voice. In fact, privileging Collard's voice was our “deliberate way of making decolonising the underpinning pillar of everything we [did]” (Ndhlovu & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, In prep.: 3).

Yarning as a Decolonial Method of Data Collection

Our first research design decision was to use yarning as a method of data collection in our sociolinguistic research. Yarning is defined by Terszak (2008: 90) as “a process of making meaning, communicating and passing on history and knowledge”. At its core, yarning is about enabling access to a community's history. For stage and screen actor and activist Uncle Jack Charles, for example, it is fundamental for communities “to have access to the true stories and histories of this land's First People” (Charles, 2019: 232). Yarning has also been deployed in institutional settings to avoid using “direct questions to obtain information” which can create tension and lead patients and learners to provide inaccurate information (Dudgeon et al., 2014: 283).

In the context of our project, yarning made it possible to collect vernacular language data (the type of AE used in “home” settings) while also offering the production of an original record of the lives of Nyungar people in Southwest Western Australia. Our *Yarning Corpus* consists of “light” (acrolectal) AE data gathered in metropolitan Perth, Southwest Western Australia. It features interactions with 58 AE speakers: 36 women and 22 men who speak AE as their first language. The recordings in our *Yarning Corpus* took place between Collard and a variety of AE speakers aged from 10 to 88 years old at the time of data collection. The oldest

speaker was born in 1931 and the youngest in 2009. The recording sessions were wholly unscripted, but – interestingly – several themes recurred. Prime among these were the topics of illness, death, and spirituality, which participants willingly offered without prompting from the researchers. In this sense, some of the AE yarns told by our participants were akin to those captured by Labov (2013) in his book titled *The language of life and death: The transformation of experience in oral narrative*. In example (1), Brad – born in 1961 – tells the story of his dad leaving home early to be able to go into town and return home before his permit expired. Brad’s mention of the term “permit” may link back to a time when First Nations people in Western Australia required a so-called “Native Pass” to be able to visit Perth City. Known as “The Perth Prohibited Area”, this restriction lasted from 1927 until 1954. Brad was born in 1961, but it is likely that, rather than a story he experienced first-hand as a child, this is a yarn that his dad told him “before he passed away”. Participants also spoke about racism and discrimination. Example (2) shows a story told by Mary, a woman born in 2000. All names of places and people have been replaced by pseudonyms.

- (1) Our spirits are still in the dreamtime, even to these days now, they still woulda. Now we could be anywhere, and that family spirit, or good spirit is with us wherever we go, they’ll look after us, protect us from evil. And I’ll tell you one time, we was in Yarka Reserve there, back in the 60s, you know, I was only a kid, about as big as, you know, about eight, nine. Then my old dad, he used to go night-time because he had to have a permit to go into town and get back out before time . . . Well he went in there before six o’clock and got his stuff and come back out. And you know, them days in the winters, real dark. Well, the old people, they made a big bonfire, front of the house and we’re sitting there and like us kids, we’re just playing around the fire, you know. Well then dad just, he was walking from the road into the reserve, and he seen us, but he seen all the family there, but there was another person there, like a spirit, standing there with us and he was wondering who that was. When he got up closer, closer, closer, it just vanished. It was one of the old people, just looking after them. And that’s what he told me, he was – before he passed away (Brad, male, born 1961).
- (2) But, nah, when we looked up, them wedjelas [AE for “white people”], they was just staring us and I just felt so shame [AE for “embarrassed”] and normally I’m not shame. Normally I’m right, and I was like “Nah, Cecilia, let’s just go”, you know? Unna? It made me feel shame (Mary, female, born 2000).

Example (1) combines historical information with the presence of protective spirits. It mixes painful memories of exclusion with the presence of ancestral beings whose role was to protect Brad and his family “from evil”. In (2), Mary describes feeling “shame” at “wedjelas” (white people) staring at her and her First Nations cousin as they readied to enjoy a meal at a pub in their area. For clarity, in AE, the word “shame” refers to feelings of embarrassment, inadequacy, or regret which emerge as someone’s individual actions clash with the interests of the group (Fesl, 1977: 66). In (2), Mary felt “shame” because the non-First Nations people at the pub discriminated against her and her cousin.

These raw accounts of our participants’ lives were captured because, following Collard’s advice, we invited AE speakers to yarn about subjects they wished to bring up and to do so in the presence of Collard and other conversational partners who were also First Nations. While Rodríguez Louro is not First Nations, her standing as a non-mainstream person (i.e., as a migrant woman) also made it possible for speakers to refer to emotionally loaded narratives of racism and exclusion, as shown in the examples provided previously. The yarns that participants shared with us made it clear that life for AE speakers is starkly different from what it is for mainstream speakers. This point of difference led the way for the applied linguistic work that was to come in collaboration with the Heart Foundation and the Pilbara Aboriginal Heart Health Program. Indeed, as a culturally entrenched genre, yarning allowed us to consider how it may be used to produce culturally appropriate medical media for First Nations communities.

Developing Culturally Sensitive Medical Content

When we were approached by the Heart Foundation in late 2019, we were excited to share our then-emerging insights into how to work with First Nations communities using a decolonial research framework. This time, the brief was to produce a set of scripts and videos for First Nations communities in Northern Western Australia, although the idea was for the materials to be used across Australia more generally. (The Heart Foundation is a national body). At the time, there was little existing material to use as a starting point, and we decided to propose a suite of design features based on: (1) our previous collaborative work on AE as spoken in Western Australia (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021a, 2021b); and (2) the importance of yarning for First Nations people in Australia (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2020, 2021c).

The First Video: Get a Heart Check

We were first asked to draft a script. For the first video, Collard developed an original draft script in AE. The draft included some culturally and linguistically

salient features of AE, such as the words *mob* (people) and *yarn* (story/conversation), as well as the discourse particle *unna* (an utterance final tag synonymous with “right”, “ok”, “isn’t it”; Fraiese et al., 2021). A section of the draft script is shown in (3) with permission from Glenys Collard.

(3)

Ey you fullahs what you doin?

Wait der I been tryin to catch up to youse ey.

I ‘ad to tell you about this new thing now that we all gotta ‘ave ok?

Come sit down ‘ere and we’ll have a yarn and I’ll tell youse about it, unna?

It’s all about our new heart check program.

Cause all our mobs gotta ‘av it

Now ya know unna?

They reckon we all gotta have it true . . .

All our mob everywhere, like, gotta ‘ave it

All our mob all Aboriginal peoples everywhere.

I’m tellin you this yarn ‘cause I had to have one done too . . .

True we don’t like goin to see the Doctor too much but we gotta for this one . . .

I was cruel frightened too!

We all gotta ‘ave this one now and when we 30 years old . . .

It is a new one now, same like they do for our little fullahs when they just born, you know?

And sometimes when they just get a bit sick . . . it’s just like that one.

They might ask you some things like just talkin takin talkin,

and when they do this test like a blood one and they send that away for tests.

Then they do your blood pressure one, they listen to your heart . . . then it’s finished.

Table 12.1 lists some of the linguistic features of AE used in the original draft script by Collard. We present these features in the order in which they appear in example (3). The feature name in the second column of Table 12.1 is based on the typology presented in Rodríguez Louro and Collard (2021a: 3).

Collard’s AE script shown in (3) was first sent to the Heart Foundation’s team. After a few days, the script was returned to us, fully translated

TABLE 12.1 Some Australian Aboriginal English features used in Collard’s original script for the first video

<i>Australian Aboriginal English (AE) text</i>	<i>Type of AE feature</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Fullahs</i>	Collective term of address	“Fellows”
<i>What you doin?</i>	Default [in] pronunciation	–
<i>Der</i>	<i>Th</i> -stopping	Alternative spelling for “there”
<i>I been tryin</i>	Omission of auxiliary <i>have</i>	“I have been trying”
<i>Youse</i>	Plural pronoun	Plural of “you”
<i>‘ad to tell you</i>	<i>h</i> -dropping	“Had to tell you”
<i>gotta ‘av</i>		“Gotta have”
<i>‘ere</i>		“Here”
<i>Unna?</i>	Utterance-final tag	“Right?”/“ok?”/“isn’t it?”
<i>Mob, mobs</i>	Collective noun	“People”
<i>I was cruel</i> <i>frightened too.</i>	Semantic inversion	“I was really frightened, too”
<i>When we 30 years old.</i>	Omission of copula <i>be</i>	“When we were 30 years old”
<i>When they just born.</i>		“When they are just born”
<i>Like just talkin,</i> <i>talkin, talkin.</i>	Verb repetition for emphasis	–

into “plain English” (presumably, a variety of English free of complicated jargon and/or specialist vocabulary that as many people as possible would understand). Collard and Rodríguez Louro were puzzled. We had agreed that jargon and specialist language would best be avoided, but we did not understand why the original AE script needed to be translated into “plain English”. If the medical message was intended for First Nations communities at risk of heart disease, then surely the materials would need to be designed in a way that was relevant and meaningful to that community.

We had an online meeting with the Heart Foundation team soon after, and we explained that AE is the linguistic variety used by most First Nations people in Australia and that, because of this, a medical message delivered in AE would resonate with the community. Importantly, Collard also clarified that, in addition to using AE to draft the script, it was key to deliver the heart health message not as a set of indications and advice regarding dos and don’ts but rather as someone’s *experience* of heart disease. Crucially, the “someone” needed to be an unequivocally First Nations character with an identifiable First Nations voice. As a lingua franca, AE was an ideal way to communicate our heart health message to a wide audience.

TABLE 12.2 Some discourse strategies used in the creation of the first medical video by Collard

<i>Discourse strategy</i>	<i>Linguistic feature</i>	<i>Intended effect</i>
Group reference	Collective nouns: <i>fullahs, mob/mobs, family, people</i> Plural pronouns: <i>youse, we</i>	Sense of inclusion
First Nations cultural framing	<i>Sit have a yarn.</i>	Content is worth listening to
Personalised experience	<i>Cause I had to have one done too</i>	Speaker has experienced what he's asking others to do
Expression of feelings	<i>I was cruel frightened too</i>	Speaker acknowledges that heart health checks can induce fear

Table 12.2 shows some of the techniques employed by Collard in framing this message. Some sections were ultimately edited out to comply with the prescribed script length. Despite these minor edits and a handful of linguistic changes to align the script with the community's preferred variety of AE (e.g., we changed the utterance-final tag *unna* to *inni* in the final version), the core of Collard's message remained intact. The framing we analyse in Table 12.2, together with the use of AE as the linguistic variety of choice, allowed us to create a video which was tailored to the sociolinguistic profile of First Nations communities. This tailoring was present in the materials from the get-go. The script was never translated from "plain English" into AE or designed by an outsider. Rather, the materials were imbued with Collard's emic perspectives from the very beginning.

In addition to the script in AE, we were also consulted about the types of images that the media production company, based in Perth, Southwest Western Australia, would use to design First Nations cartoon characters for the videos. Eventually, the storyboard was also shared with us, and changes were made regarding characters' physical appearance, the number of women, children, and men depicted, the venues shown, and whether animals would also feature (dogs were included in Video 1). First Nations colleagues with the Pilbara Aboriginal Heart Health Program, who were extensively consulted throughout the process, suggested that the video should take place in a rural setting. (The Pilbara region extends from the Indian Ocean on the west to the Northern Territory border. It is located 1,200 kilometres North of Perth). The main speaker's voice-over was performed by renowned Nyungar TV and film actor Kelton Pell.

Available on www.youtube.com/watch?v=op1dNfMiz9s, the first video was posted on YouTube on 9 November 2020. As of March 2024, it has received 11,000 views. To ensure communities with no internet connection were able to view the videos, the materials were also delivered as hand-held state-of-the-art video brochures to select schools, medical centres, and community hubs. The video brochures consist of a paper book with a slot for a USB onto which the videos are uploaded. They are created by “Video Brochures Australia”.

The Second Video: Signs of a Heart Attack

A few months after our first video was shared online, we embarked on the creation of the second set of materials, a video about the warning signs of a heart attack. Consultation about images and characters was minimal the second time around as the media company was to re-use the graphics they had created for the first video.

Available on www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyI3huqt6S0, the second video was posted on YouTube on 8 September 2021. As of March 2024, it has received a total of 2,500 views. It was also uploaded to the state-of-the-art video brochures created the first time around.

The team would once again rely on the now well-established practice of using AE as the linguistic means to transmit the message. Collard employed many of the AE features detailed earlier in Table 12.1. These included collective nouns such as *mob*, plural pronouns such as *youse*, AE grammatical features such as levelled *was* (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021a: 3), as in *you was about this high [tall] when it happened*, and specific vocabulary such as *crook* (unwell) and *yarn*. Collard also scripted materials that would foreground kinship relations between the characters. As in the first video, the older male character also delivers the heart health message in the second video, but this time, he is unequivocally referred to by his nephew as “Uncle Arty”. Unlike in the first video, Uncle Arty engages in conversation with his family in the second video, referring to his nephew as “my boy”, his brother as “my old brother, your father”, and to a woman who had also once had a non-lethal heart attack as “Aunty”. This is in line with First Nations people’s orientation to kinship, where “each person has a particular kin relationship with every other person with whom they come into contact – if not a blood relationship, then by extension, one of classificatory kinship” (Eades, 2013: 28). It is also in line with a group orientation where “to isolate oneself from the group is to risk being treated with suspicion” and where “the life of the community is largely shared by all its members, children included” (Malcolm, 2018: 15–16).

The Heart Foundation Team insisted that the list of signs in their “Warning Signs of a Heart Attack” poster must be featured in the video for the materials to be viable. These materials were ultimately included in the video, but rather than presenting these upfront, the poster was introduced by the nephew character in his yarn to Uncle Arty and as displayed on the wall of one of the community clinics run by the Aboriginal Medical Service (the “AMS”).

This time around, Collard also wished to incorporate yarning more intentionally into the materials design. Specifically, Collard strongly advised that the team should stay away from merely listing the signs of a heart attack because communities would not respond well to a list. That is, the list of possible symptoms would only increase people’s apprehension and make them less likely to get a heart health check or heed any warning signs. Instead, Collard argued that the best way to contextualise this information would be to present it as a yarn, which would help communities recall information as needed.

At this juncture, we experienced what we will refer to here as a “spark-to-flame moment”. That is, this time around, the script was not only fully scripted in AE, but we were also embracing yarning – a First Nations cultural form of storytelling and conversation (Terszak, 2008). Collard framed the message as a yarn delivered by the older character depicted in the first video and consisting of four parts: Uncle Arty’s arrival, the telling of his heart attack as a young man, a gentle demonstration of what kind of pain may be felt by those suffering cardiac arrest, and a closing greeting. The designers were asked to create a younger version of Uncle Arty, and, using the younger character, they told the story of how a younger Uncle Arty had a heart attack when his nephew was little.

How successful were our videos? The Heart Foundation administered an 11-item online survey to people around Australia. Forty-one percent of those contacted identified as First Nations. Of the 32 people who completed the survey and identified as First Nations, 31 deemed the first video suitable for use in a First Nations community. Some qualitative comments, sourced from Smith et al. (2021), are shown in (4) to (7). The demographic details of the people making these comments were not provided in Smith et al.’s work, so they are also missing here.

- (4) Loved the older voice of an Aboriginal man.
- (5) I think it will resonate with community.
- (6) Kept the health information simple and straight to the point.
- (7) A conversation rather than an info. session.

With every video designed by Collard, yarning was used to tell the story of how to look after one’s heart health. What was originally a decontextualised

list of signs of a heart attack was now a community member's story. Our metaphorical smoke had sparked a flame.

Discussion and Conclusions

At the outset of this chapter, we argued that the process of decolonisation asks us to hear decolonial stories to enable “epistemic reconstitution” (Ndhlovu, 2021: 197). In this contribution, we have introduced two aspects of our participatory sociolinguistic research, which allowed us to embrace inclusion and social justice (Charity Hudley et al., 2020: e224). Our proposal centred around “hearing the voices” of those rarely featured in sociolinguistic research (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021b: 788) and around sharing our knowledge in the creation of medical media in a way that is meaningful for First Nations communities. Our innovation rests on placing Collard's insights front and centre, and on sharing these experiences with the scholarly community. Specifically, hearing Collard's call for data collection with AE speakers in home settings (rather than institutions), her suggestion to use yarning (rather than interviews) as a sociolinguistic method of data collection, and her framing of knowledge sharing (the medical message) as story-based, relational, and interpersonal. Straddling the areas of research and materials design, the decolonial philosophy underpinning our workflows centred on First Nations people, communities, and issues. As shown previously, our focus was on First Nations leadership, First Nations ways of communicating and being in the world, and benefits to First Nations communities.

Additionally, in this chapter, we provided a description of our “praxis” of decolonisation (Ndhlovu & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, In prep.: 1) for readers to think creatively about ways to work together to produce materials that may benefit the communities they work with. Our cross-cultural work together as scholars, enriched by consultation with the Pilbara Aboriginal Heart Health Program, allowed us to put into practice Tuhiwai Smith's (2012: 143) “struggle to become self-determining” and “take back control of [First Nations] destinies”. Although small, our contributions relate to “reformulating . . . indigenous cultures” in the pursuit of social justice and the equitable access to resources, opportunities, and privileges in society (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012: 143).

Our work together has made it possible to expand our knowledge of the sociolinguistics of AE as used in Southwest Western Australia and the production of AE resources to enhance the lives of First Nations people in Australia. Because our insights stem from synchronic sociolinguistic research and recent applied linguistic practice with First Nations people in modern communities, we are able to challenge the myth that First Nations

people only exist as relics of an “ancient” era, with no present and no future (Gaby & Woods, 2020: e274). Quite to the contrary, by “hearing the voices” of those who have historically been silenced, we can take small but important steps in the right direction.

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COLONIALITY AND AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE INTERPRETING IN LEGAL SETTINGS

Dima Rusho

Introduction and Background

Indigenous language speakers in Australia face pervasive and chronic language-based discrimination in institutional settings such as the justice system. One manifestation of this issue is the inconsistent provision of adequate and timely professional interpreting services for Indigenous people in legal settings. A significant number of the 300 to 500 Indigenous languages spoken in Australia at the time of European invasion are now either sleeping – having no active speakers – or are in imminent danger of becoming so (Department of Infrastructure Transport, Regional Development and Communications et al., 2020). Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), one of the largest available sources of data on Indigenous languages and their speakers, paint a worrying portrait of the number of languages still in use and the state of their health. The 2021 ABS Census revealed that there are now only around 150 languages with active speakers (defined as one or more users), many of which have very few remaining speakers. More troublingly, it is estimated that only around 13 traditional and new contact languages (such as Kriol, Yumplatok, Gurindji Kriol, and Light Warlpiri) are spoken widely by children aged 0–14, suggesting that they are likely to be the only languages to survive over the next two to three generations. The census also revealed that approximately 10% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported speaking either a traditional or contact language at home, a number that has declined progressively over the years. Notably, the percentage of speakers differed greatly around Australia, with almost 60% of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory using traditional and contact

languages as their first language, compared to fewer than 1% of people in Tasmania (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

While this is a bleak picture that speaks to the seemingly unstoppable harm of colonisation and forced assimilation, it nonetheless highlights the presence of a relatively large number of people who are first-language speakers of Indigenous languages. For some of these speakers, those are, in fact, the only languages in which they are proficient. Despite the severe impact of colonisation, English has not been entirely universally adopted by Indigenous people in Australia, meaning that many of them do not use it in everyday life and may, therefore, not have the proficiency required to navigate complex institutional settings such as the justice and healthcare systems. In fact, 10% of Indigenous respondents to the 2021 census whose main language at home was not English reported that they spoke English either ‘not well’ or ‘not at all.’ For this group of people, professional interpreting services are integral to accessing basic institutional support and services. Without adequate interpreting assistance, Indigenous language speakers with low English proficiency can be subjected to further marginalisation and disadvantages in institutional contexts. To mitigate this issue, several dedicated Indigenous language interpreting services have been established in the Northern Territory (Aboriginal Interpreting Service (AIS)), Western Australia (Aboriginal Interpreting WA (AIWA)), and more recently in South Australia (Aboriginal Language Interpreting Service (ALIS)). This was accompanied by the creation of numerous policies and guidelines for public and private institutions and organisations regarding the use of interpreters. Despite such efforts to address language barriers in various institutional settings, including the justice system, access to interpreters for Indigenous language speakers remains a persistent challenge. The inconsistency of access to interpreter services can be attributed to a range of factors, including the undervaluation of Indigenous languages within the justice system, the discretionary use of interpreters based on power dynamics rather than the genuine linguistic needs of Indigenous language speakers, the underfunding for interpreter training and accreditation – particularly in remote communities, and the lack of support for interpreters from influential stakeholders in the justice system (Cooke, 2002). Crucially, these issues have been plaguing interpreting provisions for several decades, raising the question of why language and interpreting reforms in the justice system have not resulted in significant mitigation of inconsistent interpreting provisions.

In this chapter, I address the factors that contribute to the persistent issues surrounding access to adequate and timely interpreting services for Indigenous languages. Specifically, I aim to demonstrate that the forces of colonialism that historically dismissed Indigenous people and their languages continue to exert their power through the denial of adequate access

to interpreting services. To explore this, I focus on three distinct but inter-related considerations.

Firstly, I argue that the failure to provide interpreting to Indigenous language speakers consistently is fundamentally a social justice issue that denies them the right to access justice and legal services in a manner that is equitable and non-discriminatory. Secondly, I contend that Indigenous language interpreting has always taken place, and continues to take place, in deeply colonial settings, which has significant implications for the process of interpreting and the lived experience of interpreters. The power differentials inherent in colonial settings place the decision-making power in the hands of a select few participants in the legal process instead of the Indigenous language speakers who would benefit most from interpreting assistance.

Lastly, I argue that ensuring the provision of adequate and timely interpreting services requires active and collective engagement in anti-colonial work. This involves recalibrating and reorienting power relations in the justice system, challenging the underlying colonial attitudes and practices that perpetuate language-based discrimination, and incorporating Indigenous understandings of language and interpreting into new legal frameworks.

Interpreting and Social Justice

In describing how the profession of interpreting gives voice to people who do not speak the dominant societal language, Bancroft (2015) maintains that “community interpreting weds issues of language and culture to concepts of social justice and equity” (Bancroft, 2015: 217). In legal settings, the provision of timely and efficient professional interpreting services is crucial for upholding the principles of equity in access to justice and equality before the law (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2108). These principles are particularly significant social justice issues for many Indigenous people, especially speakers of Indigenous languages (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2009). Adequate communication is a fundamental aspect of procedural fairness as it allows Indigenous language speakers to share their stories, defend themselves, and seek justice. Failing to provide professional interpreting assistance can lead to miscommunication and impede procedural fairness, denying Indigenous language speakers the same opportunities to seek and receive just outcomes as those available to English speakers.

In addition to promoting equity, addressing the linguistic needs of non-dominant language speakers is essential for ensuring compliance with international law. Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and Division 3 of the Evidence Act 1995 (Commonwealth) in Australia, as well as the laws of various states and territories, guarantee the right to free interpreting assistance in criminal proceedings. Consequently,

failure by courts to take all necessary steps to ensure the availability and access to interpreting assistance during legal proceedings may constitute a breach of both international and Australian laws and a failure to uphold the principles of equity. More pressing, however, is the need to recognise that inadequate access to interpreters can have broader consequences beyond legal compliance, significantly impacting the lived experiences of individuals and communities and preserving the centuries-old denial of their human rights.

The case of Gene Gibson serves as a poignant illustration of how language-based discrimination can contribute significantly to miscarriages of justice. Gibson, a young Pintupi man from Kivirrkurra in Western Australia who spoke Pintupi and Kriol, was wrongly convicted of manslaughter and spent five years in prison before the Western Australian Court of Appeals overturned his conviction (Tulich et al., 2017). The Corruption and Crime Commission (2015) report into this miscarriage of justice revealed serious concerns about the conduct of WA police officers involved in the investigation that led to Gene's conviction. The report highlighted the officers' glaring unwillingness to provide Gibson with a qualified interpreter despite his obvious limited proficiency in English and repeated requests from his lawyer. The police also ignored a suggestion by one of their own senior officers to use an interpreter, instead relying on accounts from earlier investigators that Gibson had a sufficient understanding of English. Gibson's fate was sealed when he took part in a re-enactment exercise where he was accompanied solely by police without legal counsel or an interpreter to assist him with this complex procedure. The re-enactment and his supposed confession during interviews would later become the basis for his guilty plea and subsequent custodial sentence.

It should be noted that while Gene Gibson's case garnered national and international attention and scrutiny, it was by no means an isolated or uncommon occurrence. Indigenous language speakers regularly experience numerous day-to-day injustices due to limited access to interpreters, particularly in remote Indigenous communities where traditional and contact languages are widely spoken and where the need for interpreters is particularly acute (Neave, 2016). For instance, the scarcity of interpreters in circuit courts, where hearings take place in remote Indigenous communities every two to three months, can result in two possible outcomes: a trial may proceed without an interpreter, or an adjournment may be sought to secure interpreting assistance at a later date. Both outcomes pose significant disadvantages for victims, witnesses, and defendants with low English proficiency. As described previously, conducting a trial without an interpreter can impinge on procedural fairness and may result in instances of miscommunication, potentially leading to miscarriages of justice. Conversely,

postponing a circuit court hearing, as the legal maxim of ‘justice delayed is justice denied’ highlights, can result in individuals waiting for an unacceptably long time to have their cases heard, which is also a profoundly unjust outcome.

The impact of systemic and ongoing injustices, which often go unrecognised and unaddressed, extends beyond individuals, affecting the broader community and contributing to the transmission of intergenerational trauma and the associated detrimental effects on health and well-being. The denial of timely access to justice through language-based barriers further perpetuates the harms inflicted upon Indigenous peoples with tangible and intangible impacts, including the preservation of power imbalances and lack of accountability and the further marginalisation of already marginalised populations.

The Long Shadow of Colonialism

The long-standing issues with the provision of interpreting services for Indigenous language speakers in legal settings have been highlighted in various state and federal reviews and inquiries, with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991 being one of the first significant inquiries. Dispiritingly, many subsequent reviews have identified similar significant problems with the availability and use of interpreting services and the disadvantages these problems create for Indigenous communities, including pervasive miscommunication and restricted access to justice (see, for example, Access to Justice Arrangements Productivity Commission Inquiry Report No. 72 (2014); Royal Commission and Board of Enquiry into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (2017)). The recommendations made by these reports have been generally accepted by the justice system, leading to the implementation of some important policies, such as the establishment of professional interpreting service providers in some regions of Australia and the implementation of policies and guidelines to be used by the justice system.

Despite these measures, the utilisation of interpreting services remains inconsistent and inadequate, particularly in remote Indigenous communities. To fully comprehend why these endeavours have not produced significant advancements in access to interpreting services, it is essential to scrutinise how the incremental changes described previously are overshadowed by the enduring and all-encompassing constant force of colonialism. Redressing language-based discrimination necessitates acknowledging that interpreting continues to take place in the shadow of colonialism and that interpreters are working in deeply colonial institutions where marginalisation and discrimination are the status quo. Colonialism is at the centre of

the justice system's perception of Indigenous languages and their speakers, which impacts how it views its obligation to cater to the linguistic requirements of Indigenous people.

To articulate the significant language-based harm that colonialism inflicts, it is imperative to acknowledge colonialism as a highly visible and omnipresent force that retains its relevance and potency today, much like it did centuries ago. In other words, colonialism must be examined not simply as a powerful remnant of the past that incidentally influences contemporary legal systems in Australia nor as a hidden force that we must first uncover in order to appreciate its impact. Critical approaches to examining language use and situatedness in institutional settings in settler colonial societies such as Australia have often drawn upon the concept of the 'legacy of colonialism.' This notion underscores the ongoing influence of past colonial ideologies and practices on contemporary societies and institutions. For example, Meighan (2022) argues that privileging dominant colonial histories, knowledge, and languages in English Language Education, a practice they refer to as coloniallingualism, overtly and covertly upholds colonial legacies (Meighan, 2022: 1). While such perspectives are valuable in recognising the ongoing impact of past colonialism, the use of temporally specific terms such as 'legacy' risks undercutting a crucial element: that we are not, at least not yet, dealing with the legacy of colonialism in Australia, nor are current interpreting issues simply the consequences of a once-powerful force from a bygone era. Colonialism is fully operating in the now, in the everyday lives of Indigenous people, including interpreters.

The issues faced by Indigenous language speakers and interpreters are ongoing manifestations of colonialism, which is ever-present and unrelenting. Colonialism is not merely a background against which interpreters carry out their professional duties; it is also the middle ground and the foreground. It is neither temporally nor spatially demarcated. It seeps into the very structure of society, its institutions, and the individuals who work within them. To confine colonisation to the past is to overlook what Veracini (2014) – building on the works of Patrick Wolfe (2006: 390) on colonisation as a structure, not an event – refers to as the "settler colonial present." Veracini argues that settler colonialism is a distinct form of control that shapes parts of the global present and cautions against the ideas of post-settler colonialism or neo-settler colonialism, which obscure the resilience and enduring presence of settler colonialism.

Furthermore, colonialism is at times contemplated in academic discourse as an invisible hand that pulls the strings or a hidden subterranean force that needs to be uncovered when, in truth, it is remarkably discernible in the frequent and visible enactment of its ideologies, policies, and practices. It is a testament to the power of colonialism that many believe it can make itself

invisible. Additionally, the belief that the rendering of colonial ideologies into ‘common sense’ allows colonialism to blend with our lives seamlessly can lead us to become preoccupied with trying to expose its subtle contours rather than confronting their pronounced foundations. Such a preoccupation can result in muted forms of anti-colonial work that fall short of enacting genuine and long-lasting change. For instance, many anti-colonial and decolonial approaches to addressing language-based discrimination in legal settings have focused on creating campaigns to increase awareness and education about the colonial foundations of such practices rather than directly confronting the power differentials that enable them in the first place.

The points raised previously provide insight into the glacial pace of language reform in the justice system in Australia. As Dodson (1995: 1) argues, “the machinery of the Australian legal system has acted as the legitimising arm of colonialism.” Given this legitimising function, it is not unexpected that the judicial arm of the state would engage in the same resistance to change that is the hallmark of institutional settler colonialism. Such resistance is particularly evident in the Australian government’s defiance to fund the establishment of professional Indigenous language interpreting services and the continuing underuse of interpreters by those who occupy positions of power in the justice system. As I aim to demonstrate in the following section, these issues are not merely a matter of institutional inertia or bureaucratic inefficiency; rather, they are expressions of ongoing colonialism.

Resistance to the Establishment of Professional Indigenous Language Interpreting Services

The influence of race and power dynamics on the provision of Indigenous language interpreting is exemplified by the extensive and protracted power struggles that took place in the Northern Territory in the 1980s and the 1990s in the lead-up to the establishment of professional interpreting services for Indigenous languages (Goldflam, 2019). Successive governments resisted the establishment of professional interpreting services for many years despite numerous recommendations from various bodies, including government and legal organisations, and calls from Indigenous communities. Goldflam (2019) highlights how it took extensive campaigning and the tragic death of an Aboriginal boy who was denied access to an interpreter while in custody for the federal and Northern Territory governments to reluctantly succumb to mounting pressure and announce funding for an Aboriginal interpreting service in 2000.

The prolonged resistance to the pleas of Indigenous communities for professional interpreting services was facilitated by the fact that the decision-making processes were always controlled by government officials and

bureaucrats, many of whom held assimilationist views towards Indigenous people and their languages. These officials sought to impose white government standards on Indigenous communities and viewed the idea of interpreting services as a challenge to their expectations of full assimilation. The debate did not centre on logistical or practical considerations but rather on a fundamental disagreement about the necessity for interpreting services in the first place. The government's disbelief and indignation at the prospect of Indigenous communities requiring interpreting assistance was yet another illustration of the deeply ingrained power dynamics and paternalism that have hindered progress in addressing the needs of Indigenous people throughout Australia's colonial history.

The discourse surrounding Indigenous language interpreting was also largely influenced by the ideological belief that it was Australia's responsibility to educate Indigenous people to speak English proficiently. This perspective further bolstered the view that any measures taken to support Indigenous languages and their speakers were equivalent to a failure to uphold this duty. The then Northern Territory Chief Minister, Denis Burke, vehemently espoused this position in his 'wheelchair speech' to Parliament, where he declared that the need for an interpreting service was a reflection of Australia's education system's failure. Burke further argued that Indigenous people should have already acquired sufficient English proficiency through schooling, negating any need for interpreters.

To come up with a program such as an interpreter service, in the Northern Territory or elsewhere, to my mind is akin to providing a wheelchair for someone who should be able to walk. That is a simple fact.

*(Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory,
8th Assembly, 24/11/1999)*

In addition, Burke characterised efforts to support Indigenous languages as social engineering that ultimately disadvantaged Indigenous people. His views, which were pervasive among government officials at the time, serve as a testament to the power of the monolingual mindset in shaping policies and practices that directly and profoundly impact the lives of minority language speakers (Clyne, 2004).

In the ongoing process of colonialism, the systemic devaluing of Indigenous languages and the portrayal of their speakers as products of failed educational policies exemplify yet another insidious dimension of colonialism – the 'coloniality of language.' This concept, introduced by Veronelli (2015), describes the process of racialisation of colonised subjects in the Americas along linguistic lines, beginning in the sixteenth century. Veronelli scrutinises the dehumanisation that arises from the colonial

depiction of colonised subjects as possessing little more than rudimentary communicative tools that are inadequate to express complex meanings or hold any forms of knowledge. Central to the concept of colonality of language is recognising that the classification of people into hierarchical races entails similar thinking of the expressive tools they possess in terms of superiority and inferiority.

The devaluation of Indigenous languages and their speakers by the Australian government reflects a broader historical pattern of colonial domination and control in which colonisers sought to undermine and erase the languages and cultures of colonised peoples. The refusal to fund interpreting services exposed the deeply entrenched belief that Indigenous languages are inferior and incongruous with success in Australia. This is a pervasive notion that occupies both the realms of fiction and reality; it is fictional in that it has neither logical nor natural basis (and clear evidence to the contrary) and real in that it is continuously reified by practices of power. One only has to look at the dismantling of bilingual educational programs in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to understand the power of the monolingual mindset in reinforcing the fictional superiority of English and perpetuating it as a real phenomenon (Simpson et al., 2009).

The government's response is steeped in a deep-seated paternalism that both positions white governments as always knowing what is best for Indigenous communities and treats Indigenous people as passive subjects to be governed rather than active agents in their own lives. By using the need for interpreting services as an opportunity to enact further measures to 'improve' Indigenous people's education, the government entrenched the harmful paradigm of Indigenous people as 'the known' rather than the 'knowers' (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). Indigenous people were once again speaking from the periphery about something that impacted their own daily lives. Disregarding the voices and perspectives of Indigenous communities who stand to benefit greatly from interpreting services speaks to the hegemony of whiteness as both a centre of power and a locus of knowledge. As Moreton-Robinson notes, "whiteness is constitutive of the epistemology of the West; it is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effects in everyday life" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004: 75).

Power Relations and the Discretionary Use of Interpreting in Legal Settings

The continued impact of colonisation on Indigenous language interpreting is also evident in the way that interpreting services are currently administered. Even with the establishment of professional interpreting service providers over two decades ago, the use of interpreters is still heavily reliant on

the discretion of a few powerful participants in the legal process (e.g., judges, lawyers, police, and correctional officers) rather than being in the control of Indigenous individuals who require assistance.

Despite the reported increase in the use of AIS interpreters in legal settings by the Northern Territory government, the available data fails to account for the underutilisation of interpreting services in situations where they are necessary but not used. There is, nonetheless, anecdotal evidence of specific patterns of interpreting use, which shows that interpreters are most widely engaged by the courts and legal professionals during consultations with their clients while the police primarily use interpreters during recorded interviews as a means of safeguarding the admissibility of the Record of Interview. In addition, reports by government and independent bodies, such as the 2018 Pathways to Justice-Inquiry into The Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ALRC Report 133), expose an alarming lack of commitment to engaging interpreting services by entities such as the Northern Territory Correctional Services unless for reasons of legal compliance. These patterns illustrate that interpreting services are frequently employed to fulfill legal requirements rather than to respond to the genuine needs of Indigenous individuals and further underscore the systemic biases faced by Indigenous language speakers.

Both the opposition to the establishment of interpreting services and the persistent discretionary use of interpreters demonstrate that it is virtually impossible to abstract the linguistic interactions involved in interpreting from the power differentials at play in most legal settings. The concepts of coloniality of power and coloniality of knowledge are highly relevant in understanding this link. Coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) describes the persistence of colonial forms of power and oppression in postcolonial societies. Quijano argues that colonialism did not end with the formal independence of former colonies but instead transformed into new forms of global domination based on an economic and social hierarchy that divides the world into those who are considered superior – white, European, Christian, male, heterosexual, etc. – and those who are considered inferior – non-white, non-European, non-Christian, female, non-heterosexual, etc. (2000: 534). Quijano also notes that the coloniality of power is embodied in cultural and epistemological systems that maintain European dominance by reinforcing the idea of Western knowledge's superiority, thus introducing us to the related notion of the coloniality of knowledge. The coloniality of knowledge is the result of the imposition of Western epistemologies and ways of knowing on non-Western cultures, which has resulted in the marginalisation and erasure of non-Western knowledges and understandings, including those held by Indigenous people. This process has created a

binary system in which Western knowledge is valued as universal and objective, while Indigenous knowledges and world understandings are considered local, subjective, and inferior.

Mignolo and Walsh (2018) expand on this idea by arguing that the coloniality of knowledge is not only a matter of epistemology but also of language, aesthetics, and other cultural practices. African postcolonial and decolonial scholars have also contributed to the development of the concept of the coloniality of knowledge from an African perspective. Some have argued that colonialism and imperialism have disrupted and suppressed Indigenous knowledge systems in Africa, leading to a distorted and incomplete understanding of African culture and society, a loss of cultural identity, and a dependence on Western knowledge (see, for example, Wa Thiong'o, 1981; Mbembe, 2021).

These perspectives are readily applicable to the Australian context. The marginalisation and supplanting of Indigenous knowledge have been a prominent feature of Australia's colonial history. This has included the dismissal of Indigenous ecological and environmental knowledge, healing practices, and understandings of language and language-based practices, including interpreting. Notably, the complex entanglement of power relations and hierarchies of knowledge has had a clear impact on how language and interpreting are conceptualised differently by the law and by Indigenous people. In this regard, Te Tumatakuru O'Connell's (2021) research on the emergence of Māori interpreting and translation in precolonial Aotearoa (New Zealand) is particularly insightful. O'Connell argues that the historical stages influencing the emergence of Māori interpreting and translation "reveal the *aho-tāhuhu* (original guiding weft) of intercultural communication in contemporary Aotearoa" (O'Connell, 2021: 59). O'Connell highlights that interpreting in Māori culture is often regarded as a means to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, preserve cultural knowledge, and transmit traditions across generations. This understanding is similar to that found in Indigenous communities where interpreting practices have been commonplace for millennia as a means of negotiation between different language groups. However, these understandings differ significantly from the conceptualisation of interpreting in the law, which views interpreting as a method of rendering messages from a source to a target language without distortion. The principles of accuracy and impartiality in the codes of ethics governing interpreting specifically prohibit interpreters from participating in the communicative event beyond directly interpreting the message and adding culturally vital information to avoid miscommunication. It is noteworthy that both the conceptualisations of interpreting in the justice system and the current design of interpreting guiding principles and codes of ethics are predominantly based on Western views of interpreting and fail to

take into account Indigenous ways of perceiving the process of interpreting. In other words, interpreting is treated as a provision for white needs, with little consideration given to the desired outcomes of Indigenous people engaging in interpreted communicative events. As I discuss in the following section, this reality calls for significant anti-colonial efforts to recalibrate the hierarchies of power and knowledge inherent in Indigenous language legal interpreting and incorporate Indigenous knowledges and understandings into decolonised legal and interpreting frameworks.

Anti-Colonial Work in the Interpreting Space

Given that colonialism creates the conditions for economic and social injustices, any meaningful and effective anti-colonial approach must be aimed at unsettling, decentring, and potentially dismantling the colonial structures that engender and propagate injustice. Quijano (2000) posits that the coloniality of power leads to systemic issues that cannot be resolved adequately through individual efforts alone. Instead, he calls for radical rethinking and a fundamental reconfiguration of power relations and the creation of novel systems free from racial hierarchies.

The question then arises about the nature of anti-colonial work required to counteract the persisting colonial-based challenges that interpreters and Indigenous language speakers encounter in legal settings. There is no doubt that, in essence, the persistence of Indigenous communities that led to the establishment of interpreting services in the face of entrenched racialised philosophies was itself an act of resistance. It was indigeneity asserting itself. Beyond improving Indigenous people's access to justice, the formation of dedicated interpreting organisations can be viewed as a counter-hegemonic step towards challenging parts of the systems of oppression that have long disempowered and invisibilised Indigenous communities. Nonetheless, it is also crucial to acknowledge that the underlying political and racial ideologies against which interpreting services were established have not dissipated. Interpreters regularly encounter these ideologies in their day-to-day work. Interpreting organisations are also continually forced to confront the government's reluctance to truly invest in Indigenous language interpreting. This battle for recognition forms part of a broader struggle for Indigenous organisations to be considered worthy by white governments. Interpreting services are among the few predominantly Indigenous-led organisations that can actively participate in the process of justice, representing the possibility of a genuine representation of Indigenous people in legal settings. However, they face an ongoing struggle to demonstrate their worth at every turn. For these reasons, rectifying language-based injustice entails more than simply offering a larger platform for Indigenous interpreters and

community members to participate in interpreting provision processes. Instead, anti-colonial work necessitates active engagement in the politics of refusal and resistance through several avenues, including recalibrating the balance of power in the justice system and the incorporation of Indigenous understandings of language and interpreting into the design and implementation of interpreting in legal contexts.

Given the inherent power differentials in legal settings, interpreting is inevitably intertwined with these dynamics. As such, anti-colonial efforts must prioritise the empowerment of Indigenous language speakers and interpreters. Here, I add a cautionary note about the term ‘empowerment,’ which has become somewhat of a buzzword in the public sphere, paralleling the sloganisation of the notion of decolonisation as discussed by Ndhlovu and Ndlovu-Gatsheni in this volume. ‘Sloganisation’ here refers to the reduction of complex and robust conceptual frameworks into mere slogans, thus diminishing their original profundity. Batliwala (2010) examines the transformation of the term ‘empowerment’ into a buzzword in development discourse, arguing that “like many other important terms that were coined to represent a clearly political concept, it has been ‘mainstreamed’ in a manner that has virtually robbed it of its original meaning and strategic value” (Batliwala, 2010: 111). This argument is equally applicable in the context of Indigenous language legal interpreting where the discourse of empowerment is frequent, particularly in relation to empowering interpreters as a means of increasing their confidence. But genuine empowerment of Indigenous language speakers and interpreters goes beyond simply elevating their voices or including them in policy-making processes, though these are clearly vital steps.

Empowerment in this context entails challenging the status quo of uneven power relations that grant a select few powerful actors the authority to determine whether to engage interpreters. It involves confronting the justice system’s role as a cog in the colonial wheel, recognising its long-lasting ambition to “democratise the systems of domination” and maintain the oppression of Indigenous peoples (Agozino, 2018: 6). Empowerment is thus a process of disrupting the predictable mapping of racial categories and power hierarchy within the justice system. This process begins with a fundamental understanding of how the law in general, and courts in particular, constitute what Elijah Anderson (2015) terms a ‘white space.’ Anderson posits that the preponderance of white spaces, such as affluent neighbourhoods, upscale restaurants, and universities, serves to “reinforce a normative sensibility in settings in which black people are typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present” (Anderson, 2015: 10). Anderson also contends that while black individuals may perceive such areas as off-limits, white people are often unaware or ambivalent about these settings

regarding them as unremarkable manifestations of civil society. When engaging with the justice system in Australia, Indigenous language speakers and interpreters are, in essence, forced to inhabit a white space – having to navigate a white system in a white language. Consequently, their lived experience must be recognised and incorporated into decolonising approaches to legal interpreting. As Ahmed (2007: 159) asserts, “[non-white bodies] are made invisible when we see spaces as being white, at the same time as they become hyper-visible when they do not pass, which means they ‘stand out’ and ‘stand apart.’” This is especially true for interpreters, whose presence in the court’s white space makes them stand out to other legal process participants as well as their own communities while simultaneously rendering their professional and lived experiences invisible under the court’s white norms.

While one approach to this issue might be to make interpreters a regular and expected presence in court – for example, by positioning them as officers of the court – this strategy fails to address the entrenched power dynamics within the court. The impact of uneven relations of power on the administration of justice will continue to go unaddressed unless there are genuine efforts to increase Indigenous representation in positions of power so that the justice system can better reflect the perspectives of Indigenous communities. The underrepresentation of Indigenous people in positions of authority in legal contexts, such as the fact that there are only currently three Indigenous judges in Australia, is particularly glaring given the endemic *over*representation of Indigenous people in prisons. Increasing Indigenous representation in the positions of power in the justice system can take many forms, from increasing the number of Indigenous judges and lawyers to widening the scope and use of specialised culturally-responsive Indigenous courts (such as the Koori Courts in Victoria). Equally important is working towards removing the systemic barriers that may prevent Indigenous people from pursuing careers in the justice system, including the structural inequities and biases within education and training systems as well as culturally-based discrimination in the workplace.

From a language perspective, anti-colonial work endeavours to question both the hegemony of Standard English and legalese in legal contexts and the colonial lens through which Indigenous languages are viewed by the justice system. The discretionary use of interpreters may be enabled by power differentials, but it is fundamentally rooted in the belief that Indigenous languages are not necessary for, and may even be incongruous with, the administration of justice. In this context, anti-colonial work requires us to not only reimagine the practical implementation of language use and interpreting but also to reconceptualise how they are understood by the justice system. It requires us to deconstruct and decentre the epistemologies that underpin the law’s treatment of Indigenous languages and interpreting,

including the notion that Western epistemology is the standard against which all non-Western cultures' ways of knowing and speaking must be compared (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). To begin, we need a recognition of the long-held perception of Indigenous understandings of language and interpreting as orbiting their Western counterparts – themselves considered the 'true' locus of knowledge. Secondly, we must create the space for centring Indigenous conceptualisations of interpreting and providing interpreters the platform and practical means to challenge the colonial conditions under which they are forced to work.

Importantly, anti-colonial work in legal interpreting does not entail disregarding Western knowledge but rather recognising the need for a plurality of knowledges and worldviews. As Mignolo (2009) has argued, decolonial epistemology should be considered an option among many – not as a means of usurping other ways of knowing, but as a strand in a web of knowledges and world understandings. In practice, anti-colonial approaches involve creating opportunities for Indigenous leadership to incorporate Indigenous languages and knowledges into novel and reimagined frameworks of justice. They also include holding powerful actors in the justice system accountable for providing interpreting assistance and shifting the responsibility away from Indigenous communities and interpreting services. Only by engaging in these transformative efforts can we finally begin to redress historical and ongoing language-based injustices.

Conclusion

Inequities and discrepancies in accessing interpreting services have contributed to the marginalisation of Indigenous language speakers, exacerbating the cumulative harm caused by colonial ideologies and practices. As this chapter demonstrates, the factors impinging on the timely and efficient delivery of interpreting are often micro-level manifestations of macro-level coloniality. Consequently, the question of how we can improve access to interpreters will continue to be unsettled so long as it is answered from within a Western system. This underscores the need for anti-colonial approaches to interpreting that are grounded in Indigenous perspectives and that will not result in simply reifying the authority of Western law. Anti-colonial work must be predicated on the desire to right the wrongs of colonialism and redress the social injustices it continues to bring forth. Such work involves the recalibration and reorienting of power dynamics in the justice system and the genuine empowerment of language speakers and interpreters. This may seem a lofty goal given the law's resistance to engaging with decolonising approaches that require it to question its own epistemological and ontological foundations fundamentally. It is a necessary

goal, however. Without addressing the capillaries of colonialism that sustain the hierarchies of power in the justice system, language-based discrimination will remain an everyday feature of Indigenous peoples's encounters with the law.

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14

THE LIBERATED LIBRETTO

Engaging the Operatic Voice and the Multilingual Modes of Singing

Paul Smith

Introduction – Engaging with Opera

Despite a canon that commonly points towards 17th-century Italian and European aesthetic origins, opera is a global form and opera singers are a global community. The words that singers sing in opera, known formally as the *libretto*, are recurrently translated, mobilised and performed in a practice that is hotly debated within the community but reveals a mutability otherwise missing in classical music discourse. The professional opera singer is multilingual. A Japanese soprano may perform the same operatic role in Japanese, English and German in different global hemispheres in a single year. The music and language are charged differently in each iteration, with a liveness that simultaneously deconstructs and reconstructs textual meaning. The singer's voice becomes politically charged, and while opera provides an artistic vehicle for virtuosic vocal feats, the tradition of musicological study has oppressed and ignored the singer in favour of the notes of the score and the composers who wrote them. Focusing on the operatic object has denied the singer's transformative agency with text and obscured the decolonising methods of many global performers. There is a need to rethink the artistic flow. Singers do not simply return originals from the past; they songfully inscribe in the present a complex web of both dominant and subversive ideologies which affect the perceptions of language diversity. Naomi André proposes “engaged opera” as a framework for musicological analysis that promotes the present-day experience of diverse singers and audiences and the form's potential for resistance (André 2018: 1). A revival of analytical interest in the voice and its unique way of figuring language

in the world draws attention away from the inception of the libretto and towards its performative recreations. By focusing on singers and the voice in song, the aim of this chapter is to promote the liberating flight and decolonising potency of sung language.

Opera singers are a multilingual global community. The operatic voice, instantly recognisable for its grandeur, range and physicality, is a potential medium for all languages around the world. While there are certain language groups that dominate, such as Italian, English, French, German and Russian, prominent examples also exist of operas in and incorporating African languages such as isiXhosa, Indigenous Australian languages such as Yorta Yorta and other languages and dialects including Hungarian, Tahitian, African American English and Japanese, to name but a few. The history of the text sung in an opera, commonly and formally known as the libretto, charts a trajectory of musical multilingualism and exposes both a hierarchy of language in opera and the resistance against that hierarchy. For the opera community, the libretto is never siloed. Singers move around the world between different hemispheres, lending their unique voices and experiences to roles, characters and stages in many languages. It is not uncommon for a singer to perform the same role in different languages in one calendar year or for a performance to include different characters singing in different languages due to a last-minute performer substitution. The dulcet and dramatic melodies of any given opera have had layers of language applied to them over centuries of performance. Core to this practice and this chapter is the experience of the opera singer and the way that they navigate and songfully inscribe words with musical and vocal meaning and, in doing so, resist semantic singularities. They sing differently each time. In this chapter, I draw on the multilingual tradition of opera, theories of authorship and performance, and the embodiment of knowledge in song to shed light on ongoing modes of decolonisation in opera.

It cannot be ignored from the outset that opera, in all its spectacular proportions, has been part of colonisation over the past 400 years. As opera pulls together so many art forms, including music, theatre, design, poetry, literature and dance, it has been a colonisation of the arts and culture landscape in many First Nations contexts. The landing of opera on Indigenous lands around the globe from Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries was part of a successful attempt to drown out local musical cultures and contributed to the restructuring of the ‘cultural unconscious’. In this way, opera is part of “a cultural mental structure with invisible powers that operate out of sight, but unconsciously influence, shape, and control the cultural activities of human life” (Gu 2012: 29). The 19th century, in particular, saw an artistic emphasis on “music’s relation to the social good of ‘cosmopolitan humanity’” (Jones 2014: 120). This is a history that taints opera houses

and the performances therein. Operas contain within them othering narratives of many cultures from around the world that are exotically framed by an outdated Western colonial mindset. Broad and superficial conceptions of Sri Lanka, Egypt and Japan, for example, are the tokenistic settings for romantic European heteronormative love stories which have become the spectacle centre of opera culture. Press coverage regularly questions the relevance of operas such as Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, first performed in 1904, which "reeks of misogyny and exploitation" (Galvin 2023).

In Edward Said's influential profile of Western orientalism, he uses the opera *Aida*, which premiered in 1870, set in Egypt with music by Giuseppe Verdi to an Italian libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni, as a core example of the way Europe has reductively fantasised about non-European cultures (Said 1978). Northern hemisphere stories in Southern lands act as part of ongoing cultural warfare and have "contributed to colonialism by suggesting that the musical tradition of the colonising forces is of higher quality than indigenous music traditions" (Hegenbart 2020: 170). Additionally, debates continue around the way that opera represents and involves people with impairment (Vargas 2018), men/masculinity (Purvis 2013), women (Clément 1988; Vincent et al. 2022) and sexual minorities (Koestenbaum 1993). These debates often show a push and pull between operatic traditions that are superficial or discriminatory and operatic futures which involve more nuanced performance practices and community involvement.

However, despite this track record, audiences of thousands flock to productions and diverse young people in many contexts train in the operatic tradition of singing. There is possibility and potential still in opera. Opera companies are largely aware of the form's internal conflicts. Caitlin Vincent summarises strategies of revision, education and colour-conscious casting that some opera companies have employed to assist with the racist elements and gendered violence central to the most performed works (Vincent 2023). Opera continues to evolve both in the conception and production of new works and also the reimagining of canonic ones. Of these two approaches, more scholarship has focused on the ground-breaking work done by diverse creative teams as they use opera as a medium for new stories and characters. Naomi André goes so far as to say that "Opera has become a space where black people are writing themselves into history" (André 2018: 196). Part of this productivity is the unavoidable debate that occurs between current practice and history and the "confluence of these incongruent views in the operatic medium" (Mhlambi 2016: 50). Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson's illuminating collection, *Opera Indigene*, draws together diverse scholarship from Canada, the Americas and Australia to argue that "Indigenous and non-Indigenous creators have, both individually and in collaboration, turned to opera throughout the 20th and

21st centuries as a form through which to redress the historical record” (Karatonis & Robinson 2011: 12). The colonising force of opera is counterbalanced by its decolonising potential. But this potential is more abstract. It is a gap that can be filled in many ways. The most direct method is in the writing and conception of new works that are First Nations-led, ones that lean on opera’s neutrality as a medium. But I also want to consider in this chapter the community of diverse singers that do not necessarily create new works but bring new understandings to *pre-existing* opera.

To further introduce this gap and the layers of multilingualism in opera, I consider two 2022/2023 productions by New Zealand’s national opera company, NZ Opera. The first is *Ihitai’Avei’a – Star Navigator*, which premiered in 2022, by Célestine Hitiura Vaite, Tim Finn and Tom McLeod. The opera “tells the story of Tupaia, the Tahitian star navigator who sailed with James Cook, on the maiden voyage of the Endeavour in 1769” and includes Tahitian monologues set to music performed by Natasha Te Rupe Wilson (soprano) and Amitai Pati (tenor) in addition to other material sung in English (NZ Opera 2023). The combination of operatic vocal technique, contemporary composition, and Tahitian language expands and redirects dominant expectations of both the musical and linguistic potential for opera. Any investigation of opera, despite its status as a musical form, must acknowledge its linguistic components as “Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established” (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 7). Audiences hear for one of the first times what the Tahitian language offers the operatic medium as a conduit language. Additionally, the show aptly addresses themes of navigation, doubling the way that the opera charts new courses involving new kinds of expression. The decolonial line is prominent in this work in the way that diverse linguistic traditions are combined to tell new stories.

The second opera I consider is coproduced with New Zealand company Black Grace and is a reimagining of Christoph Willibald Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762) titled (*m*)*Orpheus*. The cast of this production represents diverse Pasifika identities; however, the mode of multilingualism here is notably different from *Ihitai’Avei’a*. Here, the performers sing melodies from Europe from over 250 years ago, which have been translated from Italian into English, and a Samoan translation is available for the audience. Some of the previous arguments could apply here where the oppressive sonic presence of these European melodies in the Global South is part of a consistent and internalised ongoing process of colonisation. However, NZ Opera specifically states that their ambition to reimagine opera “embraces the cultural and social identities of our diverse communities; and ensures a vibrant and sustainable presence for opera in New Zealand”

(NZ Opera 2023). In what ways, through performance, does the creative team of *(m)Orpheus* depart from the colonality of European opera, and what framework is needed to address this question?

These two operas were produced by the same company in the space of 12 months. The different approaches that can be offered by a single company further demonstrate the dynamic flow of singers engaging with different languages for audiences and the delicate multilingual tug-of-war between the old and the new in this community. At first, it might seem that only *Ihita'i Avei'a*, with its mixture of Tahitian and English in the libretto, offers a form of operatic multilingualism that engages in the process of decolonisation; however, this position might discredit the performance of a work. The idea that it is only the content of an opera which outlines its decolonial potential can be reconsidered. How have performers of colour reimaged opera over the decades outside of Europe? How have they, in these performances, responded to and rewritten dominant expectations?

André provides a productive framework for this investigation in her powerful *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*. André advocates for an 'engaged musicology' that commits to a future where opera performance incorporates analysis of race, gender and sexuality (André 2018). Opera, which is so heavily rooted in oppressive systems, can be recharged and invigorated in important ways, and by engaging with opera through a dialogic exchange, there can be something new discovered. This act is never passive. André looks at a wide nexus that involves audiences, performers, opera-makers and creators and contextual cultures. It is from this position that she establishes a simple yet direct rubric and asks, "Who is in the story? Who speaks? and Who is in the audience?" (André 2018: 20). By asking who speaks, André abandons "the old metaphysical tendency to thematize language by claiming that it speaks on its own" (Cavarero 2005: 29). In opera, the libretto does not speak on its own, it must be sung. The answers to this question, when applied to specific examples, demonstrate the robust operation and liveness of the form. Being engaged is never passive; it is built around a constant and ongoing negotiation with people and texts. It is in this space that I direct focus to the singer who localises and makes the libretto and language therein present. The singer must be bold and engage with opera on all its levels – theatrically, linguistically, musically and vocally. Within André's vision of an engaged opera, I see fit to promote the singer further and investigate the way that they, in a tradition of multilingualism, deconstruct and reconstruct operatic artefacts in real time for audiences. An investigation of engaged opera can further reveal the form's decolonising potential, particularly when we acknowledge embodied differences and how these shape meaning night after night.

Opera as Text and in Performance

Here, I outline an ongoing musicological debate regarding where and when the sites of musical meaning are established. The term ‘opera’ can refer to the written object and text, which is most commonly a score with musical notes and libretto (music and lyrics), or it can refer to the live performance of that score with singers and theatre makers bringing the show to life. The implications for privileging one of these perspectives greatly affect the political nature of opera and the way it might be categorised in relation to processes such as decolonisation. Musicologist Richard Taruskin addresses these issues in his book *Text and Act*. When privileging the opera as a text, it becomes fixed on a page (Taruskin 1995). It is a product of its time and is analysed, performed and received as such, containing the politics of previous centuries. A traditional musicological approach positions it as static. As a performance, however, the written opera score is always unfinished and instead requires present-day singers and theatre-makers to give life to the opera in a contemporary setting. This is the most compelling form of a gap for the consideration of decoloniality and opera. When it is unfinished, there is potential in the completion process. This draws particular attention to the singer and the way that they engage with music and text and encompasses both the creation of new work and the performance of canonical works. Performance connects both opera and decolonisation as ongoing activities. There is a need to shift focus to the performer and the performance of opera if we are to understand the complete mode of decolonial activity. To focus on opera as a text is to recentre it as Western. These are the limits of frameworks such as orientalism, which have been used to analyse opera. Discussing performance allows the involvement of the theory that has come after Said. Some crucial perspectives are still being addressed, as “Said’s critical theory has not dealt with the attitudes toward and views of the colonized culture by the colonized people themselves” (Gu 2012: 2). In music and opera, the way that the singer engages with the form radically recentres where and when opera exists.

There exists an uncomfortable tension and an unresolved cadence between whether opera returns to and points towards a Eurocentric tradition or if the positive potential of singing redirects and restructures systems of meaning and history in real-time. How static/robust is opera in relation to decolonisation? Arguing for the promotion of a new perspective on opera does not negate other perspectives on the way that it might affirm coloniality. Both the opera and scholar communities wrestle with the shape and content of works and the way that they resonate with contemporary audiences. As more critical work is published outlining the depth of colonial influence on opera culture, opera-makers respond by seeking new models

and practices for the performance of both traditional works and the design of new ones. In Walter Mignolo's "second thoughts" on decoloniality, he suggests that "Decoloniality is not a draft for a universal model, but an orientation to a praxis of living" (2020: 615). What, then, are the multiples of opera? How do diverse performances coalesce and resonate with each other and reorient audiences? What do they say about European opera?

In this final question, the term 'European' might be a misnomer. The geographic adjective added to the word 'opera' has, at times, reflected different things. It could denote where the opera was written, such as an 'Italian opera', meaning one that was written in Italy, or it could denote where the opera is being performed, such as 'American opera' in the 19th century, meaning American productions of European works (Goehr 2006). Recalling the NZ Opera and Black Grace production of *(m)Orpheus*, it might be classified as either a New Zealand opera as it is being *performed* in New Zealand or as a European opera referring to its geographic origin as a *text*. Under current trends of identifying operas, the former option would seem a bit unusual, but there is a rationale and history to do so. This perspective echoes the distinction between English as a language from an imperial centre and "English" as a transformed linguistic code in multiple sites around the world (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 8). These also differ in that one looks backward in time at what something *was* and the other is firmly planted in the present looking at what something *is* today. Privileging perspective guides artists and audiences to conceptually conceive of the same show differently. The discourse around the transformation of opera can be readily found; in particular, "opera's longstanding conventions with modern-day advancements in digital technology has created a scenario in which canonical operatic repertoire is now being reinterpreted and redefined" (Vincent et al. 2017: 158). This narrative around the redefinition of the canon does not easily move from the theatrical components of opera to the vocal and musical, but similar processes are taking place by 'modern-day' singers.

Much of the literature focusing on de/colonisation and opera profiles either the oppressive origins of canonic works or the decolonial foundations of contemporary projects. In both of these circumstances, the singer is a means to an end. They communicate meanings that are predetermined. Either the singer props up colonial conceptions in problematic narratives, or the singer promotes anti-colonial objectives. A deeper consideration of the singer and the way that they give voice is crucial to establishing an engaged opera that involves both the pursuit of new works and new ways of presenting old works. To pivot away from the static nature of operatic texts, I turn to the multilingual history of opera in performance. By charting a history of operas in translation as different singers adapt and transform them over time, I redirect the site of operatic meaning and privilege performance. This aids

in considering the ongoing nature of opera – this is unfinished business – and the trajectory of how vocal melodies have been positioned in and around the world over centuries.

Opera's Multilingual History

Operas have been written in many languages, but scratching at the surface of the languages of opera reveals a highly contested and debated topic which divides audiences and practitioners and does so differently in different centuries. The question of which language and opera should be sung in is relatively simple at first but quickly unravels into a political and historical mess of artistic and aesthetic positions. Language choice compels the community to engage in debates they are perhaps unaware of. The very idea of a nation is performed and outlined by artistic practice. Revisiting the term 'American opera', just as the term described "any opera-*libretto* sung in the English or American-English language", it also served "an ideal or ideological role" tangled in a web of the relationship between the 'new world' and the changing nature of a European centre (Goehr 2006: 398). Language choice can also reveal turbulent undercurrents of competing colonialities, such as the history of New Orleans, where French influences were challenged by periodic Italian operatic troupes mounting productions in Italian instead of French (Bentley 2022). To chart the changing linguistic practice of opera is to chart the artistic politics of language, the quest of nation building and national identity. Beyond America and looking further back, the layers of linguistic operatic performance stem from a range of influences. In the 18th and 19th century, it was common for the libretto of an opera to be translated for performances across Europe. Into the 20th and 21st century, these translation trends became mobilised in different ways in different locations. Three contributing factors can be considered, which show the different types of opera's multilingualism.

The first is the dominant local language spoken by the audience. It was common for operas to be translated into the local language, including Russian translations for performances in Soviet countries and German translations for performances in Austria and Germany. In the 18th century, in particular, France was accustomed to hearing operas from other parts of Europe performed in French. Revisiting Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* as an example, the opera was translated by Pierre-Louis Moline from Italian into French and retitled *Orphée et Eurydice* in 1774 for the Paris Opera. This practice continues as opera extends to new locations. In July 1903, graduates of the Tokyo Music School staged this same opera. This was one of the earliest examples of European opera performance in Japan, and it was translated into Japanese for the performance. A double translation occurred

in this instance, pointing to the way that opera fuses musical and linguistic meaning systems and how both were foreign to the local community. The Japanese translation here functions as a bridge for the local audience into the foreign world of opera as part of “an intense effort of linguistic and cultural translation” (Facijs 2022: 287). The music becomes a consistent thread that joins layers of language among diverse singers. Translation pivots around the music, and in each translation, whether French or Japanese, the breadth of the opera is expanded. This reaffirms the ongoing mutability of the libretto, which contrasts with the fixed nature of the score. The melodies, harmonies and instruments remain seemingly fixed while the language might be revised.

The second contributing factor to the language chosen for the performance of opera is the association and influence of certain locations. Italy, for example, has stepped in and out of the role of dominant opera culture, and, in some locations, Italian has come to be the expected language of opera. Verdi’s five-act grand opera *Don Carlos* was commissioned and first premiered in French in Paris with a libretto by Joseph Méry and Camille du Locle in March of 1867. Three months later, the opera received its London premiere; however, the work was not translated into English, nor was the original French libretto retained. Instead, the opera was translated into Italian, a language which had a much stronger association with the operatic form in London, most likely following the era of Handel, whose Italian-influenced operas of the 18th century would have libretti published and distributed for each performance in both English and Italian. Add to this scenario the fact that the *Don Carlos* libretto was based on a play about the prince of Asturias by Friedrich Schiller, and we find ourselves in a slightly absurd situation where an audience in England is listening to an opera in Italian translated from a French libretto adapted from a German play about a Spanish prince! The performance captured a unique mode of borderless Europe at a time when national identity discourse was doing more for separation than it was for union.

Opera, in its stereotypical form, leans towards a late 19th-century Italian style most commonly associated with the works of Giacomo Puccini and Giuseppe Verdi. If an audience is expecting the language to be foreign, then there is little discontent. The libretto can always be provided via other means in translation. Some audience members are happy with a simple plot summary to know the overall action points via a handout. Some audience members will read the entire libretto translated into a language they understand either via booklet, supertitle (projected words appearing above the stage that change with each sung line) or, in the most luxurious opera houses, subtitles on a small screen built into the seat in front of them.

The third contributing factor to the language chosen for opera performance is the troubling relationship opera has with the concept of ‘authenticity’. Abbate and Parker discuss the “continuing and heated” debate around performing opera in translation as part of the introduction to their thoughtful and critical history of the form. Their discussion points to a cultural dichotomy where an opera has an ‘original’ version and a ‘translated’ version (Abbate & Parker 2012: 5). Recently, the idea of opera in translation has become less valued. These politics are established by an attitude surrounding music performance that strives to get as close to the composer’s intentions as possible. Composers supposedly intended their operas to be performed in the specific language that was chosen for the first performance. This is part of broader issues within musicology and the performance of classical music. The reliance on the composer’s intentions forces music to operate under a constructed singularity (Taruskin 1995). Centring the composer moves against the humanity and personality of musical performance in favour of an abstract ideal of a piece of music. Most musicians who have studied under the Western tradition have been taught that there is a ‘correct’ way to perform a piece of music and that accessing that correct mode is exclusively via the composer’s context.

Even with these politics in play, in the *Don Carlos* example, it is very difficult to assign and rank forms of authenticity. Original and translation fall over quickly upon interrogation, especially when the composition process is obscured and contested – a commonplace for art in the 18th and 19th centuries. We rarely know how many libretti composers worked while writing the music or which might be traded out for a specific premiere in a certain part of Europe. Indeed, *Don Carlos* receives common performances in both French and Italian, perhaps owing to the close gap of just three months between the respective language premieres. It seems strange, though, that the length of time makes the difference. Why is it more acceptable for this opera to be performed in multiple languages but not others that had more time in between translations?

Goehr calls this culture the “Beethoven paradigm”. It was a period after 1800 when the status of the composer moved into a transcendental space as they “enjoyed describing themselves and each other as divinely inspired creators whose sole task was to objectify in music something unique and personal” (Goehr 1992: 195). The composer becomes a genius, and to question them by changing some part of their score, including the libretto, becomes blasphemy. Within this paradigm, the singer can only get in the way of the composer’s assumed genius, and, thus, a ‘respectful’ performer will always try and recreate the most authentic version of the performance in line with the composer’s context. This generally includes the language first performed or most associated with the composer’s wishes. If an opera

was written and performed first in French, a historically informed performer is compelled to perform that work in French for any audience regardless of their intelligibility of the language. Discussions around translation quickly fall to what might be lost in translation. However, the opposite is also true. What perspectives and understandings do we lose in pursuing singularity? Goehr asks, “Why shouldn’t opera in translation also mean adaptable opera, an opera indicative of cultural transformation?” (Goehr 2008: 408) To insist on performing in European languages around the world starts to reaffirm models of colonisation.

While opera has enjoyed a rich history of multilingualism, one that contains gaps with potential, this culture is fading. The composer continues to reign within the opera halls. NZ Opera’s performance of (*m*)*Orpheus* noticeably calls the work a ‘masterpiece’, and the Beethoven paradigm is still firmly felt, including research performing genomic analysis of locks of the actual Beethoven’s hair. Research such as this does not include a justification other than the self-evident merit of knowing the precise cause of Beethoven’s “recurring gastronomical complaints” (Begg et al. 2023: 1). Rarely is the singer profiled with as much detail – the one that gives their tangible voice to audiences in the room. We must “depart from the solitary goal of understanding how music might have had meaning in the past” and move to an engaged opera (André 2018: 1). A renewed reverence for the composer has appeared largely fuelled by opera’s attempts to justify its own lavish expense and public funding through further deification of the genius creator. This has strengthened and reinforced calls to acknowledge the composer’s intentions. Few opera houses perform in translation, with a few notable exceptions, such as the English National Opera, whose company premise is built on performing all works in English. This movement away from each opera’s multilingual potential is a movement away from an engaged opera and towards a solitary approach. When dominant opera practice assumes that operas are monolingual, this starts to undo the multilingual plurality of opera across the globe. Navigation, star gazing and exploration are lost. Thankfully, the figure of the singer pushes back against this tide. The singer must perform, and in doing so, they *always* engage and they *always* depart. Regardless of the performance mindset, the singer locates opera in the now.

Singing and Authorship

It might seem unusual to suggest, but the dominant Western musical culture that governs opera dismisses the singer. Ironically, the form which so idolises and is built around the facility of the singer is also subject to a political structure, as outlined previously, that focuses on the composer and

the content of the opera above the singers themselves. And yet, without the singer, there is no other opera. Other components may be switched out. There are operas without orchestras or instruments, operas without stages and operas not in theatres, but it is hard to conceive of an opera without singers. This section is part of the liberation of singers and profiles how songful thinkers have, over the past 200 years, transformed and altered opera through voice.

Singers are authors. Equally in line with composers and librettists, singers imprint a complex layer of messages onto the music. Roland Barthes famously labelled this imprint the “grain of the voice” (Barthes 1977). Voice studies have advocated for the emancipation of the voice from other forms of static meaning, particularly the semantic (Cavarero 2005; Dolar 2006). This profile of the voice and the way that it ephemerally flows into the world directly connected to the experience of bodies places it “in a position to assume an antagonistic role with respect to the system of languages” (Cavarero 2012: 77). This includes musical languages along with linguistic ones. The singer is antagonistically related to the score as each individual voice personally and uniquely refigures it. There is potential here that “performers can teach receptive scholars a great deal, and communication both ways is needed if a real symbiosis of musicology and performance is to occur” (Taruskin 1995: 63). This broadly returns to the idea of performance, but the precise way that singer, language and music come together in opera and the positive potential for engaged meanings must be specifically championed. Singers do not perform music in the same way as instrumentalists, and their bodies convey language differently to actors. The way that singers make meaning wrestles with a line of thought stretching back to the figure of the Siren in Greek mythology. Cavarero explains that the Siren does not sing with a “signifying voice”; they depart meaningless sounds which have been characterised as dangerous and deadly (Cavarero 2005: 161). The act of singing is tangled not only in an artistic tradition of Europe but also in a conceptualisation from Greek philosophy that privileges “the connection between voice and speech, thus imprisoning voice in the realm of logos” (Cavarero 2012: 72). The emancipation of the realm of vocality points towards a new kind of multilingualism in opera which involves and acknowledges the way that the singer goes beyond the libretto to add to it and embody it.

It has taken the performers of music considerable time to be recognised on equal footing with the composer and the audience. When Barthes argues that to compose is “to give to do, not to give to hear”, he outlines that all types of authorship are beginnings, not endings (Barthes 1977: 153). They commence the threads of meaning-making and point towards the future. There are things yet to be done. The intensity of the author/composer

figure and the way in which they might dictate textual meaning beyond the grave remains a core issue for the operatic community. The concern here is a representational one, and it is fruitful to consider the ways that singing skirts representational frameworks. Vocality resists representationalism by always doing something with text. It resists “a mode of thought that prescribes all that is known” (Bolt 2010: 13). It constructs a non-representational mode of musical practice which sees a proliferation of meaning, and it is in that site of proliferation that music and opera can take on new and potentially decolonial forms.

When a singer escapes the shackles of representationalism and becomes an author, they are then able to respond to the unfinished score. Ashcroft et al. have presented perspectives on the way that diverse writers from colonial contexts might repurpose European languages and write back to the empire. They explain that “an Indian writer like Raja Rao or a Nigerian writer such as Chinua Achebe have needed to transform the language, to use it in a different way in its new context” (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 10). In these contexts, where languages such as English and French have supplanted local languages and dialects, there is a mode of resistance which comes from diverting the flow of power contained within these systems. These languages have a colonial history, but many artists and writers have found ways to take back agency. Similarly, if the singer is also understood as an author, they do not merely return the score. Applying this positive way of looking at engaging with the language systems to opera, a perspective arises where the antagonistic singer sends a message back to the musical culture of Europe detailing the potential for the new.

I take this opportunity to shine a light on the decades of non-traditional research that has been conducted by an illustrious list of singers in the operatic field. These singers have, in their preparation, interpretation and performance of canonic operas, found new knowledge and engaged in healthy and productive debate with composers and librettists long past. This public debate of dialogical discovery that occurs when certain singers choose to grapple with the complex history of the form allows opera to be thrilling on multiple levels – sonically, dramatically and critically. When South African soprano Pretty Yende sings the iconic act I finale of *La Traviata* (1853), ‘Sempre Libera | Always Free’, a role and aria for which she is lauded, she enters into scholarly debate with the composer Verdi and librettist Francesco Piave. In opera, there is an opportunity for the female body to topple the rigid masculine fixity of the operatic form (Cavarero 2005: 128). Unexpectedly, opera singers themselves are reticent regarding this role, and a professional career often requires the outspoken reverence of so-called genius composers. This discourse aside, these musical scholars give opera renewed life and provide ephemeral vocal analysis on the topic of opera.

These performances are crucially multi-hemisphere and multi-directional. It is an oversimplification to only look at how the operatic text has travelled one way from Europe to be performed in a colonial context, as though Indigenous people have nothing to add. “Opera is storytelling, music, and theater, all part of First Nations tradition” (Williams 2011: 311). Different lines can be traced from a single opera, creating a woven tapestry of meanings across the surface of the earth. Singers from the Southern Hemisphere will perform back in Europe. Some singers will travel to Europe and America and present their sung thesis on well-known opera stages, such as the Metropolitan Opera House in New York or La Scala in Milan. Other singers will move their performance from one location to the next, and, in each, they will update and reinscribe their performative meanings for new audiences and add yet another layer to the productive iterations. Performances in Brazil, New Zealand and Johannesburg recharge operas in important ways. The Sydney Opera House has succeeded in becoming one of the most visually recognisable opera houses in the world, and it is located in the Global South, but in what ways do singers transform and rewrite opera within its walls? Generations of experience may be contained within the performance of some singers, where multiple genealogies and conflating experiences will be summed up in their embodiment of the music, housing a complex mix of lived perspectives.

This act of singing provides a line of flight away from territorialised and hegemonic structures. It retreats from colonialism by imprinting audiences with individual vocal patterns and grains. While the colonial perspective of opera, which is present, dictates Global Northern ways of knowing, singers depart from the text rather than act in service to it. They write the libretto anew and imbue it with their individual and local entanglements of meaning, gesture and symbolism. This flip of the dominant artistic flow of classical music performance mirrors the way that European philosophy has been analysed through the lens of Indigenous and First Nations knowledge systems. The lens becomes vocal as operatic music must be embodied and performed and can pass through the vocal apparatus of diverse singers. The visceral knowledge systems of singers embody aesthetics and vernaculars, and these “bring about an admixture of perspectives which demand a full appraisal of the polyphonies and dialogism at play in the operas” (Mhlambi 2016: 49). It is a polyphony that proliferates in an exciting way both historically and into the future. Polyphony is divergent. In a profile of two productions of the opera *Carmen* by George Bizet performed in Africa, André claims that “these African Carmens present a *study* of the Western form reconfigured” (André 2017: 56; my emphasis). Vocal analysis can be recognised, and the way that singers and artists have, over time, critiqued opera through performance is revealed. This is vocal and artistic scholarship.

Conclusion

The drive of this chapter has been to relocate the singer as a meaning-maker in opera and explore the way the singer engages with the music and libretto. This is part of a multifaceted way that opera is looking forward to restructuring itself and its relationship with audiences. Although not explored in more detail in this chapter, new operas between diverse collaborating artists are a rare occurrence globally. They thankfully receive more academic scholarship and attention, but the presence of diverse voices in opera houses has been and continues to be relegated to other predictable advisory roles on certain cultural components of main-stage canonical works. There is still so much to be gained in new ways of writing, producing and performing opera. There is still so much to be learned about how tradition can reorient and recentre opera as we acknowledge that “indigenous experience, while it is anchored to that tradition, is fed by that tradition, is much broader than that experience” (Cheetham 2011: 325). The future of the form and the way that it expands and removes common gatekeeping practices to explore new modes of decolonisation are crucial. A decolonial praxis in opera will always contain the singer. While the act of singing is not dominantly positioned as an authoritative role, it is in vocality that the many components of opera come together. The unique way that singers engage with the operatic text and rewrite it is an ongoing process, and they connect multiple languages through musical and vocal embodiment. Each performance asks a question of the operatic object and interrogates it for the audience. In considering an individual opera, I suggest also considering a multilingual history of unique localisations at the singer level. The melodies coded with different languages and individual articulations contain an exciting breakdown of territories and borders – they take flight. The liberation of the libretto is a practice hundreds of years in the making but also with emerging traditions, expectations and trends that continue to break new ground, revitalising both the opera that we’ve known and revealing what opera might come to be.

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15

FROM LINGUISTIC RESISTANCE TO RE-EXISTENCE

Pretuguês as an Anti-racist Perspective on Language

Joel Windle and Gabriel Nascimento

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of Brazilian and international Black rights movements in promoting linguistic justice and citizenship in Brazil, but also more widely in Latin America and other Afro-diasporic spaces. Close to 54% of Brazil's population identify as Black, the result of five hundred years of colonial exploitation of the Americas through the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. Indeed, by some measures, Brazil can be considered to have the largest Afro-descendent population of any country in the world after Nigeria. Brazil was also the last country in the Western world to abolish slavery formally in 1888. Today, racial divides in Brazil remain stark in access to education, health, employment and security (Telles, 2014). Black Brazilians are overrepresented among the victims of violent crime and in the prison population (Truzzi *et al.*, 2022). However, shifting state ideologies have downplayed the existence of separate racial groupings since the late nineteenth century, when ideas of a racial melting pot or “racial democracy” rose to prominence, continuing into the present day (De Azevedo, 1987, p. 246). The denial of racial divisions has given rise to ideas of Brazil as a place of “cordial” or hidden racism rather than the officialised racism of the USA or apartheid South Africa (Turra and Venturi, 1995, p. 1).

Throughout this colonial history, Indigenous and Black resistance has remained a constant presence. This includes colonial-era *Quilombos*, societies established by those who escaped enslavement, as well as contemporary social movements, many of which celebrate and revive this legacy – such as the *quilombismo* movement that proposes reorganising Brazilian along

maroon society (Afolabi, 2012; A. Nascimento, 2020). Black rights movements have pointed to the erasure of Black people, history and culture – as well as speech – from schools and universities (Silva, 2011; Munanga, 2015). Recent victories for these movements include laws requiring African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture to be included in school curricula since 2003. Further, since 2012, most public universities have begun adopting affirmative action policies for the admission of Black, Indigenous and working-class students.

Black activism has also focused on language since at least the 1980s, led by the coining of a term for Black Portuguese by Lélia Gonzalez, *pretuguês* (preto/black+guese) (Gonzalez, 2020). This neologism is tied by Gonzalez to a wider set of decolonising propositions that form the central focus of this chapter. The work of Gonzalez has been taken up by other contemporary Black activist scholars in Brazil (G. Nascimento, 2020; Muniz, 2021). Their work confronts a body of traditional prescriptivist and descriptivist linguistics that has little time for the arguments raised by Black scholars or for the presence of Black subjects inside the academy (Nascimento and Windle, 2021).

In the first section that follows, we discuss the idea of linguistic resistance that is taken up before providing a fuller account of Lélia Gonzalez and her work. We then turn to contemporary authors who take up her legacy, considering the implications for decolonising linguistics more broadly. In so doing, we not only theorise the notion of linguistic resistance but what potentially lies beyond it – practices of re-existence (Souza, 2016; Windle *et al.*, 2020; Muniz, 2021).

Linguistic Racism and Linguistic Resistance

In order to understand the importance of Lélia Gonzalez's concept of *pretuguês* as a manifestation of linguistic resistance, it is important to first draw attention to the types of oppression that it sought to counter – and these are far from a uniquely Brazilian phenomenon. Language has long been central to subaltern political movements, most notably in the rejection of linguistic imperialism perpetuated by colonial metropolises and nation-states. By linguistic resistance, we refer to movements that invoke language and representations of language as part of their demands and self-identification. Further, we can specify our focus here as anti-colonial linguistic resistance – that is, forms of resistance to racialising and dehumanising linguistic ideologies that are tied to the project of modernity (Heller and McElhinny, 2017; G. Nascimento, 2020).

In colonial settings, the languages of colonisation are tools of Whiteness and the erasure of Blackness that are both imposed and internalised,

as Fanon compellingly argues (Fanon, 1970). Further, new categories turn language into a technology of dehumanisation through notions of Blackness alongside an unmarked notion of Whiteness. Nascimento notes that even these impositions left space for repurposing from below:

The ‘Black’ subject was not only created as a historical and discursive category, but was forced to use the language of the interlocutor (particularly in the case of the national languages of the colonisers) to produce meanings of defence and survival following the intense transatlantic slave trade and enslavement itself, being capable of . . . creating changes in this language.

(G. Nascimento, 2020, p. 12)

The early stages of colonisation in Brazil relied on the establishment of *línguas gerais* – common tongues that could be used for evangelising the Indigenous populations. For the first three centuries, Portuguese colonisation in the Americas relied not on the imposition of a European language but on the enforcement of Tupi-based *línguas gerais*, remnants of which are spoken by some communities in the Amazon (Silva-Reis and Bagno, 2020). Only with the population movements provoked by the gold rush of the late eighteenth century did Portuguese become dominant, supported by a shift in official policies. Still, with the children of enslaved peoples forbidden from attending school until the end of the nineteenth century, the image of colonial imposition of linguistic norms via education is far from the only experience of colonial Brazil.

Interlinked with the imposition of colonial languages is the destruction of the languages of colonised people, their knowledge and their identities – not to mention physical destruction, rape and pillage (Carneiro, 2015). Linguicide is, definitionally, epistemicide. Conversely, linguistic resistance is a resistance to knowledge, identity and being, as much as it is of any particular linguistic form. The linguistic clothing that resistance may wear is varied.

Minority languages and the defences of these languages are perhaps the most visible forms of linguistic resistance in post-colonial societies. These include varieties of colonial languages that have been developed by colonised peoples and adapted to their own purposes and outlooks. Some of these are now firmly linked to political and cultural movements – including Afrikaans in South Africa (Alim *et al.*, 2021) and African American Vernacular English and Gullah in the United States (McLaren, 2009). In these cases, efforts have been made to establish alternative spoken or literary norms that represent the language of racialised speakers previously cast as speaking a sub-standard variety of a norm based on by White speakers.

Nevertheless, contact languages and varieties emerging from colonialism have more often been present in academic discourse as the “property” of linguists themselves, answerable to the preoccupations and theoretical debates that flourish internally. Such is the case of debates over creoles and pidgins (Lucchesi *et al.*, 2009), as well as less stable composite categories such as Aboriginal English in Australia (Malcolm *et al.*, 2020).

The knowledge produced about linguistic variation is potentially subject to appropriation by speakers themselves, who speak back as part of political agendas. Professional linguists and speakers of subalternised registers share a concern with distance from standardised linguistic norms imposed by institutions such as schools and government bureaucracies. But the strategies they adopt are different. Mainstream linguistics has recently sought to avoid the ideological pitfalls of normativism, in which coloniality hides via descriptivism (Nascimento and Windle, 2021). But descriptivism offers a set of technical criteria for linguistic inclusion and exclusion that has, at best, a weak link to empowerment. By contrast, an activist stance looks more closely at speech as a marker of identity and political agency.

Activist discourses about the speech of subaltern groups in colonial settings constitute metapragmatic regimes (Silverstein, 2003; Silva, 2022) that are often distinct from those of mainstream professional linguistics. It is the metapragmatic regime itself – that is to say, talk about language and evaluations of linguistic identity materialised interactionally and *as* a community – that is of primary importance in our analysis of linguistic resistance/re-existence here. For example, the speech of Black Brazilians has been *descriptively* categorised by linguists as Afro-Brazilian Portuguese based on morpho-syntactic characteristics prevalent in more isolated communities. The speech of Black Brazilians has been self-categorised in scholarly-activist circles as *pretuguês*, based on the use of language to build resistance against enslavement and oppression within Black communities. The coherent set of identities, semiotic values, themes and styles associated with *pretuguês* by its own users contribute to constituting it as a sociolinguistic register (Agha, 2006), even if there is no wider recognition beyond activist circles at present.

Although advocates of *pretuguês* draw attention to lexical items that come into Brazilian Portuguese from African languages, often without recognition, it is language in use for community-building and resistance that is of paramount importance. Hence, it is not possible to invalidate *pretuguês* on descriptivist grounds – i.e., the relative strength or weakness of the influence of African languages on the Portuguese spoken in Brazil.

The processes involved in the activist discursive production that identifies a distinctive Afro-Brazilian use of language within practices of resistance is indexical in nature – that is, these practices only gain meaning by looking

at how they are connected to contexts that have their own socio-semiotic orders of value and relevance. In this sense, we follow Silva's analysis of a register used in Brazilian activist circles – *papo reto* (straight talk). Silva describes *papo reto* as:

an enregistered trope that indexes a speaker animator who is an activist or favela resident (or aligns with this role) and who often metadiscursively signals an attitude of defiance toward the unequal structuring of Brazilian society.

(Silva, 2022, p. 240)

This definition is closely aligned to *pretuguês*, and indeed, there is no doubt overlap in the associations and uses of these two terms. Similarly, there is proximity in the ways in which they establish themselves through the process of enregisterment described by Silva as entailing:

the socialization of register users into participation frameworks that relatively stabilize the register's denotational and indexical values and (2) the meta-pragmatic work of institutions and discourses that reflexively produce criteria, norms, and evaluations for its discursive organization and situate it in the stratified terrain of a society.

(Silva, 2022, p. 241)

Building on Silva's analysis, we focus on pragmatic and metapragmatic dimensions of *pretuguês*, which involve the thematisation of Black identities and position-taking – the most central of which is an orientation towards remaking social relations on a more egalitarian and Black-centred foundation that is named as “re-existence” in contemporary Black linguistic scholarship (Souza, 2016, p. 1).

Black Portuguese – *Pretuguês*

As mentioned previously, *pretuguês* is a term coined by Lélia Gonzalez, a Black feminist author and activist who contributed to psychology, philosophy and anthropology. Gonzalez wrote academic texts, but much of her production was for newspapers and the activist press. Much of this has recently been edited by Flávia Rios (Gonzalez, 2020). Gonzalez was born in the city of Belo Horizonte in 1935 but moved to Rio de Janeiro at the age of seven. At university, she completed degrees in history, geography and philosophy, graduating shortly before the military coup of 1964. By 1972, she had come to the attention of the dictatorship's military police for her activism. Gonzalez was a founding member of the Unified Black Movement

and of the Workers' Party, unsuccessfully standing for Congress at the end of the dictatorship in 1986. In addition to her writing and activism, Gonzalez was a translator (from German and English) and teacher, becoming head of the Department of Sociology and Politics at the Pontifical Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro. She died of a heart attack in 1994.

Gonzalez introduces *pretuguês* in an essay analysing race, class and sexism, originally published in 1983 and available in English translation (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2021). In this essay, Gonzalez focuses on the ways in which Black women are classified and treated – as servants, wet nurses or objects of sexual desire. The figure of the wet nurse, in particular, is theorised by Gonzalez as one of Black linguistic resistance rather than merely submission to White domination. The so-called *mães pretas* (“Black Mothers”) hold and pass on knowledge and speech from Black communities, eventually reconfiguring the Brazilian linguistic landscape more widely through their role in child-rearing. Metaphorically, Gonzalez presents this child as Brazilian culture and the language of that culture as *pretuguês*. That is to say, Black women control and pass on culture through a language that is theirs and that bears their own identity.

Later, she goes on to situate *pretuguês* within the logic of internalised racism, evident in selective (mis)recognition of African speech forms and influence:

Funny how they make fun of us when we say we root for *Framengo*. They call us illiterate, they say we can't speak properly. And then they ignore that the utterance of /r/ instead of /l/ is a linguistic feature of an African language in which /l/ does not occur. So, who is illiterate now? At the same time, they think the so-called Brazilian way of speaking – marked by the ellipsis of final /r/ in verb infinitives, the clustered words and whatnot – is so groovy. They don't get they're speaking *pretuguês*.

(Gonzalez *et al.*, 2021, p. 386)

The differential treatment of the rhoticism in *framengo* (officially *Flamengo*), indexing the speech of poor Black Brazilians, compared to linguistic forms shared with more privileged speakers, is of note here. Blackness attaches itself to *framengo* but not to the dropping of the final /r/ in verb infinitives. Questioning the authenticity of the link between rhoticism and African influence by mainstream linguists such as Bagno (who notes this tendency as predates colonisation) is of secondary importance here. Rather, it is the contrasting treatment given to language and cultural symbols when they are attached to Black compared to White bodies that is significant.

To exemplify this differential treatment, Gonzalez offers the Bantu origin of *bunda* (bum). The Black female buttocks are fetishised in “folkloric”

cultural forms such as Samba, which are even held up as national emblems alongside Afrocentric cultural and cosmological practices (Umbanda, *condomblé*). But these are carefully cordoned off and objectified. Eurocentric aesthetics reassert themselves at every turn in the national imagination of Brazil's White elite. In another play on words, Gonzalez jokes that Brazilian White supremacy "steals" the arse (*desbundante*) (and the Bantu term for it) from Black Brazilians in this cultural hierarchy, in which the African occupies the lowest place. It is typical of Gonzalez to refuse a separation of ancestry, corporality and language – "And they say that signifiers don't leave marks", she quips (p. 386).

Importantly, in seeking to establish an Amefrican identity, Gonzalez looks to the Americas rather than to an idealised Africa for the construction of a new identity. This is a distinctive mode of decolonising that sets Gonzalez apart from many historical and contemporary strands of Afrocentric thought and activism.

Gonzalez returns to *pretuguês* in her 1988 essay "the politico-cultural category of Amefricanity". She herself offers the possible English translation of *amefricanidade* (Amefricanity) and of *amefricano* (Amefrican) – both linguistically innovative ways of re-centring the constitutive role of Africans in the Americas, and apparently linked to the term Amerindia(n), which she also evokes. Pretugues is a linguistic category that is developed in parallel with the identity category *amefricanidade* and shares its productive properties:

Beyond its merely geographic character, the category of Amefricanity incorporates a whole historical process of intense cultural dynamics (adaptation, resistance, reinterpretation, and the creation of new forms) that is Afrocentered, that is, referencing models such as: Jamaica and the Akan, their dominant model; Brazil and its Yorubá, Banto and Ewe-fon models. Hence, it moves us towards a whole ethnic identity.

(Gonzalez, 2020, p. 135)

Gonzalez was inspired in her pan-American and pan-Africanist analysis by her active participation in academic and activist meetings across the Americas and Africa. She wrote:

Thanks to a growing contact with Black cultural manifestations in other countries of the American continent, I have had the opportunity to observe certain similarities that, in relation to speech, remind us of our own country. It is clear that the Black presence in the Caribbean region (here understood not just as islands but including the Atlantic coast of Central America and the north of South America) modified Spanish,

English and French spoken in the region (as for Dutch, for lack of knowledge, I cannot comment). That is to say, what I call “pretuguês”, and which is nothing more than the mark of Africanisation of the Portuguese spoken in Brazil (never forgetting that the colonisers called the African slaves “*pretos*” and those born in Brazil “*crioulos*”) is easily identifiable particularly in the Spanish of the Caribbean region.

(2020, p. 128)

It is notable here that Gonzalez does not seek to present *pretuguês* as exceptional but rather as a shared emblem of belonging that is common to the settings of colonial America. The differential treatment of newly arrived Africans and those born in the Americas already points to shifts occurring locally and a territorial distinction in affiliation, forced by the category of “*crioulo*”, of those born there. Seeing *pretuguês* in Caribbean Spanish, Gonzalez points to both linguistic features and cultural forms, but without promising many specific links to African languages:

The tonal and rhythmic character of the African languages brought to the New World, and also the absence of certain consonants (like the L or the R, for example), point towards a little explored aspect of Black influence on the historical-cultural formation of the whole continent (without mentioning the creole dialects of the Caribbean). Even stronger similarities are evident if we look to music, dance, belief systems etc. It goes without saying how much all of this is covered by the ideological veil of whitening, and repressed by Eurocentric classifications like “popular culture”, “national folklore” etc. that minimise the importance of the Black contribution.

(2020, p. 128)

The central point here, again, is not a sociolinguistic description but the colonialist, racist erasure of Africanness from the Americas and the possibility of reclaiming Amefricanity through categories such as *pretuguês*. This reclaiming undermines ideologies of White supremacy that are internalised in efforts to cast off Blackness in appearance, culture and language. Gonzalez points to political developments in the United States and Africa, as well as to Black literature, such as the work of Alice Walker, as examples of how such undermining has enjoyed success in contexts where racism is more exposed. Of these contexts, she notes:

It is precisely the objective consciousness of this unhidden racism and direct knowledge of its cruel workings that awaken this effort, in the sense of rescuing and affirming the humanity and competence of an

entire ethnic group considered “inferior”. The hardness of these systems made the Black community unite and fight, at different levels, against all forms of racial oppression.

(2020, p. 132)

Consciousness-raising through and about the Africanness, or rather the Amefricanness of language, became the task Gonzalez assigned to *pretuguês*.

However, as alluded to, *pretuguês* also runs into a challenge from mainstream linguists who claim that the speech of Black Brazilians is not descriptively distinct from White Brazilians, dismissing *pretugues* as an activist confection. Until recently, the dominant position in Brazilian linguistics has been that shifts already underway in European Portuguese account for the distinctive characteristics of Brazilian Portuguese rather than the influence of African languages. Mainstream Brazilian linguistics is concerned with the authenticity of diachronic influences. In this regard, there is growing consensus that Brazilian Portuguese can be thought of as Afro-Brazilian, given the extent of African influence on all aspects of the language (Lucchesi *et al.*, 2009; de Castro, 2016). As Lucchesi and colleagues have shown, this influence is strongest in more isolated rural communities and amongst older Black speakers. Nevertheless, de Castro (2016), among others, has shown a growing list of linguistic items that bear African influence and which are generally not recognised as such by the wider population. European Portuguese, and most notably a written literary style that is not spoken or mastered by even the most socially elite Brazilian speakers, remains an ideal education standard (Bagno, 1999, 2019).

Bagno (2019) is representative of a descriptivist school of sociolinguistics that acknowledges a generalised African influence, strongest in stigmatised varieties, but no distinctive Black speech community when he writes:

Unlike the United States, it cannot be said that there exists a “Black Portuguese” in Brazil . . . the most stigmatised linguistic varieties in our society are spoken by Black, Indigenous, Mixed and White people with the least access to schooling, work and income. Although at the social level Brazil is a country imbued in racism, on the linguistic level, the differences that separate privileged urban varieties from other, stigmatised varieties, are of a socioeconomic order: the grammar of poor Black women and men is the same as that of poor White women and men.

(Bagno, 2019, p. 155)

At stake, from our own perspective, are two questions – how can a relationship between a people and their speech be recognised, on the one hand,

and what purposes does professional linguistics serve in this process (Nascimento and Windle, 2021)?

The Value of *Pretuguês* Today

We understand *pretuguês* as a distinctive decolonising perspective on language and as a distinctive technology for the appropriation of Portuguese that emerged historically in the usages, ways of being and ways of knowing of enslaved Africans and is manifest in contemporary Brazilian society amongst Afro-Brazilians. Further, *pretuguês* is a way of valuing the ways in which the speakers Niger-Congo family languages shifted European Portuguese towards new forms and bodies (de Castro, 2016). As such, *pretuguês* contribute to pluralising understandings of language in Brazil and rejecting monoglossic ideologies that paper over multilingualism (Cavalcanti and Maher, 2017).

In our view, *pretuguês* is both language and languaging, reformulating the noun into the verb form as previous scholars have advocated in movements to destabilise named languages as the building blocks of linguistics. Importantly, the practice of *pretuguês* is not the mere use of languaging resources with a defined origin point in colonial history but the indexing and enactment of political struggle for Black bodies and dignity that is still underway. In this sense, *pretuguês* is not a fixed category but an evolving concept that is mobilised for various purposes.

An important representative of this perspective is Kassandra Muniz, who uses the vocabulary of the Brazilian martial art Capoeira, developed and practiced by Black communities in northeastern Brazil and illegal into the twentieth century, in order to write about speech akin to *pretuguês*. In *Capoeira*, the term *mandinga* refers to moves or plays entered into with an adversary (or adversaries). Hence, *mandinga* is knowing “when to duck, when to stand your ground, and when to fight back” (Muniz, 2021, p. 282). Borrowing from this metaphor, *mandinga* builds a performative image of language that involves reading and being read by others and thinking about “how we as a Black population play linguistically, and hence, politically with our identities in a strategic way” (Muniz, 2021, p. 278). Language is mobilised and manipulated in the same way that the sparing stances and moves of Capoeira are (swaying moves that are known as *ginga*, always involves close attention to opponents’ *ginga* as well as to an overarching corporeal and musical architecture shaping Capoeira as a collective activity).

For Muniz, *mandinga* refers to strategic uses of language, including subterfuge, linguistic games, creativity and retreat, under the pressures of racism, sexism and other forms of oppression that weigh on Black speakers (Windle *et al.*, 2020; Muniz, 2021). These types of speech embody ways of knowing passed down through generations as practices of survival. More than resistance – it is re-existence that is proposed in this embodied stance. *Mandinga*

operates from a specific place. Muniz, writing also of her own positionality, writes, “for me, being a Black and peripheral woman is thinking, acting and living from the starting point of the crossroads” (2021, p. 280). The linguistic “engineering” of Black women at these crossroads “keeps communities alive and active” and plays a fundamentally epistemological role:

The place that these Black women, from our mothers to Black intellectuals, occupy to engender the possibility for us to make ourselves subjects of language, and too subjects of rights, must always be seen starting from what the epistemologies bestowed by our ancestralities and our (his) tories give us to be able to exist in this world.

(Muniz, 2021, p. 280)

Mandinga thus offers a perspective on language as it is “embodied in the reexistence(s) of the Black population” (Muniz, 2021, p. 280) – that is, a performative notion of language that takes up the promise of *pretuguês*.

Like Gonzalez’s own writing style, Muniz’s writing can be taken as exemplifying *pretuguês*. Muniz also lays claim to oral, subversive and deeply personal traditions of writing, citing connections to an international sisterhood of fellow writers who include bell hooks and Glória Anzaldúa. Outside of academia, she cites hip-hop as an “Afro-peripheral” cultural expression grounded in *mandinga* (2021, p. 285). She ends her presentation on the concept of *mandinga* with a poem that includes the following verses, reproduced here in their original and in translation, and including metapragmatic evocation of *pretuguês*:

[Q]ue pode um povo que é reduzido à cor e não à gente? Mandingar. Gingar com as palavras da mesma forma que gíngam com a vida. Reescrever, reinventar, reestartar a própria ideia de linguagem. “Reexistir”. Daquele jeito que a Preta Analu falou, com os manos e as minas. Com as monas também. Todo mundo que verga mas não quebra, mandinga. Preocupa, pretuba, perturba, fala “pretuguês”. A gente quer é causar! Que nada. A gente quer é viver, marchar, lutar, poetizar sobre o preto também. Ter direito a se sentir bem na língua que nos habita. A pele que nos veste, desloca, recria. Eu quero que você me leia, mas sem seu branco olhar. Eu quero que você reconheça um axé que há em nós, mesmo lendo a Bíblia.

(Muniz, 2021, p. 286)

[W]hat can a people who are reduced to color and not to people do? *Mandingar*. Spar with words the same way you spar with life. Rewrite, reinvent, reset the very idea of language. “Reexist”. The way Preta Analu said, with the brothers and the sisters. With *monas* too. Everyone who bends but doesn’t break, *mandingas*. Worries, troubles, Blackens,

disturbs, speaks *pretuguês* We want to cause trouble! Not at all. We want to live, march, fight, poetize about black people too. Having the right to feel good in the language that inhabits us. A skin that dresses, displaces, recreates us. I want you to read me, but without your White gaze. I want you to recognize an *axé* in us, even reading the Bible.

(Muniz, 2021, p. 286)

This excerpt thematises tropes that help to define *pretuguês* as a register and which have much in common with tropes identified by Silva (2022). Notably, centring the Black, female speaking subject and the evocation of familiar and horizontal relations of solidarity (sisters, brothers, mention of Ana Lúcia Silva Souza by the affectionate name Black Analu). Further, there is a playful inventiveness with language that is reminiscent of Gonzalez's own neologisms. The suffix of preoccupation is substituted for Black (*pretu*) just as Portuguese is "Blackened" (made closer, racialised) into *pretuguês*. As with the activist register of *papo reto*, Muniz's writing here draws attention to divergence from norms of politeness and conflict avoidance that characterise the normative register of Brazilian Portuguese – in so doing, marking it as White. Muniz writes that Black Brazilians "bother", "worry" and "disturb" a White listening subject by using *pretuguês* (2021, p. 286). She rhetorically denies any deliberate attempt at provocation, evoking instead activist and artistic contexts in which *pretuguês* may form a framework for understanding. Ancestrality and cosmology are indexed through the metaphors taken from Capoeira and through the invocation of *axé*. The constant racialisation of positions is also important here.

Most important of all in this writing is the thematisation of re-existence. Re-existence is a practice centred on the body, spirituality, ancestrality and movement, but also laughter that transgresses the forced civility of Whiteness. Refusing to separate language from its subjects and the tasks it performs, Muniz talks of "rewriting life with seman, sweat, bodies and languages" (p. 287). The pragmatic contrast with the politeness of colonial languaging that seeks to erase the body is also present in Gonzalez's writings of *pretuguês* as perceived by White listeners – and Black speakers themselves (a mark of internalised colonialism) as "embarrassing" (*incomoda*), "loud", "scandalous" and "rude" (2020, pp. 75–76).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that linguistic resistance, and its theorisation amongst organic activist-intellectuals, relies on principles of usefulness, authenticity and validity that are distinctive from those on offer from mainstream linguistics – at least in the case of Brazil. The concept of

pretuguês, largely ignored or even dismissed by linguists, has been taken up in Black rights movements as identifying a technology of Afro-Brazilian resistance and re-existence. Its authenticity is vouched for by its embeddedness within Black communities, ancestralities, cosmologies, ontologies and bodies.

Pretuguês names a metapragmatic regime – a way of naming and evaluating speech in conjunction with speakers. *Pretuguês* is a practice of self-identification that highlights strategies of resistance and re-existence centred on Black women across the time-space of colonialism. The valuing and preservation of *pretuguês*, and the substitution of alternative evaluations of it as incorrect or ignorant speech, is fundamentally about speakers in a set of recognisable contexts for Afro-Brazilians. *Pretuguês* is a decolonising force because it names Black belonging in/to a register that has a political history and identity which remains under construction.

Re-existence offers a combined perspective on language and body through Blackness. In this sense, as a perspective on uses to which language is put, *pretuguês* may be thought of as a register to be deployed under specific conditions, but also as reflective – indeed perhaps naming – a more stable and enduring metapragmatic regime. Afro-centric metapragmatic regimes encompassing *pretuguês*, including through its invocation alongside icons of cosmology, ancestry and activism, together with registers such as *papo reto* and the interactional tactics of *mandinga*, all offer the hope of re-existence for Black subjects in the Americas in the face of historic and ongoing anti-Black racism.

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16

FROM POST-REVOLUTIONARY “GLOTTOPHOBIA” TO THE BILL AGAINST “ACCENT DISCRIMINATION”

France’s Tortuous Journey Towards Linguistic Diversity

Valentina Gosetti

Introduction – Tan de’i! (Let’s go!)

France’s 2022 entry for the hugely popular international Eurovision song contest was a song in Breton entitled ‘Fulenn’ [Sparkle], performed by Alvan, an electronic music artist, in collaboration with Ahez, a vocal trio formed by singers Marine, Stereen, and Stereen. The artists, all from Brittany, represented France by singing a song in Breton, their own language. This seemingly uncontentious choice sparked a controversy on social media, with someone on Twitter (now X) launching a provocation by blaming this linguistic choice as the chief culprit for a disappointing 24th placement in the competition:

La France termine 24e du concours 2002 [sic] de l’#Eurovision avec 17 points. En choisissant une chanson en patois régional que personne ne comprend, c’était certain qu’on n’allait pas gagner!

(15 May 2022)

France ends up in the 24th position within the 2022 Eurovision song contest with 17 points. By choosing a song in a regional *patois* that no one understands, it was certain that we were not going to win!

Many of those who responded to this claim did not do so to endorse the band or to advocate for the artistic quality of the song but to defend Breton itself. They argued that Breton is not a mere *patois* but a *proper* language, “une langue regionale” [a regional language], in its own right. Others

threw their virtual arms up into the air with resignation such as Terres Celtes [Celtic Lands], a web guide for the Celtic countries, whose Twitter account posted “[p]énible ce mépris français pour les LANGUES (et non patois) régionales” [how gruelling is this French contempt for regional LANGUAGES (not patois)].

Why cite this relatively small, circumscribed, and, for the most, rather trivial Twitter exchange concerning a Euro-centric music context? As is often the case, “vernacular discourses and other non-mainstream forms of small talk” are key to gaining a “better understanding of the contemporary world” (Ndhlovu 2018, 345). In other words, what people say in their everyday lives, now often showcased through social media, may be a symptom of something running much deeper in a society. In this specific case, it is a glimpse into centuries of linguistic discrimination in France, the linguicism on which the *République une et indivisible* [the one and indivisible Republic] had been founded, what French sociolinguist Philippe Blanchet has termed *glottophobie* (from the Ancient Greek word γλῶττα, *glōtta*, meaning language or tongue, and φόβος, *phóbos*, meaning fear or terror) in his crucial book on the topic, *Discriminations: combattre la glottophobie* [Discriminations: fighting glottophobia] (2019). In December 2019, Blanchet’s reflections on glottophobia were referenced as the theoretical foundations of a bill aimed at banning all discrimination based on regional and/or foreign accent, here to be considered at the same level as other forms of discrimination like racism and sexism. The bill, presented by MP Christophe Euzet – whose mother is of Catalan origins and whose father comes from Sète, the Venice of the Languedoc, in the south of France – was approved by an overwhelming majority by the Assemblée Nationale [National Assembly], France’s lower parliament chamber, on 26 November 2020. As of today, the bill is still stuck in the Senate, the upper house, awaiting a debate to see whether accent discrimination will eventually become an enforceable crime in the Republic.

To understand why it is still important to legislate against matters of linguistic discrimination explicitly in twenty-first-century France, this chapter retraces some of the main episodes within France’s history of language oppression and linguistic ‘colonialisme intérieur’ (internal colonialism) (Lafont 1971; McPhee 1980; Alcouffe 2009; Lagarde 2012). From the French Revolution’s efforts to extirpate France’s “jargons barbares” [barbaric jargons] (Barère 1794, 10) via the 1999 French Constitutional Council’s ruling regarding the unconstitutionality of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to the 2021 events surrounding the so-called Loi Molac [The Molac Law] on the protection and promotion of regional languages, this chapter explores the strong nexus between language and national identity in the modern nation-state. France’s tortuous journey

to come to terms with its linguistic diversity will reveal how “‘Frenchness’ was only achieved surprisingly recently, and at the expense of France’s other indigenous languages” (Williams 2007, 9). The overall aim of this chapter is to raise awareness around the imperialistic mindset underpinning nationalistic discourses about the French language within the borders of the co-called Hexagon (Spillmann 1981; Weber 1986; Pialt 1988; Shepard 2016), beyond its borders, and, especially, in our minds, whether consciously or not.

Foundational Myths: Language and the Nation-State

“Mon véritable pays c’est la langue française” [My real country is the French language] (cited in Blanchet 2018, 37). This declaration, originally pronounced by the 2000 Nobel laureate in literature and naturalized French citizen Gao Xingjian, was chosen by Jack Lang, the then *ministre de l’Éducation nationale* [French Minister of National Education], during a 2001 speech regarding the schooling of migrant children and the teaching of languages. For those familiar with modern French history, declarations such as this one come as no surprise. As historian Paul Cohen, among many others (e.g., Aldrich 2015; Van den Avenne 2020), has remarked:

In few countries has language played a greater role in constituting national identity than in modern France. French is first and foremost a political idiom, enshrined by the leaders of the Revolution and the Third Republic [1870–1940] as the language of the Republic and the Nation.
(Cohen 2000, 21)

Why and how did this happen in the first place? Textbooks usually refer to the 1539 ordinance of Villers-Cotterêt signed by King François I (Frances I of France), which is the historical event that established French as the language of France. French President Emmanuel Macron once publicly called this ordinance the “acte fondateur de notre identité” [the founding act of our identity] (Tweet, 16 September 2017), and only recently, on 19 October 2023, via a highly controversial speech, President Macron inaugurated, in the castle of Villers-Cotterêt, a museum close to his heart, the *Cité internationale de la langue française*, entirely devoted to the promotion and celebration of the French language. Although through the centuries, the *ordonnance* has acquired a quasi-mythical status, in truth, François I’s monarchic legislation was simply meant to impose French, instead of Latin, as the language of the public sector (for legal acts, legislations, official contracts, etc.). The king had no intention to suppress the spoken vernaculars of his subjects. Subsequent kings of early-modern France and their entourage

played a greater role in the sacralization of the French language (Houdebine 2016), in particular statesman Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642), who, in 1635, founded the Académie Française, which is still today the official authority for the defence of the French language. This said, it was especially after the 1789 French Revolution that “the knowledge of the French language became an essential indicator of national loyalty under the Republic” (Ford 1993, 13). What set out to be a new, open, and enlightened republic based on the principles of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* [Liberty, Equality, Fraternity] had placed the French language as the foundational pillar of the nation-state, a political unit, which still “remains as the most enduring instrument of social and political closure” (Ndhlovu 2018, 4). The revolutionaries faced a conundrum. In the late eighteenth century, France was a highly multilingual society and only a very small portion of the population could speak French with some fluency. Now that the Republic was built, how to build French citizens?

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, there was an ephemeral period of apparent tolerance towards France’s regional languages, whereby, for instance, all decrees of the National Assembly had “to be translated into all languages (*idiômes*) of the country” (Nagy 2013, 139). These so-called patois, however, soon became pegged as threatening barbaric idioms in need of imminent extirpation. Against the backdrop of Revolutionary Terror, the Paris-based revolutionaries looked with increasing suspicion on provincial populations, which were “assumed to be teeming with counter-revolutionary tendencies, superstitions, ignorance and a propensity for being gulled by local aristocrats and the Catholic Church” (Gosetti et al. 2023, 90). In 1794, the Abbé Grégoire, a key revolutionary leader, presented to the National Convention his (in)famous report “sur la nécessité et les moyens d’anéantir le patois et d’universaliser l’usage de la langue française” [Report on the Necessity and the Means to Annihilate Every Dialect and to Universalize the Use of the French Language], whose underpinning questionnaire is often considered, from a Eurocentric perspective, an early example of sociolinguistic fieldwork (De Certeau et al. 1975). The only solution, according to Grégoire, was “dans une République une et indivisible, l’usage unique et invariable de la langue de la liberté” (Grégoire 1974, 4) [in the one and indivisible Republic, the unique and sole use of the language of freedom].

In the same year, Gascony-born politician Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac submitted to the National Convention a “Rapport du Comité de Salut Public sur les idiômes” [Report of the Committee of Public Safety on idioms], in which he made anti-republican recriminations about a number of languages still spoken within the Republic:

Le fédéralisme et la superstition parlent bas-breton; l’émigration et la haine de la République parlent allemand; la contre-révolution parle

l'italien, et le fanatisme parle le basque. Brisons ces instruments de de
dommage et d'erreur.

(*Barère 1794, 8*)

Federalism and superstition speak Breton; expatriation and hatred of the
Republic speak German; the counter-revolution speaks Italian, and fanatic-
ism speaks Basque. Let's smash these instruments of damage and error.

As Cohen reminds us, it can be argued that the Jacobin regime never imple-
mented these proposals (Cohen 2000, 32). Other more pressing political
issues took the front stage. Furthermore, as I often tell my students, the Abbé
Grégoire and Barère were not 'bad guys'. These were people who believed
in democratic principles and had explicitly pronounced themselves against
slavery. It is equally going too far, however, to imply that denouncing this
entrenched and institutionalized glottophobia, stereotyping, and blatant dis-
crimination against languages other than French risks "perpetuat[ing] a set
of myths concerning the history of language in France" (Cohen, 34). What
should be acknowledged, instead, is that in the fervour of post-revolutionary
"linguistic terror" (Bell 1995, 1416; Nagy 2013, 139), those same rev-
olutionaries who had advocated for a secular nation-state, one guided by
reason and the much-revered ideals of the enlightenment, one supposed
to eradicate the backwards superstitions of the *Ancien Régime* [the Old
Regime] and of the Catholic Church, were substituting, without realising it,
one religion for another. Realizations such as this are not meant to dismiss
some of the key steps towards democracy and individual liberty achieved by
the revolutionaries in their historical time, as reflected, for instance, by the
Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du citoyen de 1789 [the 1789 Declara-
tion of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen]. This said, especially as white
European scholars, it is our duty to be alert to the inherent contradictions,
injustices, and dogmas that underpin enlightenment thinking itself:

de-hegemonizing and decolonizing globalization requires a radical cri-
tique of Eurocentrism and the philosophical discourse of enlightenment,
which provided the epistemological basis for the development of new
global orders of reality, operating through a body of complex economic,
political, military, ideological, and cultural hegemonic relations.

(*El Habbouch 2019, 6*)

Thus, paradoxically, within the context of a relentless advocacy for a secu-
lar republic, the French language itself became the "objet d'une adoration
sans bornes (une glottomanie), d'une croyance qui échappe à toute rati-
onalité critique, d'une sacralité dont découlent de nombreux tabous" [object
of boundless adoration (a glottomania), of a faith that escapes all critical

rationality, a sacredness that generates many taboos], a “véritable religion d’État en France, totem central de l’unité nationale” [a full-blown State religion in France, the central totem of national unity] (Blanchet 2018, 35). It is from this point that “[l]a France se constitue sur une matrice d’idéologie monolingue” [France founded itself on a matrix of monolingual ideology] (Escudé 2018b, 70). A monolingualism crystallised in the purity of the French language, a sacred entity that cannot be tarnished by difference or variation (Escudé 2018a, 22). In short, it is the exact opposite of what a living language needs to do and be to survive. Such a pernicious ideology is still evident these days, notably in French legislation.

***La langue de la République est le français* – The Language of the Republic is French**

In the twentieth century, the wishes of the Abbé Grégoire, Barère, and the likes were finally fulfilled thanks to an amendment added on 23 June 1992, the second article of the French Constitution of the Fifth Republic now states that: “[l]a langue de la République est le français” [The language of the Republic is French]. This second article is all about national symbols. It devises, for instance, the aforementioned motto of the *République*, “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*”, the national anthem, and the tricolour. As argued by Lynne Wilcox in her important paper on the rather eventful behind-the-scenes that led to this clause, “to enshrine the French language in the Constitution alongside references to the national flag and the Marseillaise was an act of symbolic value” (Wilcox 1994, 277). In particular, Wilcox remarks that the amendment, which was largely a result of the relentless lobbying of a pressure group named *Avenir de la Langue Française* (ALF) [Future of the French Language], was implemented “within the context of the Maastricht Treaty”, the foundational treaty of the European Union, and “served particularly to assert French identity at European level” (Wilcox 1994, 277). It was not just a matter of defending the French language against the increasing threat of global English but also a way for France to reassert its sovereignty and relevance on an international stage (Pinhas 2008). Unsurprisingly, the French language – this quasi-sacred symbol of national identity – was brought back under the spotlight. As convincingly demonstrated by Finex Ndhlovu in his significant study *Language, Vernacular Discourse & Nationalisms*, transnational forces often strengthen and harden “inward-looking nationalist linguistic and discursive practices” rather than crumbling them, “sharply contradicting common-sense assumptions about a world that is said to have become more transnational and more interconnected than before” (Ndhlovu 2018, 348). It was, in fact, on the very day after the adoption of the amendment that consecrated French

as the sole language of the Republic that France, one of the six founding members of the European Union, symbolically refused to sign The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, an international treaty for the promotion and protection of linguistic diversity in Europe (Wilcox 1994, 276; Gaquin 1999; Chabal 2015, 74). Over two centuries after the Revolution, the regional languages of France were still perceived as a threat to the nation.

But the *Avenir de la Langue Française* (ALF) wanted more. Lobbying fiercely via national newspapers and other means, the pressure group ended up playing “a key role in the elaboration of the so-called Loi Toubon (Toubon Law), which was designed to ensure the use of French in the workplace” (Chabal 2015, 74–75) and “restricted and regulated the use of anglicisms in French public life” (Gemie 2002, 148). In one of the very few issues that consistently transcends party lines (Wilcox 1994, 276), supporters of regional languages, mainly MPs from the regions, kept expressing their dissatisfaction with the lack of recognition of France’s linguistic diversity in the Constitution and, linking their discourse back to the Revolution, denounced France’s “linguistic Jacobinism” (Chabal 2015, 77), a common refrain in such debates and articles on France’s institutionalized monolingual ideology (e.g., Rogers 1996). Heated arguments about the urgent need to acknowledge regional languages culminated in 1999, the year when The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages was finally signed by France. But on 15 June 1999, only days after the long-awaited signature, the French Constitutional Council, the highest constitutional authority in the country, ruled that “the European Charter on Minority and Regional Languages could not be applied in France without an amendment to the Constitution” (Gemie 2002, 148). In other words, according to the Council this signature contradicted the 1992 clause to Article 2, “La langue de la République est le français” (Constitutional Council 1999). Discussions surrounding France’s rather embarrassing non-ratification of the Charter continue to this day (Stoll 2022).

After much soul-searching, to allow for an acknowledgement of France’s linguistic diversity, on 25 July 2008, Article 75–1 was added to the Constitution to stipulate that: “Les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France” [Regional Languages are a part of French Cultural Heritage]. But, as it always happens, this was only a half-win. During the initial debates, many MPs advocated for a stronger recognition within Article 2 of the Constitution: “Le français est la langue officielle de la République. Les langues régionales de France sont également reconnues par la République” [French is the official language of the Republic. The regional languages of France are also recognized by the Republic] (cited in Farget 2011, 137). Debates, discussions, and arguments ensued until it was decided to add the

clause “Les langues régionales appartiennent à son [of France] patrimoine” [Regional languages are part of its heritage], to Article 1 of the French Constitution, which reads:

La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l'égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion. Elle respecte toutes les croyances. Son organisation est décentralisée.

France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It ensures the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It respects all beliefs. It is organised on a decentralized basis.

This proposal caused outrage in public opinion with lobbies and official institutions, including, importantly, the Académie française, applying pressure on the decision makers. The so-called *immortels* [immortals] – the elected members of the Academy – issued a public statement, in which they unanimously declared:

il nous paraît que placer les langues régionales de France avant la langue de la République est un défi à la simple logique, un déni de la République, une confusion du principe constitutif de la Nation.

(*Académie française* 2008)

it seems to us that placing the regional languages of France before the language of the Republic is a challenge to simple logic, a denial of the Republic, a confusion of the constitutive principle of the Nation.

Once again, if the French language is under threat, the Republic as a whole is at risk. The French language *embodies* the Republic. Unsurprisingly, the proposal ended up being defeated in the Senate, and Article 75–1 was added instead as a sort of symbolic gesture, psychological closure, delayed apology, and an act of reconciliation (Farget 2011, 155).

The struggle for the recognition of regional languages and linguistic diversity is, to this day, still punctuated by disappointments. In May 2021, after much debating and press coverage, a bill proposed by Breton MP Paul Molac, the so-called Loi Molac [Molac Law] for the promotion and protection of regional languages – which has been termed an “événement glottopolitique” [a glottopolitical event] (Blanchet and Urteaga 2022) – was finally promulgated, only to be partially censored shortly after by the French Constitutional Council. Basing its decision, once again, largely on Article 2 of the French Constitution, the Council deemed it unconstitutional for

citizens to be able to use non-French diacritical marks, such as the Breton tilde, in official documents. This is a particularly emblematic ruling, which recalls the highly mediatized two-year legal struggle of the parents of little Fañch (François in Breton) to gain the right to use the tilde in their child’s birth certificate (Blanchet 2019, 17–18). Upon Fañch’s birth in the Breton town of Quimper in May 2017, such a right had been denied by a government official, as the ñ was deemed un-French. This has been considered a chief example of institutionalized glottophobia and discrimination (Blanchet 2019, 17–18). Within the same ruling, the Constitutional Council also found it unconstitutional for schools to be able to offer an “enseignement immersif” [immersive teaching]; in other words, for it to be possible to teach a number of subjects via the medium of a regional language in those regions where such a language was traditionally spoken.

The teaching of regional languages in state schools has been a long-standing controversy in France (Martel 2007). As Sudhir Hazareesingh recalls in his absorbing book *How the French Think* (2016), in 1870, within a wider context of “provincial cultural awakening” (Gosetti 2013) that had marked the nineteenth century, “a petition calling for the teaching of regional languages was sent to the French government by a group of Breton notables” (Hazareesingh 2016, 181). However brave, this document partook in the generalized patrimonialization of regional languages as a sort of folkloric ruins of a rooted local past, which would serve to build mythology to the benefit of the rather Paris-centric *patrie*. It was no question to challenge the supremacy of the French language, nor its rightful legitimacy:

[e]n demandant pour ces langues le droit de garder leur place, si modeste qu’elle soit, au soleil de la grande patrie, nous ne prétendons, du reste, porter en rien atteinte à la suprématie acquise par la langue française. Plus jeune d’âge que ses sœurs, auxquelles elle a si longtemps fait une guerre impitoyable, elle restera toujours l’emblème vivant et véritable de notre unité nationale.

(Charencey Comte de et al. 1903)

By demanding for these languages a righteous place, however modest it may be, under the sunshine of our great country, we do not claim, after all, to undermine in any way the supremacy that the French language has acquired. Younger in age than her sisters, against whom she has waged such a long and ruthless war, she will always remain the true living emblem of our national unity.

On these lines, the petition presented “the teaching of dialects as a way of strengthening national unity” (Hazareesingh 2016, 181). According to

this view, regional languages should not pose a threat to the dominance of French and, in fact, serve to enhance the understanding of the national language. As writer and librarian Charles Nodier (1780–844) once wrote in a study entitled *Notions élémentaires de linguistique* [Basic notions of linguistics]: “tout homme qui n’a pas soigneusement exploré les patois de sa langue ne la sait encore qu’à demi” [anyone who has not carefully explored the patois of their own language still only half knows it] (1834, 229). In other words, regional languages are mere ornaments to embellish the real language.

In more recent times, a crucial tangible step regarding the teaching of regional languages in state schools was the publication, on 11 January 1951, of the so-called *Loi Deixonne* (Deixonne law), which is considered by most as the only real precedent to the *Loi Molac* (Morin and Gasquet-Cyrus 2021). This law originally allowed the teaching of Breton, Catalan, or Occitan as an optional subject for one hour a week in the regions where these languages were traditionally spoken (Farget 2011; Hawkey and Kasstan 2015; Blanchet and Urteaga 2022). The law would later be expanded to include other languages (such as Alsatian, Corsican, Thaitian, Ajië, Drehu, Nengone, and Paicî) and to allow for more teaching hours (Escudé 2018b, 87). Another notable success story for the preservation of regional languages in France was the establishment of independent Breton-language schools, the Diwan school movement, the only real example of ‘immersive teaching’ in France, which have used Breton as a medium of communication and teaching since the 1970s (Rogers 1996; Perazzi 1998; Vetter 2013; Dołowy-Rybińska 2016). Since their establishment, however, these schools have been the object of constant legal and public-opinion vexing (Williams 2007, 12; Gemie 2002), so much so that, as late as 2021, non-government organizations such as the European Language Equality Network (ELEN) had to issue a statement addressed to President Macron to “call on the French state to immediately reverse its decision to reduce the amount of teaching hours in Breton at the secondary and college level” (ELEN 2021). These legal examples lead us to a core issue relative to the specific means through which France’s systemic monolingual ideology has been propagated: French national education both within and beyond the borders of the Hexagon.

The Forbidden Language

L’ patois s’apprend tout seul, – et l’ français, à l’école.

L’un vient in liberté, l’autr’s’intass’ comme un rôle.

Patois is learnt on our own, – French at school.

One comes with freedom, the other feels like a chore.

Jules Mousseron (1868–1943), a coal miner and poet from the northern French city of Denain (Micarelli 1961), wrote these lines in Picard as part of his 1929 poem 'L' Patois', a love letter to his mother tongue, the language of authentic emotions, true connections, and spontaneity. The language of poetry. Contrary to what Abbé Grégoire had declared when defining French as "the language of freedom", for many speakers of the minoritized languages of France, real liberty could only be found in the language of their ancestors and communities. Although often admired and respected (Mousseron himself starts this very poem with his own internalized glottophilia "J'ai fort quier el français, ch'est l' pu joli langache" [I do really like French, it is the most beautiful among the languages]), the national language had often been experienced as an imposition via the national education system. Among the many obvious social advantages coming from the establishment of free national education in the late 1880s, it is undeniable that schooling has been key to the perpetuation of institutionalized glottophobia (Balibar 1985). As argued by Blanchet, it is through national education that the state has been able to propagate its linguistic ideology (Blanchet 2018, 36). It is here that the colonization of the mind begins to occur.

Breton historian of the French Revolution Mona Ozouf once declared in no half terms that: "[l]'égalité scolaire, en réalité, était une égalité meurtrière, puisqu'elle dissimulait un génocide culturel" [educational equality, in reality, was a murderous equality, since it concealed a cultural genocide] (Ozouf 1984, 21 cited in Williams 2007, 12). Well-known are accounts of children in the regions being punished, mocked, or publicly humiliated at school by their teachers or schoolmates for speaking their language, a practice that continued through to the 1950s at least. Through the years, many scholars have challenged or nuanced the myth of "the celebrated Black Hussards [school teachers] who ventured into the countryside to spread the Republican gospel . . . and wipe out the crude idioms of a backward society" (Cohen 2000, 33), recalling, instead, how the Third Republic constituted an important moment for the incorporation of regional cultures and identities within the idea of Frenchness (Hazareesingh 2016, 170–174). Others have insisted on the fact that people from the regions were often themselves eager to shed their language to join the French-educated elite. It was, in fact, often parents or grandparents who would forbid their children to speak what they considered a mere patois (Cohen 2000). In this revised picture, however, the risk is to gloss over the relentless systemic pressures inherent to an all-pervasive imperialistic linguistic ideology inculcated from a very young age. In exploring an episode of internal colonization in northern Catalonia, McPhee reminds us that linguistic colonization "stems from two sets of attitudes", "a theory of languages which classifies all speech on a scale

running from cultivated to savage”, and “a theory of nation”. In France, “the two have been fused” (McPhee 1980, 406). That is to say that the very idea of *willingly* giving up one’s language is, more often than not, a fallacy, one that ignores, or, even worse, *chooses* to ignore, the very processes through which a language becomes more appealing than another in the first place. How is one pushed to abandon the language(s) spoken at home and even be ashamed of it/them? It is questionable to call this freedom of choice when it is based on extreme socio-economic as well as cultural pressures.

In his recent autobiographical book entitled *L’Arabe pour tous. Pourquoi ma langue est taboue en France* [*Arabic for All. The reason why my language is taboo in France*], French journalist Nabil Wakim retraces and voices many of these tensions and stereotypes. In a present-day France thorn by islamophobic and nationalistic currents, “enseigner l’arabe, c’est enseigner l’islam” [teaching Arabic means to teach Islam] (Wakim 2020, 153). Just like Barère had once accused Breton of being the language of federalist conspiracies and superstition, public opinion now sees Arabic as the language of terrorism. The result is that this more-or-less tacit subtext – “[l]e bon Arabe, c’est celui qui choisit d’être le meilleur en français plutôt qu’en arabe” [the good Arab is someone who chooses to the best at French than Arabic] – gets internalized by Arab families and conveyed, whether deliberately or not, to their children, many of whom, just like Nabil Wakim, end up losing their language as a result. Wakim suggests that both migrant and regional families often share a similar perception of their own language. He, too, cites the example of Mona Ozouf, whose grandmother, a fluent speaker of Breton, would prevent her from speaking this language. For her, just like many other rural citizens “le français est la langue de l’ascension sociale” [French is the language of social ascent] (Wakim 2020, 47). In his hugely important autoethnographic book *Peau noire, masques blancs* [*Black Skin White Masks*], Martiniquan philosopher, psychologist, and public intellectual Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) recalls a similar situation during his own childhood:

La bourgeoisie aux Antilles n’emploie pas le créole, sauf dans ses rapports avec les domestiques. À l’école, le jeune Martiniquais apprend à mépriser le patois . . . Certaines familles interdisent l’usage du créole et les mamans traitent leurs enfants de “tibandes” quand ils l’emploient.

(Fanon 1952, 36)

The middle class in the Antilles does not use Creole, except when dealing with servants. At school, the young Martinican learns to despise patois. . . . Some families forbid the use of Creole and mothers mockingly call their children “tibandes” [a contraction of *petites bandes* – “the gangs of

children who worked in the cane fields” (Macey 2004, 217)], whenever they use it.

Fanon perceives an important distinction between the situation in the Antilles and that in regions like Brittany:

[A]pparemment, le problème pourrait être le suivant: aux Antilles comme en Bretagne, il y a un dialecte et il y a la langue française. Mais c’est faux, car les Bretons ne s’estiment pas inférieurs aux Français. Les Bretons n’ont pas été civilisés par le Blanc.

(1952, 43)

It would seem, on the surface, that the problem is as follows: In the Antilles, as in Brittany, there is a dialect and there is the French language. But this is false, for the Bretons do not consider themselves inferior to the French people. The Bretons have not been civilized by the white man.

In the discussion that follows, when tracing some analogies between France’s linguistic imperialism outside and within the Hexagon, it is crucial to remind ourselves of the need to keep investigating, studying, and voicing the distinct, unique, situated histories of injustice and trauma experienced at a human level in radically different contexts and situations. To mention but one example, sociolinguist Cécile Van den Avenne reminds us of the “double stigma” that people in the French colonies in Africa had to endure:

[c]lumsy speech was denigrated for lack of competence; too accurate, and it was denigrated for pretentious hypercorrection. To be heard, the African native had to be wary of two pitfalls: ‘*petit-nègre*’, which exposes him to laughter, and ‘*verbalisme*’ or ‘*pédantisme*’ . . . which was irritating. The simple use of French was a social injunction: to know one’s place.

(Van den Avenne 2020, 328–329)

What remains a constant still today is that Creole, Breton, or Arabic are often not considered as a “chemin de réussite . . . sociale” [a path to social success] (Wakim 2020, 49) by the very families where these languages are still spoken, within and beyond the perimeter of the Hexagon (Goheneix-Polanski 2008).

The state-sanctioned peer pressure, whether based on sheer ignorance or calculated manipulation, manifests itself in sneaky and unpredictable ways. As Pierre Escudé has remarked, “[o]n apprend à des enfants qui parlent occitan, breton, basque, créole, etc. que ces langues n’existent pas” [children who speak Occitan, Breton, Basque, Creole etc. are taught that these

languages do not exist] (Escudé 2018a, 20). Sometimes, the situation becomes so paradoxical that some regional languages of France, such as Picard, the same language in which poet Jules Mousseron wrote the verses quoted previously, have had to advocate for their very existence and demonstrate that they are not just “bad French” (Dawson 2004, 494). What is worse is that, within this institutionalized gas-lighting, speakers themselves often start believing and partaking in this ideology. I talk from personal experience. I grew up talking Bresciano (a Gallo-Italic non-standard variety of Italo-Romance spoken in the north of Italy) with my *nonna*, my grandmother. It was the only language she could speak with some fluency. My parents only talked Bresciano to each other, although they preferred their children not to speak it back to them. ‘*Parla italiano!*’ [Speak proper Italian!], they would admonish, as they wished a better future for their children than for themselves. A *proper* language was perceived as a ticket to a more successful life. Bresciano was not a language. It was a mere *dialetto*. As a result, I have never considered myself bilingual from birth because Bresciano was just ‘bad Italian’ after all. Only relatively recently, through the study of poetry written in other minoritized languages, I slowly started considering Bresciano as a language and using it as a medium for poetry translation. It took me a lifetime to understand that the only means through which my *nonna* and I could communicate was (and indeed is) a language in its own right. When my three-year-old son tells his Italian relatives that he speaks English, Italian, some French, and some Bresciano, the extended family can’t avoid seeing it as a joke. Bresciano is cause for laughter. They all still think that their own mother tongue does not exist. I, too, sometimes still doubt myself.

Hexagonal Language as Imperial Language: Conquering Young Minds

“Taisez-vous/vous ai-je dit ou non qu’il vous fallait parler français” [Be quiet/Haven’t I told you to speak French?] (Damas 1937 trans. by Noland 2015, 244–245) reads an excerpt from the famous poem ‘Hoquet’ [Hiccup], which is included in the 1937 collection *Pigments* by Léon-Gontran Damas (1912–1978), a French poet and politician from the city of Cayenne in French Guyana, who played a crucial role in the founding of the *Négritude* movement, together with poets and intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), Paulette Nardal (1896–1985), Jeanne Nardal (1900–1993) from Martinique, and Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001), the future first President of free Senegal. Via its form and themes, the poem represents a denunciation and revolt against the impositions of a middle-class upbringing in the Antilles, a colonial acculturation reinforced via familial pressures.

Once again, the idea of a *proper* and *pure* French language – “the French of France/the French of the French/the French French” (Damas trans. by Noland 2015, 244–245) – takes centre stage.

In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin have insisted on the link between language and imperial oppression:

[o]ne of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities. . . . Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established.

(2002, 7)

Rosina Lippi-Green has argued that the myth of the standard language

is carefully tended and propagated, with huge, almost universal success, so that language, the most fundamental of human socialization tools, becomes a commodity. This is the core of an ideology of standardization which empowers certain individuals and institutions to make these decisions and impose them to others.

(2012, 61)

And this ideology of standardization has been a key element in the imposition of state-sanctioned monolingualism, notably via the teaching of an uncontaminated and accent-free national language at school (Escudé 2018a, 17). The role of French national education in this process becomes even more blatant if we compare the experience of children in the regions to that of children in France’s colonial empire. As Heather Williams recalls, “there was essentially no difference between the linguistic policy of the French Revolution in the Hexagon, and that of the Third Republic in the colonies” (Williams 2007, 12) and, in fact, “what really cemented the solidarity between different types of ‘colony’ was the shared experience of State education” (Williams 2007, 130).

In its unquestionable purity and undeniable universality, the French language thus became itself an instrument of both internal and external colonialization, a “tool for colonialism” (Judge 2005), whereby “[t]he supposed universality of the French language converges with the supposed universality of the French republican model” (Van den Avenne 2020, 328). French is the language of human rights, French is the language of freedom, French is the language of civilization, and, as Cécile Van den Avenne has remarked, this “imperialism of universality”, in Bourdieu’s terms (Bourdieu

1992), “concerned both the French national territory and the conquered territories of the French colonial empire” (2020, 328). It is in this sense that the French language itself can be considered, still today, as a “postcolonial realm of memory”, an “immaterial site . . . imbued with a symbolic aura that, in the context of the French everyday, refers to more or less tangible memory traces linked to the colonial” (Achille et al. 2020, 9). This is an important realization, considering that virtually every French citizen uses it on a regular basis. Acknowledging the French language as a “postcolonial realm of memory” is a reminder of how deeply embedded colonial thinking still is, in myriad ways, within French society. Enough to mention the highly controversial law 2005–158 of 23 February 2005 on colonialism, whose article 4, abrogated shortly after largely due to national and international indignation, demanded the teaching of the benefits of colonization: “[l]es programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer” [school curricula recognize in particular the positive role of French presence overseas]. Such discourse goes to show that, as Susan Chiblow and Pòl Miadhachàin-Chiblow have argued, “[c]olonization continues to this day. We are not in a ‘post-colonial’ era” (Chiblow and Meighan 2022, 208).

In the parliamentary and public debates surrounding the 2005 law, among the alleged ‘benefits’ of colonization, the “teaching French language and teaching in French were implicitly referenced” (Van den Avenne 2020, 327). After all, even one of the founders of the *Négritude* movement, Léopold Sédar Senghor, once wrote an essay entitled “Le français, langue de culture” [French, language of culture], where he urged: “il est . . . question de nous servir de ce merveilleux outil trouvé dans les décombres du Régime colonial. De cet outil qu’est la langue française” [It is a question of using this marvellous tool found in the rubble of the colonial regime. Of this tool that is the French language] (Senghor 1962, 844). The cult of the French language, a “sacrosanct element” (Gosetti and Williams 2023, 2), still often pervades both the Hexagonal and non-Hexagonal French-language literary and cultural scene, one traditionally guided by a “monolingual imperative” (Edwards 2021, 8), and where “the unity of the French language” is seen “as a monolithic treasure of which all writers are invited to partake” (Dutton 2016, 414). Institutions such as the Organisation Mondiale de la Francophonie [OIF, International Organisation of La Francophonie] for the promotion of the French language and mutual cooperation among the 88 member countries, although valuable on so many different levels, betray traces of the centuries-long linguistic ideology we have been elucidating thus far. There is nothing wrong, in itself, in loving a language and promoting its teaching and learning. As many of us know well, emotional investment, in a way, is key to language learning. But when love turns

into an unhealthy cult, a protective obsession, to the exclusion of other ways of seeing and being, as the (his)stories we have been weaving through this chapter make plain, the consequences include a collectively enforced and self-imposed silencing, which can take many unpredictable forms.

L’Auto-òdi, Shame, and Self-Hate

Christophe Euzet, the MP who had proposed the bill against accent discrimination, wrote in his original report to the Assemblée Nationale, “[l]’accent apparaît donc comme un outil de domination sociale et culturelle” [accent appears as a tool of social and cultural discrimination] (2020). In a country where Parisian French is the accepted norm and the required standard, all those coming from the regions or other countries are forced to control their accent in the workplace, to be self-conscious, to self-censure, or to be ashamed of who they are (Blanchet 2019, 14–15). In my late teens, I was proud to have been able to spare some of my money earned in odd jobs to offer my parents a family holiday: a four-day trip to Rome to visit the wonders of the capital city. Among the many memories of that trip, I still remember the feeling of shame whenever my brother, much younger than me, could not contain himself and talked loudly in Italian with a strong Bresciano accent. What if some Roman heard us? What would they think of us uncultured people from the mountains. I remember my father, who himself only spoke Bresciano to my mother, noticing how uncomfortable this made me feel, and admonished my brother, who then started crying. As I type these words, I still feel ashamed, but of something different. I feel compassion for my brother, a child who was not doing anything wrong. He was *just talking*. I feel ashamed of my then shame. I had never thought about this episode before now. It resurfaced as an involuntary memory in the writing of this very chapter when reading what I am about to quote.

I was very surprised and somewhat touched when I discovered that many of the contemporary thinkers we look up to within French scholarship have experienced “ce qu’on appelle en sociolinguistique catalane et occitane l’auto-òdi (la honte d’être soi-même)” [what is called in Catalan and Occitan sociolinguistics *auto-òdi* (the shame of being oneself)] (Escudé 2018a, 18; see also Garabato and Colonna 2016). Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), a sociologist by profession, once confessed the visceral disgust brought about by his own internalized glottophobia:

J’avais la honte de mon accent, que j’avais corrigé. . . . Quand j’arrivais à Dax et que j’entendais l’accent, ça me faisait horreur – mais vraiment horreur – et encore aujourd’hui quand j’entends certains accents à la radio, ça me fait physiquement horreur, or c’est l’accent que j’avais. . . . Moi je ne

devrais pas, c'est mon boulot de comprendre ça, c'est mon propre accent, or je ressens ça comme affreux.

(*cited in Escudé 2018a, 17*)

I was ashamed of my accent, which I had corrected. . . . When I arrived in Dax (a commune in southwestern France) and I heard that accent, I was horrified – really horrified – and even today whenever I hear certain accents on the radio, they cause a physical reaction of disgust. And yet, that used to be my accent. . . . I shouldn't react like this, it's my job to understand these things, it's my own accent, but I still feel that it is hideous.

Similarly, Algerian-born French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), in *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* [Monolingualism of the Other], reveals his conscious efforts to lose his “français d'Algérie” [Algerian French], and confesses:

Je n'en suis pas fier, je n'en fais pas une doctrine, mais c'est ainsi: l'accent, quelque accent français que ce soit, et avant tout le fort accent méridional, me paraît incompatible avec la dignité intellectuelle d'une parole publique. . . . Incompatible *a fortiori* avec la vocation d'une parole poétique: avoir entendu René Char, par exemple, lire . . . avec un accent qui me parut à la fois comique et obscène . . . cela n'a pas peu fait pour ruiner une admiration de jeunesse. . . . j'ai contracté, je l'avoue, une inavouable mais intraitable intolérance: je ne supporte ou n'admire . . . que le français pur.

(1996, 78)

I'm not proud of it and don't want to make a doctrine of it, but that's how it is: accents, whatever French accent it may be, and above all a strong southern accent, seems to me incompatible with the intellectual dignity of public speaking. . . . Incompatible *a fortiori* with poetic vocation: hearing poet René Char, for example, read . . . with an accent that seemed to me at the same time comic and obscene. . . . was enough to spoil my youthful admiration for him. . . . I have contracted, I confess, an unavowable but intractable intolerance: I can only bear and admire . . . pure French.

Some months ago, a relative of some dear friends, a cultivated Italian man originally from the northern city of Bergamo, was passing through unceded Gadigal land. When meeting me for the first time, he cheerfully remarked with some surprise, “*non hai perso il tuo accento bresciano!*” [you've never

lost your Bresciano accent!]. Such a statement would have depressed me beyond comprehension 20 years ago. This time, I happily responded directly in Bresciano, loud enough so that my child could hear it: *se, ne?* [it’s true, isn’t it?]. It took a lot of self-work and unthinking to liberate myself, at least partially, from an ideology that leads to self-hate and shame, as well as the intergenerational perpetuation of shaming. As researchers and teachers in languages, literatures, and cultures, it is our duty, in our everyday teaching practices, to dismantle the idea that language purity should be the norm. It is our duty to be aware of and acknowledge subtle instances of “coloniallingualism” (Meighan 2023) in our own methods. How can we teach such topics as French pronunciation to first-year students in less normative and more pluralistic ways, for example? Why not reflect on the vast reality of how French is *actually* spoken in everyday life around the world and, yes, even within the borders of the Hexagon? Why not recall, at the same time as we do this, the long history of contradictions, injustice, suffering, silencing, and dogma underpinning the nation-state linguistic ideology? As Ingrid Piller has stated, after all, “[u]nderstanding and addressing linguistic disadvantage must be a central facet of the social justice agenda of our time” (Piller 2016). For those of us raised within such ideologies, the real decolonization work – a life-long questioning – ought to start within ourselves.

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ON THE INVISIBILITY OF RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM

Russian Studies in the West

Tomasz Kamusella

Introduction

Russia's unprovoked and unjustified full-scale invasion of peaceful Ukraine in 2022 compels the rest of the world to rethink its relations with this country. A global consensus was swiftly reached to condemn the Russian onslaught (General Assembly 2022). After the immediate imposition of sanctions on Russia (Joint Statement 2022), the West dragged its feet before deciding to help Ukraine with military assistance (NATO's Response 2022). It was done in recognition of the fact that this country is fighting to protect liberty and democracy in all of Europe (EU Local 2022). Subsequently, the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) have extended unprecedented multiple packages of humanitarian, economic and military aid to Ukraine (All Information 2022; EU Solidarity 2022). On top of that, Brussels conferred on Ukraine the official status of an EU candidate state (Grant EU 2022). Yet, the process of disentangling the EU from structural dependency on Russian gas and oil proves painfully slow and contentious (Cahill 2022; McWilliams and Zachmann 2022). This dependency makes it possible for the Kremlin to blackmail individual EU member states, seeking to destabilize all the Union (Kramp-Karrenbauer 2019). What is more, EU member states' payments for Russian carbohydrates still dwarf any help extended to Ukraine. Hence, the increasing stream of billions of Euros and Dollars flowing each day from the EU to Russia under sanctions in reality finances the latter country's imperial war machine, including its war on Ukraine (EU Says 2022).

This decades-long dependence on and entanglement with Russia's oil- and gas-based economy, consistently deployed by the Kremlin for political

ends, has stalled a post-Cold War rethink of the role of Russian studies in the West. It appears that this field, which emerged shortly after World War II for an improved understanding of the Soviet Union (SU) and to counter it, now – perhaps unwittingly – serves the needs and goals of resurgent Russia's neo-imperialism. After the 1950s, the study of Soviet imperialism was abandoned, and increasingly less attention was paid to its predecessor, namely tsarist imperialism. Curiously, given the clearly colonial and neo-imperial character of the Kremlin's current war on Ukraine, no significant research projects have been devoted to neo-imperialism in the post-Soviet Russian Federation or the country's ethnically non-Russian colonies, officially known as '(autonomous) republics.'

The chapter analyzes the West's myopia on the subject, or even delusion, from two perspectives. First, the discussion focuses on the present-day Russian government's observed practice of (ab)using the Russian language and culture for neo-imperial ends. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine did away with any illusions in the West about the fact whether the country is a colonial empire or not. Politicians and journalists are now actively commenting on the neo-imperial nature of Russia's governance and politics. But, the discourse has not percolated into Western academia yet. So second, the essay probes into the persistent lack of methodological reflection on the Cold War discipline of Russian studies. In turn, at Western universities, this situation helps to continue and 'justify' the disciplinary dominance of the Russian language and culture in the research on the post-Soviet space and especially the Slavophone postcommunist countries from the former Soviet bloc. Finally, some possible solutions are offered to this dual – ideological and methodological – dilemma, which at present plays into Moscow's hands.

Discussions on these issues literally started emerging only in the wake of Russia's onslaught against Ukraine on 24 December 2022. This means that the majority of the relevant source material is available only in the form of online press, news, opinion and blog articles in English, Russian, Ukrainian and some other European languages. Hence, such articles constitute the core of this chapter's research base employed for referencing.

Culture as a Battlefield

At present, the West is playing catch-up with Russia's cyberwarfare capacities and preparedness (Cyber 2022; UK Says 2022). With all the aforementioned geopolitical trump cards unthinkingly given away to Moscow on the false assumption that the Russian Federation would become a 'normal European' country, the West allows itself to be wagged by an economic

midget. After all, Russia's GDP is 13 times smaller than the EU's (GDP 2022a, 2022b). But culture as a battlefield (Traverso 2011) still remains a blind spot in all these Western efforts to assist Ukraine under the genocidal-scale Russian attack (Wright 2022). In this manner, the West is – consciously or not – coming to the succor of the Kremlin and its anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian propaganda and actions. For instance, the Russian World (*Russkii Mir*) centers – more similar in their mode of operation to China's Confucius Institutes than to the Alliance française or the British Council – continue operating unhindered across the world, not coincidentally, most of them located in the European Union (Masiyenko et al. 2022). There are as many as *ten* such centers in the small but strongly pro-Russian Bulgaria and eight in Germany with its three million Russian speakers (*Mehrsprachigkeit* 2005: 167–170), while only three in the United States and *none* in Canada or Ireland (Russian Centers 2022). It is telling that despite the Kremlin's positioning of Russia as a leader and friend of the global South (Russia Seeks 2022), in all of sub-Saharan Africa, only five *Russkii Mir* centers are present (in the Democratic Republic of Kongo, Kenya, Zambia and two in South Africa), while *none* in Bangladesh, India or Pakistan. On the other hand, at 11 in communist China, the world's most populous country boasts just one more such center than diminutive Bulgaria (Russian Centers 2022).

For way too long, the West has been blind and passive toward Russia's enemy operations pursued under the cover of soft power, that is, in the guise of 'cultural and linguistic cooperation' (Tereshchenko and Koval 2022). In addition, Russian studies continue to be practiced in Western universities, mostly as they were before the fall of communism, as though nothing has happened in the meantime, as if the Soviet Union (SU) has not fallen and fractured into 15 successor states. Yet, the field's disciplinary and curriculum structure remains as it used to be during the Cold War. Being so obsolete, it is not fit for purpose. Even worse, flying on this Cold War autopilot means that unwittingly, Western universities conduct research on things Russian and post-Soviet in accordance with the logic and goals of the Kremlin's ideology of the Russian world.

Russian Studies as the Core of Area Studies

Prior to the fall of communism, there was just a single polity in the world where Russian was an official language, namely, the Soviet Union. What is more, following World War II, all the globe's *Slavophone* polities (with a partial exception of Yugoslavia) found themselves under Soviet control. Moscow extended and enforced its rule over the Soviet bloc through the Warsaw Pact and 'Comecon' (known officially as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance). Not a single Soviet satellite state had any illusions

about the bloc's military, economic and ideological hegemon. In practice, the SU was another incarnation of the Russian Empire, but the name.

Area studies – as a group of geographically, culturally and linguistically delimited fields and subfields of frequently multidisciplinary research – were founded in the 1940s by the United States with an eye to countering the military and ideological threat posed by the Soviet Union (Khosrowjah 2011). Research of this type was to inform Western activities undertaken in line with US President Harry Truman's worldwide policy of containing the Soviet Union and other communist countries (Pieper 2012). For the sake of stopping the potential expansion of the Soviet bloc, the West's priority in research was to train scholars and linguists fluent in Russian and knowledgeable about the Soviet (that is, ethnically mainly Russian) customs and conditions (Wolff 2017). From the geopolitical perspective, other Slavic languages (and cultures) were of some importance only when employed as official (state) languages in the Soviet bloc countries, for instance, Bulgarian in Bulgaria, Czech and Slovak in Czechoslovakia and Polish in Poland. During the Cold War, the study of Belarusian and Ukrainian languages and cultures was neglected in the West because, in the Soviet Union, political and other state-level decisions were *not* made in Minsk or Kyiv but invariably in imperial Moscow. A similar situation could be observed in the approach of area studies practitioners toward Yugoslavia; after 1948, they chose the middle path of the Non-Aligned Movement. The study of Yugoslavia's state language of Serbo-Croatian was privileged over the republican languages of Macedonian and Slovenian.

Tellingly, the first-ever research institute in area studies was the Russian Institute, founded in 1946 at Columbia University in New York City (Pares 1946). In 1982, it was renamed after entrepreneur and New York Governor W. Averell Harriman (Harriman 2022). This Russian-centric model of pursuing area studies was emulated elsewhere in the West, including Japan (Wolff 2017). As a result, to this day, in the West's non-Slavophone countries, the majority of university departments of Slavic studies actually focus on the Russian language and culture. Even if other Slavic languages are on offer, students are required to master Russian first before progressing to Czech or Serbo-Croatian (Undergraduate 2022). In effect, Russian is positioned – without saying this openly – as the gatekeeper language for all Slavic studies, thus relegating all the other Slavic languages to second place.

At present, university education is talked about in business-like terms, so one can often hear the supposedly matter-of-fact argument that it is students who choose and prefer Russian over other Slavic languages. In the West, Russian is usually seen as a 'big language' because it is spoken by around 156 million and functions as an official language or an idiom of everyday communication in the 15 post-Soviet countries, alongside Germany, Israel

and Mongolia (Russian Speaking 2022). Yet, it is conveniently forgotten that it was a *political* decision that established the field of Slavic-vel-Russian studies as we know them today, *not* any pecuniary or investment consideration. Had Columbia University not given Russian the pride of place in area studies, nowadays, Russian would have been a niche interest in the West, as it used to be prior to World War II.

On the other hand, in university departments of Germanic languages (and cultures), students are *not* made to acquire German or English first before continuing with the study of their beloved Dutch or Swedish. From day one, if a student selects Swedish, she can focus on this language alone. Not a single Germanic language is posed as more important than the others or is elevated to the position of some gatekeeper language for all the other Germanic languages. If this *laissez-faire* approach makes economic sense in the case of the Germanic languages, then there is no need to privilege Russian over other Slavic languages in Western universities, either.

Great Russian Literature?

This unreflective privileging of Russian nowadays in Western universities gives Moscow a specious but tangible argument to ‘justify’ their current disparaging denial of Ukrainian as a language (Dlugy 2022) and brushing off the other Slavic languages as ‘second-rank’ (My vse 2022). From a geopolitical perspective, the curious situation also constitutes a solid cornerstone for furthering Russian influence and propaganda in the West. Resigning from rethinking and redesigning the shape of area studies as inherited from the Cold War opened the West with its own hands to enemy penetration from resurgent neo-imperial Russia. It is an easy and cost-effective option for the Kremlin to instill and strengthen the Russian world ideology across the West because North American and European universities have already done most of the necessary spadework for such an enemy implantation in thinking, values and attitudes.

Incongruously, Western universities even welcome the situation as a positive sign of supposedly (multi)cultural cooperation (MA Russian 2022; Russia – India 2019; Subjects 2022), notwithstanding Moscow’s insistence on Russia’s exclusive right to control over the Russian language, both in the Russian Federation and outside this country (Kamusella 2021). Somehow, Western Russia watchers failed to take note of the Kremlin’s progressive weaponization of Russian (Kochin 2016) for hybrid warfare abroad (Bershidsky 2019; Matviyishyn 2020) and a renewed campaign of Russification at home (Aitkhozhina 2019; Globe 2019). Yet, for over a decade, Russian officials have been honest and open about trying to expand their country’s borders aggressively to include all the adjacent areas with

Russian-speaking populations (Kornatskii 2015). And even further, since they see all the Slavophone Orthodox Christian populaces (alongside the Romance-speaking Romanians and Moldovans [Gaida 2022]), the former Soviet bloc countries and the tsarist empire's territories (including Alaska [Putin's Aide 2022]) as 'properly belonging' to Russia (Vladimir 2016).

The uncritical and even worshipful attitude toward Russian language and culture (cf. Manaev et al. 2022) made the West blind to the Kremlin's neo-imperial designs. It also convinced many pundits to consent with the widespread Russian opinion that Ukrainian is a small and unimportant language not worth their attention, that no literature of value could be created in Ukrainian (Flier and Graziosi 2017). Among the Slavic idioms, only Russian is the proper language of 'great literature' (Loshchits 2015; Nikolaev 2022), though some pieces of note were written in Czech, Polish or Serbo-Croatian, as confirmed by Nobel prizes in literature for authors writing in these languages.

This Russian patriotic self-promotion reached a crescendo (Kishkovsky 2022) during the ongoing unprovoked and unjustified war that Russia wages on peaceful Ukraine. The context is all the economic sanctions that the West has already piled up on belligerent Russia (Sauer 2022) and the paradoxical Russian conviction that their language supposedly faces mortal danger (Beglov 2022). The sanctions evoked a widespread discussion in the West about whether similar curbs could or should be imposed on Russian culture (Brinkhof 2022; Jenkins 2022; Serhan 2022). Predictably, Russian commentators (Nikonov 2022a) and Western critics of this approach claim that neither Leo Tolstoy nor Fyodor Dostoyevsky are guilty of the 2022 Russian onslaught on Ukraine (Farrington 2022; Khrushcheva 2022; West's 2022). This is true; they are not. Yet, the Kremlin has abused Russian literature and culture by weaponizing them, like the Russian language, to spread Russian influence in the occupied Ukrainian territories and worldwide (Krechetova 2022; Official 2022; Yankovskiy 2022). On top of that, the Kremlin speciously claims that seven billion people, out of the globe's current population of 7.7 billion, support Russia's war on Ukraine (Nikonov 2022b).

Hence, now, in the current standoff between Russia and Ukraine supported by the West, Russian books and music performances are not neutral products of culture. The Kremlin seeks to shame Western proposers of a more critical approach to Russian language, culture and literature to keep open its well-established and cheap channel of influence across the West (Sabel'ev 2022; Wade 2022). Many Western observers believe that it may be alright for Ukraine, under Russian attack, to limit the use of Russian in administration, culture, book production and everyday life (Nynko and Savitsky 2022), but the West should abstain from imposing similar limitations (Morson 2022; Otmena 2022).

But are Russian literature and culture so ‘big’ that no counterparts in other Slavic languages could match them? Well, Western savants of belles lettres appreciate Bulgarian, Czech, Macedonian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Slovak or Slovenian literature but typically know next to nothing about Ukrainian or Belarusian literature. Yet, the quality and volume of ‘literary production’ in Ukrainian is at least on par with that in Polish. It is not surprising, given that at 40 million, there are as many Ukrainian speakers as Polish speakers. In the ranking of the numbers of speakers among the Slavic languages, Ukrainian and Polish share the second position after Russian.

In addition, no reflection is given to the history of the quite widespread English-language expression ‘great Russian literature’ at present. After all, in English, no one speaks or writes about any ‘great French literature,’ ‘great German literature’ or ‘great English literature.’ The phrase’s origin goes back to the 1860s when, after the defeat suffered in the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Russian Empire was rebooted with the policy of Russification. First, the Russian language was renamed as ‘Great Russian’ (*Velikorusskii*). Second, a political theory was developed that ‘White Russian’ (Belarusian) and ‘Little Russian’ (Ukrainian) were rural dialects ‘belonging’ to Great Russian and unworthy of being committed to paper (Staliūnas 2014; Thaden 1981). Third, the standard dictionary of Russian in official use during the late tsarist period since the 1860s featured the moniker ‘*Great Russian* language’ in its title (Sichinava 2022). This coinage percolated to the name of the school subject of ‘*Great Russian* language and literature.’

The new imperial name of the Great Russian language replaced the established English-language term ‘Russian language.’ On top of that, in the late 19th century, novels by Leo Tolstoy or Fyodor Dostoyevsky became bestsellers both in Russia and in translation across the West. Hence, the term ‘Great Russian literature’ (*Velikorusskaia literatura*) for belles lettres written in the Great Russian language became conflated with the evaluatory label ‘great Russian literature’ (*velika Russkaia literatura*) for commenting on the quality of this literature. Unlike in Russian, in English, both expressions are exactly the same (bar the vagaries of capitalization). Later, in the interwar SU, as an element of the ideological struggle against ‘Great Russian chauvinism,’ the adjective ‘Great’ was dropped from the name of the Great Russian language (Chamberlain 1945). As a result, after World War II, the formerly descriptive term ‘Great Russian literature’ (that is, belles lettres composed in the Great Russian language) became exclusively evaluatory, yielding the ubiquitous expression ‘great Russian literature’ (Ngram Viewer 2022b). The persistent postwar use of this Russian-language evaluatory term for the promotion of Soviet-Russian culture time and again rekindled its English-language counterpart (Ngram Viewer 2022a). So, today,

the term appears self-explanatory and confirms the supposed ‘greatness’ of Russian literature without necessitating any proof to this end.

Ukrainian Literature is Great, Too

It took the shock of the ongoing war to shake some Western specialists and publishers specializing in Ukrainian books out of complacency and unthinking kowtowing to the ossified stereotype of great Russian literature. In 2022, to its purely scholarly book series ‘Library of Early Ukrainian Literature,’ Harvard University Press added a brand new one, namely, the ‘Library of Ukrainian Literature.’ This new book series is devoted to the best Ukrainian-language modern fiction and poetry and aims at the general reader in North America and Britain (Harvard 2022). The series may be a portent of a long overdue decolonizing change, a balancing act of inclusion for literature and cultures created in *numerous* post-Soviet languages.

Simultaneously, the adulation of Russian literature should be cut down to size. After all, Tolstoy and other Russian writers faithfully served in their country’s imperial armies, while Dostoyevsky incorporated in his fiction verbatim fragments from the writer’s rabidly pro-imperial journalism and diaries (DeBlassio 2022). Curiously, in the flagship works of Russian literature, one really *cannot* find ethnically non-Russian characters. The canon is homogenously Russian (*Russkii*) from the ethnic, linguistic and cultural perspective. In other words, this cannon is Orthodox, Russian-speaking, patriarchal, heteronormative and relentlessly white.¹ For instance, literature experts in Russia find it outrageous (Panin 2013) that foreign scholars of Afro-American studies may label Alexander Pushkin as a black poet (*The Life* 1972).

Yet, we know that ethnic Russians constituted barely over 40% of the population in late tsarist Russia (Mironov 1998), reaching the mark of half of the inhabitants only in the territorially diminished Soviet Union (Vsesoiuznaia 2022). Such ethnic Russians added up to a mere *fifth* of the empire’s entire nobility (Becker 1985: 182). And among Russia’s nobles, not more than half spoke Russian at home (Rolf 2020: 66). The entire imperial elite shared the same sociolect of French (and much later, to a degree, Russian), though in their regions of origin, they spoke and wrote German, Georgian, Polish, Swedish, Tatar or Yiddish. Actually, few Russian-speakers lived in the tsarist empire’s western and southern cities of Tallinn, Riga, Vilnius, Minsk, Warsaw, Kyiv, Chişinău, Tbilisi, Yerevan or Baku, that is, the capitals of present-day Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

But somehow, this great Russian literature *fails* to portray and reflect on the highly multicultural, polyethnic and multiconfessional character of

the Russian Empire. In their day-to-day lives, Russian writers did see and interact with numerous non-Russian and non-Orthodox subjects of the tsar because the state's capital of St Petersburg and the empire's biggest city of Moscow teemed with them. At different times, military service, business, civil service placements, pleasure trips and exile brought most authors of the Russian literary canon to the ethnically non-Russian borderlands. These were Russia's unacknowledged (and often denied) colonies (Khodarkovsky 2018). Yet, these Russian writers remained narrowly loyal to the ethnolinguistically and confessionally defined 'Russian idea' (Dostoevskii 1993: 7) of focusing only on ethnically Russian topics and characters. Until the Bolshevik Revolution, Russian literature was unabashedly elitist and chauvinist. It zoomed on this fifth of Russia's nobles who were ethnic Russians, entailing a group of as few as 400,000 people, or at best, around one million if all the nobles fluent in Russian were taken into consideration (DeSilver 2012). This group amounted to a mere half a percent of the inhabitants of the Russian Empire, which numbered 166 million in 1914 (Russia in 1914 2020).

Furthermore, the majority of writers who contributed to 'great Russian literature' preferred not to see their country's colonial wars and tragedies caused by military expeditions dispatched to the empire's far-flung corners. Among others, the ethnic cleansing during the early 1860s, concluding with the unprecedented genocide of Circassians in 1864, somehow did not register even in the tiniest of Russian short stories and not even in a single press article published in Russian. The entire Black Sea littoral and the adjacent mountainous hinterland from Georgia to Crimea were 'emptied' of its Caucasian-speaking² Muslim population that had lived in this region from the times immemorial. Expellees and genocide survivors fled across the sea to the safety of the Ottoman Empire. Desperate rescue voyages in rarely seaworthy vessels were perilous; thousands of Circassians drowned and died of starvation on the high seas. In a couple of years, the former Circassia was repopulated with Slavophone Orthodox settlers, and the region's old name was erased from the Russian annals of imperial history (145th Anniversary 2009; Richmond 2013). To this day, no commentators make the obvious link between this bloodbath and the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The Ottomans did not invent the technology of genocide; they learned it from the Russians.

These are clear limitations of Russian belles lettres, a sign of how ethnically Russian and imperially-minded writers were stuck in the rut of their Russian language, Orthodox Christianity and their noble estate. They mostly had no imagination to write about anything or anyone else other than themselves, or they refused to consider such topics due to ideological (that is, imperial) considerations. In the Soviet Union, for Russophone authors, the range of prescribed topics and characters broadened to take in

all the strata of Russian society but to the exclusion of the unacknowledged colonials (natives) who spoke and wrote in languages other than Russian.

Officially, literature in the Soviet Union's republican languages was encouraged, but often, the publication of novels composed in Belarusian, Kyrgyz or Ukrainian was delayed so that Russian translations of these novels could come off the press first. Furthermore, during the Soviet period, translations of such books into Western languages were allowed only from Russian translations, which created a conviction that in the Soviet Union, Belarusian, Kyrgyz or Ukrainian writers wrote in Russian and, thus, contributed to the body of 'great Russian literature' (Čamu Bykaŭ 2009; Vasil Bykau 2003).

Another conviction generated by these strictures was that Soviet literature(s) written in languages other than Russian was (were) of poor quality. More often than not, a German or French translation of a Ukrainian-language novel conducted from a hasty Russian philological translation hardly conveyed the beauty of the prose or the intricate plot of the Ukrainian original (Kolomiyets 2020). On top of this, to this day, three decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, world bestsellers tend to be translated into Ukrainian and many other post-Soviet languages (be it Azerbaijani, Kazakh or Tajik) from Russian translations rather than from original languages. This was the ideologically required norm during the Soviet times. Now, it is a sign of cutting corners on the sly because, in a given Ukrainian translation conducted from a Russian translation, it is incorrectly stated that the translation was conducted from the English or French original (Veremko-Berezhnyi 2015). The result, however, is similar, namely, continuing Russian cultural and ideological domination. It is none other than linguistic and cultural imperialism (cf Kamusella 2020, 2021; Phillipson 1992; Tomlinson 1991).

Looking Forward: Ukrainian Studies and the West

The aforementioned limitations and blind spots of Russian literature could be, at long last, honestly and openly addressed alongside the Soviet Union's and the present-day Russian Federation's Russifying stereotypes and mechanisms of suppressing the country's non-Russophone literature and cultures (Yusupova 2018). In turn, when inescapably discussing *Anna Karenina* or *The Brothers Karamazov*, students could be pushed further, for instance, to reflect on why they cannot see in these novels characters who speak other languages of the Russian Empire, belong to other social layers than the nobility, or profess other faiths than Orthodox Christianity. On this basis, they would be ready to dissect the tacit but widely and unreflectively accepted definition of Russian literature, which makes this subject such a

narrow and blinkered pursuit. Then, students would be in a position to open wide a window in this stuffy disciplinary cabin to roam more freely, following their clear realization that both in tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, writers composed and published excellent, outstanding and even timeless novels, stories, plays and poetry in a plethora of languages, for instance, Henryk Sienkiewicz (Genrikh Iosifovich Senkievich) and Władysław Reymont (Vladislav Iosifovich Reiment) in Polish, while Frans Eemil Sillanpää (Frans Emil' Fransovich Sillanpiaia) in Finnish. All three became laureates of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1905, 1924 and 1939, respectively.

But let us mention some other ethnically *non-Russian* (*Rossiiskii*) authors from tsarist Russia, be it Peter Ernst Wilde (Piter Ernst Vil'd) who wrote in German and Estonian, Johan Ludvig Runeberg (Iokhan Liudvig Lorentsovich Runeberg) in Swedish, Oskar Luts (Oskar Khindrikovich Luts) in Estonian, Julie Hausmann (Jülija Hausmane, Iuliia Ivanovich Gausman) in German, Rainis (Jānis Pliekšāns, Ivan Khristoforovich Plekshan) in Latvian, Lithuanian poet Oscar Vladislav de Lubicz Miłosz (Oskaras Milašius, Oskar Vladislavovich Milosh) in French, Maironis (Jonas Mačiulis, Ivan Aleksandrovich Machiulevichus) in Lithuanian, Janka Kupała (Ivan Łucevič, Ivan Dominikovich Lutsevich) in Belarusian and Polish, Jan Potocki (Ian Pototskii) in French, Lesya Ukrainka (Larysa Kosach, Larisa Petrovna Kosach-Kvitka) and Taras Shevchenko (Taras Grigor'evich Shevchenko) in Ukrainian, Joseph Conrad (Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, Iosif Fiodor Konrad Korzhenevskii) in English, Clarice Lispector (Khaia Pinkhasivna Lispektor) in Portuguese, Hryhorii (Gregory) Skovoroda (Gregorius Scovoroda, Grigorii Savvich Skovoroda) in Latin, Greek, (Church) Slavonic, Ruthenian (Ukrainian) and Muscovian (Russian), Stefan Yavorsky (Simeon Ivanovich Iavorsky) in Latin, Polish and (Church) Slavonic, Irène Némirovsky (Irina Leonovna Nemirovskaiia) in French, Romain Gary (Roman Kacew, Roman Leibovich Katsev) in French and English, L. L. Zamenhof (Lazar' Markovich Zamengof, Ludwik Łazarz Zamenhof, Eliezer Lewi Samenhof) in Esperanto, Ismail Gasprinsky (İsmail Gaspiralı, Ismail Mustafovich Gasprinskii) in Crimean Tatar and Arabic, Demetrius Cantemir (Dmitrii Konstantinovich Kantemir) in Latin, Greek, Moldovan (Romanian) and Osmanlıca (Ottoman Turkish), Samuil Lehttir (Samuil Rivinovich Lekhtts'er) in Moldovan (Romanian), Ioannis Kapodistrias (Ivan Antonovich Kapodistriia) in Greek, Russian, French and Italian, Nikolai (Aleksandrovich) Pankov in Romani, Leksa Manuš (Aleksandr Belugin) in Latvian Romani and Latvian, Valentin Panteleevich Arseniev (Nechaev) in Bulgarian, Teodor Filipović (Fiodor Filipovich, Božidar Grujović) in Serbian, Khachatur Abovian (Khachatur Abetikovich Abovian) in Armenian, Raphael Eristavi (Rafael Davidovich Eristavi) in Georgian or Jalil Mammadguluzadeh (Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə, Dzhilil Khuseinovich Mamedkulizade) in Azerbaijani (Azeri).

On top of that, the three towering figures who invented and shaped modern literature in Yiddish, namely, Mendele Mocher Sforim (Sholem Yankev Abramovich, Solomon Moiseevich Abramovich), Sholem Aleichem (Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich, Sholom Nohumovich Rabinovich) and Isaac Leib Peretz (Icchok Lejbusz Peretz, Itskhok-Leibush Iegudovich Perets) were the Russian tsar's subjects, too. Likewise, many creators of modern Hebrew literature were based in the Russian Empire, among others, Mordecai Aaron Günzburg (Aharon Mordekhai Iegudovich Gintsburg) and Abraham Mapu (Abram Kushelevich Mapu). This milieu spawned the creator of Ivrit (Modern Hebrew) Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (Leizer Itskhok Iegudovich Perelman) and the first great authors who wrote in this language, for example, Hayim Nahman Bialik (Khaim Iosifovich Bialik) and Moshe Smilansky (Moshe Shmaikhovich Smilianskii). The first Ivrit-language winner of a Nobel Prize in Literature (1966), Shmuel Yosef Agnon (Szmuel Jozef Czaczkes, Samuel Josef Tschatschkes) was born in Galicia, Austria-Hungary, but nowadays his hometown of Buchach is located in Ukraine. The situation is more straightforward in the case of the world's sole Yiddish winner of a Nobel Prize in Literature (1978), Isaac Bashevis Singer (Itskhok-Gersh Pinsukhovich Zinger, Icek-Hersz Zynger), who was born as a Russian subject.

A similar list for Soviet authors writing in the communist state's numerous indigenous languages would be much longer. However, due to the breakup of the Soviet Union and the Kremlin's current policy of neo-Russification (Federalizm 2017; Ola 2017), such a group of ethnically non-Russian authors who keep writing in their ethnic languages shrinks rapidly across today's Russian Federation. Per annum, a mere one thousand publications (mostly school textbooks and children's books) are brought out in these languages – spoken by over a fifth of Russia's inhabitants (Natsionalnyi sostav 2011). This number accounts for less than 1% of all the book titles produced annually in Russia (Bolee tysiachi 2020). Yet even more curiously, although at two million, Ukrainians are the present-day Russian Federation's second largest national minority immediately after the Tatars (Ethnic Groups 2022), not a single Ukrainian-language book has been published in this country during the past three decades, following the breakup of the SU (Grigor'ev 2021: 15–16).

In comparison, between the late Soviet period and the 2010s, the percentage of Russian-language book titles produced in Ukraine decreased only gradually from 75% to 25% in the country's overall book production (Gluzman 2022; Ivanko 2010). But prior to Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, because of uncontrolled publication imports from Russia, as many as *half* of the books on offer in Ukraine's bookstores were actually in Russian (Orlova 2022a). However, ethnic Russians constitute just 17% of Ukraine's

population, while all the country's ethnically non-Ukrainians amount to 22%. Obviously, the 5% of ethnically non-Russian minorities speak and read in languages other than Russian, be it Belarusian, Bulgarian, Crimean Tatar, Hungarian or Moldovan (Romanian) (Demographics of Ukraine 2022).

Moscow pays much attention to the supposedly 'endangered position' of the Russian language in Ukraine (Moser 2013). At times, the Russian propaganda resorts even to the alarmist label 'genocide of Russian-speakers' (SKR zaiavil 2014; Sobchak 2022). Meanwhile, absolutely *nothing* is done to address the de facto suppression of Ukrainian language and culture in Russia itself. What is more, across the Ukrainian territories under Russian occupation, Russian military or civilian administrators officially brand Ukrainian-language books as 'nazi' or 'extremist' literature. Subsequently, these publications are summarily confiscated from the libraries and bookstores to be destroyed through incineration or bulldozing them into the ground (Orlova 2022b; Pod Mariupolem 2022). In order not to miss a single offending book title, the occupation administration err on the side of caution. For instance, recently, they ordered the blanket destruction of all Ukrainian books published after 1991, be it children's picture books with no words or Ukrainian publications in Russian (Okkupanty prikazali 2022; Soloviova 2022).

In this neo-imperial context of building a homogenously Russophone Russian world (which is none other than a renewed Russian Empire) with all means available, it is not surprising at all that the Kremlin actively stays silent on Russian (or the Russian Federation's) literature(s), which is (are) composed in over thirty languages that formally function as official in the country's autonomous republics (Oding et al. 2019). Refreshingly, this continuing highly multicultural, polyglot and multiethnic character of today's Russia constitutes the very starting point and the leading subject matter of Alyssa DeBlasio and Izolda Savenkova's exciting and innovative language textbook *Pro-dvizhenie: Advanced Russian Through Film and Media* (DeBlasio and Savenkova 2022).

Alyssa DeBlasio informed me that the textbook's main methodological goal is to break with the outdated focus of Russian language textbooks on the ethnic Russians (*Russkie*) in the (post?)imperial urban centers of Moscow and St Petersburg, alongside the closely related traditional canon of Russian culture and literature. The obvious model emulated in this case is typical textbooks of the English language and culture. They do not by default concentrate exclusively on London but rather roam widely and freely across the countries where English is used as a significant language of communication, be it in Canada, New Zealand, Pakistan or Nigeria, among others.

Likewise, Russian is spoken and written also by non-ethnic Russians who are Russian citizens (*Rossiianie*), for instance, in the country's

autonomous republics of Sakha and Tatarstan, alongside the republican (and now increasingly suppressed) languages of Tatar and Sakha. Similarly, in Mongolia and Israel, numerous citizens of both countries employ Russian side by side with their state languages of Mongolian and Hebrew, respectively. That is why this aforementioned new textbook features a Russian-speaking Tatar, Dagestani, Bashkir, Sakha (Yakut), Tat, Kazakh, Armenian and Kalmyk, together with reading passages about Sakha (Yakutia), Belarus and Israel. As a result, in the follow-up exercises, students are free to choose whatever Russian-speaking nation, state, community or identity they want to discuss. There is nothing that requires that they focus on the imperial and ethnically Russian (*Russkii*) core of the Russian Federation alone.

Unwittingly, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine accelerated changes in the direction of noticing consciously and acknowledging this multiethnic, polyglot and (hopefully) postcolonial world, where Russian is used as a second or third language of intercommunal communication. Immediately after the outbreak of this war, most Western students of Russian learning at partner institutions in Russia were evacuated from this country to prevent the Kremlin from turning them into hostages or pawns of high politics (Callaghan 2022; Kednix 2022; University Staff 2022). For instance, this is the case of the students enrolled in the Russian language program at the University of St Andrews. Now, they continue their year abroad to master Russian in Estonia's predominantly Russophone city of Narva. And again, as in the example of English that can be acquired in the streets of London, Valletta, Lagos, Ottawa, Seattle or Sydney, only now university educators and administrators in the West wake up to the realization that the same is possible in regard to Russian. Apart from Moscow and St Petersburg, Russian can also be acquired in any other post-Soviet country, alongside Israel, Germany or Mongolia.

My pedagogical appetite whetted by the innovative language textbook of Russian, now I impatiently wait for a critical textbook of multilingual Russian literature, be it in the tsarist empire or the Soviet Union, or even better, for a ground-breaking textbook of Russia's fruitfully entangled literatures in plural. The situation is similar to that in multilingual, polyconfessional and multiethnic Austria-Hungary, where authors wrote in different languages, though tended to know and use German (or more rarely Hungarian, and earlier Latin) for communicating with fellow citizens and literati who did not know their given ethnic language, be it Croatian, Bosnian, Czech, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, Ukrainian or Yiddish. Hence, Austro-Hungarian authors do not fit in typical ethnonational slots of this or that present-day nation-state (Leben and Koron 2019; Magris 1986; WEEO 2002–).

For instance, this is the story of Franz Kafka, who wrote in German and, after the breakup of the Dual Monarchy, became a Czechoslovak writer. Yet, he did not change the language of his writings, though he knew Czech and Yiddish (Suchoff 2012). The Holocaust that took place one decade and a half after his premature death in 1924 made it impossible to define Kafka as a German (or Austrian) writer and thus made him into a Jewish author (Franz Kafka: spisovatel 2022). Prior to World War II, all his papers were relocated to Mandatory Palestine (The NLI 2016), which became Israel in 1948. Thus, Kafka is now considered to be an honorary Israeli author (Davis-Marks 2021; Franz Kafka 2019) and also a Czech writer (Citáty 2022), following the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993. When researchers disagree on the ethnic or national belonging of Kafka, they often finally concede that, above all, he was a Prague writer (Franz Kafka 2022).

Similarly, multicultural stories lurk in the biographies and careers of most tsarist Russia's and Soviet-period ethnically *non-Russian* (*Rossiiskii*) writers whose lives straddled radically different states and political systems. Their life stories became extremely complicated, not so much due to emigration, but rather the causes of their identification and other choices and transformations rested in the seismic political upheavals experienced during the dark 20th century. Commemorations of such authors and the reception of their works change accordingly in the wake of their deaths when another cataclysm of a similar magnitude strikes again. This was the case of the breakup of the Soviet Union. And now, the Kremlin's brutal and unjustified attack on Ukraine has initiated a subsequent huge shift in political configurations and identity-shaping policies both across the post-Soviet space and in the West.

We would not think it sensible or advisable to study the Czech language and culture exclusively through Austro-Hungarian material published in German or only after mastering Russian or German as the entry prerequisite. Likewise, it is high time to restructure – that is, to decolonize – the pro-imperial Russo-centric syllabus of Slavic studies in the West so that the field's promising name would cease concealing the entailed dominance of Russian language and culture, which has no pedagogical or methodological justification. It would be strange and most inappropriate that consciously or not Western scholars in their research and teaching would continue doing the bidding of the present-day Kremlin's neo-imperial ideology of the Russian world. This would amount to cutting the branch of democracy, liberalism and civic freedoms, on which the West rests as its value fundament.

Ukrainian language and culture – like those of Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Poland or Slovakia – should be studied and appreciated in its own right, which with regard to the Germanic languages is the regular case of Danish,

Dutch, Norwegian or Swedish. And given the ongoing war in which post-colonial Ukraine, under Russia's neo-imperial attack, is fighting not only for its survival but also for security and democracy in Europe, it is of import that the field of Ukrainian studies be swiftly developed in the West. Yes, it must be a political decision, as the founding of Slavic (Russian) studies originally was in 1946. Now, let us be clear-eyed about it: successful communication with Ukrainian partners is a top priority, together with a thorough knowledge and appreciation of Ukrainian culture, customs and literature. Apart from enjoying Ukrainian belles lettres, the goal is improved cooperation between Ukraine and the West for repelling and containing today's totalitarian and neo-imperial Russia.

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Notes

- 1 I thank Dr. Kirill Zoubkov, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, for discussing this subject.
- 2 Circassian belongs to the Caucasian group ('family') of languages that, among others, also includes Chechen and Georgian, which are official, respectively, in Russia's autonomous Republic of Chechnya and the post-Soviet nation-state of Georgia.

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18

KWAMUNYASA

Problematising Coloniality of Citizenship in Zimbabwe

Aaron Sigauke

Introduction

The title of this chapter is based on the historical origins of the Malawi people who are now ‘citizens’ of Zimbabwe. During the British Central African Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, people of Malawi (formerly Nyasaland) and Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) came to Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia) as migrant labourers to work on tea estates, farms and mines. After many generations in Zimbabwe, these people still regard themselves as Malawians and have maintained much of their Malawian culture (language, religion, dress, beliefs and other behaviours) up to this day. One example is a tea estate in the eastern part of Zimbabwe which is locally and euphemistically known as ‘Munyasa’ and takes its name from Nyasaland – the name given to Malawi during the British Central African Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The estate has a number of people originally from Malawi (Nyasaland) who were brought as migrant labourers to work on the tea estate during the Federation.

This chapter discusses the concepts of *culture* and *citizenship* as viewed from colonial and postcolonial perspectives. Both culture and citizenship are vexed and contested concepts for which there is no consensus among scholars. Neither of them is of a natural kind: they are ideologically laden and products of imaginaries, especially at the service of dominant, hegemonic forces in their quest for the exercising of power. However, Stevenson (2001, p. 1) defines culture as “the dialogic production of meaning and aesthetics through a variety of practices” and further points out that culture is also associated with a mix of public and private institutions such as

museums, libraries, cinemas, schools and the media. In society, different ethnic and community groups often subscribe to different specific cultural expectations associated with their groups, aspects which include beliefs, languages, behaviours, religions and others (Banks, 2004). Because of cultural differences in communities, the concept 'cultural pluralism' is sometimes used to describe such communities, and community members belonging to different cultural groups are entitled and have rights to their cultures.

Citizenship, on the other hand, is often associated with different individuals' and groups' membership, belonging, rights and obligations to the community at the local, regional, national and global levels (global citizenship). Banks (2004, p. 4) further defines citizenship as "the state of being vested with rights, privileges and duties of a citizen". Citizenship is thus an understanding and practice of one's culture as defined previously. As noted previously, these concepts are not neutral since meanings and interpretations depend on who defines them. As an example, this chapter looks at the cultural and citizenship statuses of migrant labourers circulated within and during the former British Central African Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland vis-a-vis their current status in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Viewed from the colonial and postcolonial perspectives, the question is: what was and is the *citizenship status* of migrant labourers in former colonial British Central African Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland vis-a-vis current postcolonial Zimbabwe?

Theoretical Issues: Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory

So much has been written about postcolonialism and postcolonial theory, with quite a number of questions being raised, such as: What is postcolonialism (colonial)? Where is postcolonial? Who is the postcolonial? and so on (Childs & Williams, 1997). This section of the chapter provides a brief overview of what this theory is all about and its relevance to this chapter discussion.

It is sometimes difficult to talk of postcolonialism without talking first about colonialism itself. Colonialism refers to "a specific form of cultural exploitation that developed with the expansion of some foreign powers and their implantation of settlements in distant territories" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000, p. 186). These authors further describe colonialism as a phase of imperialism or the globalisation of imperialism, especially by Western powers. Geographically, Western colonialism eroded and fractured societies and cultures in countries of South America, Africa, Caribbean and Asia. It is mostly in these continents that Western and other non-Western imperial powers conquered and controlled indigenous people's land and goods (Loomba, 1998).

If what came before is what constitutes colonialism, what, then, is post-colonialism? Castle (2001) describes postcolonialism as referring to the era after colonialism and a range of critical attitudes taken towards colonialism; or a post-independence state having left the powers of the colonizer, a separation of the colonised from the imperial power (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000: pp193). However, Childs and Williams (1997, p. 25) observe that colonial powers “leave inscriptions on the formerly colonised states in the form of language, cultures . . . and other areas”. This continuation of the influence of foreign powers in different sectors of the decolonised state (political, economic, cultural and so on) is what is sometimes referred to as neo-colonialism. This is evidence that postcolonialism is still a form of colonialism or globalisation of imperialism. Generally, Western activities in former colonies do not aim to improve the lives of natives; they are oppressive and exploitative. Some writers, for example, Loomba (1998), have referred to this as ‘modern colonialism’, a recurrent widespread feature of human history involving the extraction of goods/wealth, restructuring of economies of former colonial states and a flow of natural and human resources between the former colonies and colonial powers usually for the benefit of the latter. Postcolonialism is thus a distinct critical theoretical perspective which encompasses a range of ideas, theories and theorists associated with discursive practices. Roy (2008) notes that in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA, indigenous people still feel colonised; the effects of colonialism still remain with them even in these ‘postcolonial’ states. “Discourse and culture of former colonial powers have left an undeniable skew on the psyche of the colonised” (Roy, 2008, p. 318).

Spivak (1991) sees postcolonialism as a theory that can be used to deconstruct the processes of ‘othering’ or the process through which subalterns (the Orient or Other) such as women, indigenous people, homosexuals and ethnic minorities are marginalised by Western powers or powerful indigenous native elites. Postcolonial theory can also be used to learn how these marginalised people produce a counter-discourse through which they resist the dominant narratives of cultural appropriation and imperial domination. Thinking about the ‘Other’ is relevant in describing and analyzing the marginalisation of any category of oppressed people in and outside Western societies as well (Saada, 2014).

The process of marginalisation usually happens through the exclusion of the ‘Other’ from mainstream cultures or by a distortion of their image by the dominant discourses in society. Not recognising the ‘Other’ can be based on race, class, gender and cultural differences. In a local community and the rest of society outside the local community, the marginalisation process can take place within different social institutions such as the education system (the school’s curriculum and classroom’s pedagogy, for example),

economic system, political systems and other institutions. Burney (2012) suggests that colonised people need to resist “Eurocentric, logocentric, and ethnocentric grand narratives of empires” (62) because they dominate the discourses of education, media, politics and culture. These discourses produce systems of knowledge and power that “subjugate, objectify, marginalize, distort, and oppress the Other” (62–63).

The previous discussion has shown that colonial and postcolonial theory is relevant to an understanding of the experiences of countries that were formerly and those currently under colonialism. As noted previously by Loomba (1998), these are mostly in developing/third-world continents of South America, Africa, the Caribbean Islands and Asia, where colonialism and postcolonialism have eroded and fractured the cultural, political, economic and other spheres of these societies. Zimbabwe is one such country in Africa that was under British colonial rule and where these colonial and postcolonial effects are openly experienced.

This chapter uses the previously stated colonial and postcolonial theory to analyse and understand the effects of colonialism and postcolonialism in real terms. As highlighted in the introductory section of this chapter, the chapter discussion focuses specifically on the experiences and effects of colonialism and postcolonialism on former labourers in the British Central African Federation. These people were moved from their original home country of Nyasaland (now Malawi) to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to work in mines, agricultural estates and other areas. The section which follows discusses, firstly, the historical background of the establishment and subsequent dissolution of the British Central African Federation. Then it discusses the economic activities that led to the movement of labourers (sometimes forced movement) from and to the different states of the federation. What are the current citizenship positions and feelings of these people in these former federation states considering their many generations in these states since the establishment and end of the federation (*problematising citizenship in Zimbabwe – the case of Munyasa Tea Estate*)?

The Case of KwaMunyasa in the British Central African Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland

This section briefly discusses the British colonisation process of the three countries of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which later became the Federation of Central Africa. It then focuses on how the colonisation of these countries impacted the cultures and citizenship statuses of their indigenous peoples as these were moved from one country to another. With regards to issues of citizenship and cultures, the question being asked and to which this chapter tries to respond is: what has changed and/or has remained of the indigenous cultures and citizenship statuses of

former migrant workers in the postcolonial era of the former British Central African Federation?

The colonisation of Central Africa started with the arrival of the British South African Company (BSAC), sometimes referred to as the Pioneer Column, which moved northwards from South Africa and was led by Cecil John Rhodes. This is the company which established the colonies of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. These are the colonies that later became the Central African Federation (1953–1963).

Vail (1989) notes that from the late 19th century, the Central African Connections that came before Federation, that is, the colonial territories of central and southern Africa, were joined by “ties of finance, trade, political influence, and especially migrant labour”. The author further observes that migrant networks extended from the mining towns and cities of South Africa into Southern Rhodesia and north towards the sisal estates of Tanganyika and beyond. Often these routes had already been trampled by missionaries, travellers and political refugees from overseas prior to the implementation of formal colonial borders (Landau, 2010). The fluidity of movement continued as a feature of the region into the colonial period. Border controls remained fairly minimal, or at least ‘permissive’, until the 1930s (MacDonald, 2012). Some writers have pointed out that while the federation was designed partly to promote regional economic development and integration, it was, more importantly, intended by Britain to block the northward advance of Afrikaner racial policies (Butler, 2005).

Nyasaland provided a vast labour supply for the southern and central African economic regions. By the 1910s, a strong tradition of Nyasa labour migration had emerged, particularly among mission-educated men seeking skilled opportunities and higher wages in the industrial centres of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa (Groves, 2013). This movement of migrant labour continued and even more so during the Central African Federation in the 1950s when Britain sought to construct a ‘multiracial’ Central African Federation, financed largely by Northern Rhodesia’s copper industry (Butler, 2005; see also Hyam, 1987, pp. 145–172). The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, established in 1953, died on March 29, 1963. Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland became independent states under black African government rule, while the Southern Rhodesian white population proclaimed a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) in 1965 (see Somerville, 1963, pp. 386–402).

Labour Migrants: Culture and Citizenship in the Colonial Era

George Kay (1970) provides some interesting detail about the movement of African labourers between the federation states before, during and after the federation. Kay notes that while most European settlers in

Rhodesia during the pioneer era were prepared to work hard physically, they also expected to make extensive use of the indigenous African population. However, he also notes that the indigenous local African population (Matebele and Shona) were reluctant to work for long for settlers. "They had neither the wish nor the need to leave their tribal life; their material necessities and status were not dependent on money. Wages were not an incentive for them to leave home" (Kay, 1970, p. 55). In Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), settlers depended on labour recruitment from Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Nyasaland (Malawi) and Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). However, the racist policies further discouraged the African population from willingly taking up jobs on European farms and industries. Kay (1970) provides some detailed statistics on the movement of African labour between Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, with Malawi being the leading source of labourers to work in mines, farms and industries of Zimbabwe.

One farming activity that attracted labour from Nyasaland to Rhodesia was work on tea estates. Nyasaland, because of its weather and landscape, was doing well with the growing of tea, and the indigenous African population there took up employment on the tea estates. White settlers also found the eastern highland areas of Rhodesia suitable for growing tea. Several tea estates were established but faced a serious shortage of labour (the local African indigenous population was not interested). To meet these labour demands, indigenous African labourers were brought in from Nyasaland (Malawi), thus leading to the establishment of the Southdown Tea Estate (euphemistically referred to as Kwa Munyasa) and other tea estates in the eastern highlands region of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Migrant labourers came to Rhodesia with their cultures (language, religion, beliefs, food, entertainment activities) and their official citizenship statuses as people of Nyasaland (as indicated on their identity documents). They still regarded themselves and were regarded by local indigenous Africans (Rhodesians) as Malawians. The local indigenous Africans in Rhodesia used derogatory terms such as 'maNyasalandi' (someone from Nyasaland) or 'aBhurantaya' (someone from Blantyre) to refer to labour immigrants from Malawi. These derogatory terms are still being used today and are an irritation to people of Malawian origin in Zimbabwe. Because Southdown Tea Estate had a majority of its workforce from Nyasaland (Malawi), with their cultures and citizenship statuses as noted previously, the tea estate was and is still referred to by locals as 'KwaMunyasa'.

European white settlers in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and after the break-up of the Federation, also had a culture different from that of the indigenous people in the territories in which they had settled. At the break-up of the Federation, and in terms of citizenship, European

white settlers became either Rhodesians, Zambians or Malawians, while others went back to become British citizens. Thus, sometimes indigenous people would joke amongst themselves, saying: “you behave like a white person”, referring to colleagues whose behaviours tended to be like those of white settlers. Both Malawian immigrant labourers and white settlers were regarded by the local indigenous Rhodesian Africans as ‘foreigners’ and not citizens of the country.

Labour Migrants: Culture and Citizenship in Postcolonial Era

Former migrant workers from Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique and other countries have been in Zimbabwe during and since the end of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953–1963). They have been and are citizens as far as they hold official documents of Zimbabwe and because there are now several generations born and grown up in Zimbabwe. Some have also become married to indigenous Zimbabwean Africans. However, with regards to cultural affiliations, in a number of situations, former migrant labourers, especially those of Malawian origin, have remained as Malawian communities in former commercial farming areas such as KwaMunyasa. They have passed on their cultural practices (traits) from generation to generation. These traits include language, religious practices, entertainment activities and others. This is why the tea estate on the eastern part of Zimbabwe is still referred to as ‘KwaMunyasa’ because many people on that estate are descendants of those originally from Nyasaland (Malawi). They still hold some of these cultural practices found in Malawi. In cases where there have been cross-marriages with indigenous Zimbabwean Africans, some of these immigrant cultural practices have been diluted, and some of these people have followed cultural practices expected in the indigenous Zimbabwean African families in which they are married.

The author of this chapter grew up in a village close to KwaMunyasa and has had close contact and discussions with residents of this tea estate, the majority of whom are former immigrants from Malawi. Evidence is that while they now hold citizenship documents as Zimbabweans, former immigrants from Malawi still see and regard themselves as Malawians because of cultural affiliations with the people of Malawi. However, citizenship as a concept means more than just holding these official documents. It also has to do with one’s contributions to the welfare of the local, regional, national and global community. This is what these former immigrant workers have done – contributed to the welfare of communities locally and beyond. Some have taken up jobs not just on the farms but also in professional careers such as teaching, nursing, security (as policemen and women) and others. Unfortunately, some indigenous Zimbabwean Africans still euphemistically

and negatively refer to these people as 'Ma(Mu)Nyasarandi' (someone from Nyasaland) or 'Ma(Mu)Bhurataya' (someone from Blantyre).

How would the postcolonial theory explain the situation? The theory points out that colonial powers leave inscriptions on the formerly colonised states in the form of language, culture and other areas. Neo-colonialism, which is a characteristic of postcolonialism, is also a process of marginalisation of the 'Other', a distortion of the image of the 'Other'. This marginalisation or distortion can also be exercised by powerful indigenous natives of the colonised or formerly colonised societies (Spivak, 1991).

KwaMunyasa, as discussed previously, is one typical case or an example of where this marginalisation/distortion process is taking place. Due to colonisation people were moved from one country (Nyasaland) to another (Southern Rhodesia) as workers on farms (tea estates), mines and manufacturing industries. They were used as labourers; and even now, after the end of the colonial period, they are still looked down upon and regarded as 'foreigners' by local indigenous Zimbabweans. This is in spite of the huge economic and other contributions they have made to the nation and the long stay of their many generations in the country. As noted previously, these negative attitudes are against the other conception of citizenship, which is not about holding official government documents but about membership and service to the community (active citizenship) (Banks, 2004). Because they hold and practise a culture which is somehow different from that of the local indigenous Zimbabweans, this does not mean that they are not citizens in their communities and the country. Renato Rosaldo (1994), cited in Stevenson (2001), rightly points out that there is an interconnection between culture and citizenship. One has "a right to be culturally different while still enjoying the full membership of a democratic and participatory community" (p. 2). This is the case with these former migrant workers at Southdown (Munyasa) Tea Estate who still hold cultural aspects of their country of origin. They are citizens of communities in Zimbabwe – on farms such as the Southdown Tea Estate, in rural peasant areas, in urban areas and elsewhere. They participate in the economic, political and other social activities in the country. As Osler and Starkey (2005) note, citizenship and being a good citizen is not about always conforming to the ideologies of the state or unquestioningly accepting and conforming to the values, norms and beliefs as defined by authority or others. It is also about questioning undemocratic practices in the community and the state.

These former migrant workers in Zimbabwe have this right to question and challenge the negative attitudes of indigenous Zimbabweans in the country because they, former migrant workers, are citizens of this country. It should be noted, however, that central to these negative relations is the fact that these are a product of colonialism by foreign powers and

postcolonialism after the end of the federation and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) (see previous discussion on theoretical issues).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has focused on the issue of citizenship, a concept that has had controversies in its definition and application in different circumstances. It is controversial that, in some cases, people in some situations regard themselves as citizens, while others do not see them as such. This is why scholars and other critics have argued that citizenship does not need to be defined only by the holding of official documents of the state but also by one's contributions to the welfare of their community, region, state/nation and global level. This is why terms like 'active citizenship' and others are currently being preferred and popular in discussions about citizenship.

The chapter has also focused on issues related to colonialism and postcolonialism and how these concepts link with and affect the citizenship statuses of individuals in nation-states where these are applicable. Generally, colonialism has been defined as the imposition of power, regulations and ideas by a foreign power in another state, with the result being that local citizens and their ways of life are forced to change and adapt to these newly imposed conditions. As an example, this chapter has cited and focused on the British Central African Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia; Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe; Nyasaland, now Malawi). The 'forced' movement of indigenous Africans from and between these countries is one example that is a product of the process of colonisation. The inscriptions left by the colonial power (Britain) and the 'othering' of indigenous Africans are evident in this current postcolonial era of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. Southdown Tea Estate (KwaMunyasa) is such a clear example of a place where postcolonial effects are evident and where questions about citizenship can be raised and are applicable.

Finally, the chapter suggests the way forward in terms of how and why former migrants should be treated not only in this former Federation of Central Africa but also in other similar situations experiencing and living in a postcolonial era.

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DECOLONISING AFRICAN MIGRANT LANGUAGES IN THE AUSTRALIAN MARKET ECONOMY

Vera Williams Tetteh and Sithembinkosi Dube

Introduction

The importance and contributions of periphery languages are often overshadowed and overlooked in the discourse of Global North market economies, where language standardisation and hegemonic regimes ascribe inferiority to non-European languages, particularly oral-based African languages. There is, however, growing evidence from research which employ the tropes of “pride” and “profit” in discussions about linguistic varieties (see Heller & Duchêne, 2012, p. 3) that periphery languages including oral-based African languages do accrue returns and do contribute to local and global economies (e.g., Wang & Hatoss, 2022; Kamwangamalu, 2016). Nevertheless, yields that accrue to linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) from these marginalised language varieties remain largely invisible in discursive constructions of imagined communities of the Global North (Anderson, 1983).

The driving force behind this chapter is the authors’ interest in ensuring positive representations of African heritage languages and their users by highlighting how they contribute to Australian society, albeit from the periphery. The discussion and examples are based on our **Hidden Oracies** project and its offshoot, **LangDentity**, a community language school teaching Shona and Ndebele to Zimbabwean children and young adults living across NSW. We also tap into our *emic* (**insider positions**) – ongoing daily participant observations in our engagements within our communities in Australia. The Hidden Oracies project is our ongoing ethnographic research with African families in Australia that began in 2019. It stems

from two parts: (i) Vera's PhD thesis, which explored the language learning and settlement experiences of adult African migrants in Australia (Williams Tetteh, 2015); and (ii) our collective desire as linguistics scholars of African descent to make visible the sidelined African languages. These languages are viewed as tied to home and community use, but in reality, they contribute to building social cohesiveness and healthy and resilient communities, which promotes economic stability for our society at large. We call these languages Hidden Oracies because they are shared spoken languages that function mostly 'behind the scenes', that is, outside the public domain, to promote the transfer of knowledge and shape cultural understanding for individuals, within families and within ethnolinguistic community groups in multilingual and multicultural contexts. The Hidden Oracies project is thus grounded in an ethnography approach (Hymes, 1980). We draw on some of our ethnographic data to support the arguments advanced in the chapter. The dataset includes participants' coloured-in silhouettes of language use maps (Busch, 2012, 2016) and biographic interviews providing detailed descriptions of their colouring choices of the language maps (see Wang et al., 2023 for a detailed methodology). All the names used for the participants are pseudonyms.

This chapter adds a new angle to our discussion of the marginalised languages as we seek to explore how current multilingualism policies in Australia can be decolonised to give emerging languages a niche in the Global North market economy – whatever that may look like. Observations from our *emic insider positions* reveal discursive constructions, which show that despite the many government-sponsored multilingual initiatives in Australia, a 'coloniality of language' continues to marginalise minoritised and emerging African languages and their users. The concept of 'coloniality of language' is an explanatory paradigm of how notions of language and language policies have remained colonial in postcolonial Africa (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021, p. 17). We extend Ndhlovu and Makalela's concept of 'coloniality of language' to the context of Australia. The concept also resonates with the framework of "linguistic diversity" and "social inclusion" agenda (Piller & Takahashi, 2011, p. 374) on which our ethnographic work draws. Both views acknowledge that the potential for linguistic diversity and inclusion is undermined by manipulative policies that are only meant to benefit macro-domain agentive goals. Both call for a dismantling of the status quo. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to add our voices to the ongoing call for decolonising multilingualism systems and policies that marginalise speakers of minoritised ethnic languages. We do so by exploring and highlighting the vital behind-the-scenes **roles** and **contributions** that lesser-known African heritage languages and their speakers play, even though they go unnoticed and unacknowledged.

To illustrate the roles and contributions of African languages, this chapter focuses on one aspect of our work: African migrant languages and their positionings in the margins of the market economy in the Global North context of Australia. Our discussion is guided by the following key questions:

1. How are oral-based African languages constructed in the global North context of Australia?
2. What evidence do we have of the performance of African languages accruing returns in Australia's formal and informal economy?
3. What can be done to decolonise language policy and include languages that are in the margins?

To address these questions, we start with a brief background on African ethnolinguistic history in Australia and a review of the literature on Global North discourses about the Global South. We then provide evidence from the formal economy (i.e., the aged-care industry; community services sector; and the legal sector), the informal economy (i.e., grassroots business and small entrepreneurship) and community language education. This is followed by a discussion of the interplay of these sectors with African languages and the contributions they make to Australian society. Lastly, we conclude by arguing that while Global North ideologies and epistemologies have influenced and dominated representations and positionings of Global Souths – coloniality of language – such colonial epistemologies and their accompanying discriminatory and inequitable ways of viewing the global economy are no longer sustainable.

African Ethnolinguistic History in Australia

The African ethnolinguistic history in Australia can be traced around four main moves of Africans to Australia: the first is the Black Founders era with the arrival of Africans in the first fleet in 1788 (Pybus, 2006a, 2006b). The second is the White Australia Policy era from 1901, which favoured the immigration of mainly Whites from South Africa, Rhodesia (now known as Zimbabwe) and Kenya. The third is the post-White Australia Policy era from the late 1960s to 1990s, with the arrival of Black African economic and refugee migrants from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and from Commonwealth countries, including Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Zimbabwe. The fourth is the post 9/11 2001 era, with Black Africans from predominantly refugee backgrounds arriving from countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo (DR), Burundi and Togo.

Due to Australia's foundational racist and exclusionist ideologies, the sparse African ethnolinguistic history that exists is often drawn from the

fourth era. This history tends to be viewed with deficit lenses as it is steeped in refugee resettlement challenges and linguistic barriers that African arrivals from non-English speaking countries are perceived to face (Grossman, 2010). Such deficit lenses simplify and homogenise a rather heterogeneous group, inhibiting adequate explorations and true depictions of their ethno-linguistic and cultural diversities to inform policy. This means that policy is mostly shaped by the history of larger and well-known migrant groups classified under the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) category (Gunn, 2003). Consequently, the CALD classification drives most social policies while subsuming issues of relevance to African migrants and other racialised ethno-linguistic migrant populations in Australia. In this chapter, we bring to light how the marginalised populations continue to bear the brunt of these power and ideological postures.

Despite the linguistically diverse population of Australia, the multilingual language policy remains unrepresentative as it excludes emerging languages. Piller (2016) attributes this to monolingual ways of seeing a multilingual world, which echoes Clyne's (2008) notion of a monolingual mindset. Although Africans use linguistic repertoires reflective of their diverse ethno-linguistic groups, those repertoires are not recognised beyond administrative purposes. For example, within Australian migrant settlement research, African languages are categorised as "new and emerging" languages (FECCA, 2016) or "languages of newly emerged communities" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) and classified as having the following characteristics: (i) has only recently (although not exclusively) become a spoken language in Australia; (ii) has become a spoken language in Australia through the recent arrival of migrants (usually refugee/humanitarian entrants); (iii) is not an Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language; (iv) is not widely spoken or commonly known in Australia; and (v) has not yet reached the stage where academic education or instruction, or NAATI accreditation in translating and interpreting, is readily or widely available in Australia (FECCA, 2016). While such a characterisation of the newly arrived African migrants for systemic purposes may be helpful for government agencies and authorities for administrative purposes, they do very little for other African migrant cohorts – earlier and newly arrived migrants – whose languages do not fall within those categories. This reflects what Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) refer to as the coloniality of language and is typical of Global North constructions of Global South contributions to the global marketplace.

Global North Discourses in the Global Marketplace

Global North discursive constructions of the global marketplace and pronouncements or lack thereof about Global South contributions are

deeply steeped in colonial ideological processes. These types of constructions in the Global North market economies where language standardisation and hegemonic regimes persist ascribe inferiority to non-European languages, cultures and peoples contributing in the margins. Yet, as Connell (2014) argues, it is at the margins “where the majority of the world’s people live, where most of the world’s cultures have flourished, and where most economic activity occurs” (p. 217) and must be acknowledged as such. Even with current increases in human migration and movement into Global North spaces, such colonial ideologies of language and its interplay with economic activity continue to shape the way communities on the margins of society are viewed. This is the situation that persists for oral-based African languages and their speakers, even in the context of Australia. There is currently no truly empowering language policy targeted at establishing a link between African languages and economic development. According to Bourdieu’s (1991) classic twin notions of ‘linguistic market’ and ‘habitus’ (p. 30), this linkage can only happen if these languages are part of the language policy regime (Kamwangamalu, 2016; Ndhlovu, 2019).

In a similar vein, we employ the concepts of linguistic market and habitus to support our argument for a truly empowering language policy regime that establishes a linkage between African languages and economic development in the context of Australia. Additionally, we present voices from the margins to show intersections of language, social capital, economic and social value of African languages where not everything of value in people’s lives is reducible to economic value (Ndhlovu, 2019). We argue for the inclusion of African languages in language valorising discussions as their roles in the building of healthy and resilient, economically stable communities cannot be underrated.

Despite their invisibility in mainstream discourses, African languages accrue returns to Australia’s market economy. Emergent themes from our Hidden Oracles project and participants’ depictions of their linguistic repertoires, that is, where and how they use their heritage languages within these repertoires, show two key areas of hitherto invisible contributions to the market economy. These are (i) language use and social services; and (ii) heritage language maintenance and social resilience. We provide examples of each next.

Language Use and Social Services

The three main areas of African heritage language use within social services we showcase here are from participants working in the aged-care industry, the Madi community’s engagement with the legal industry and one

participant's interpreting engagement with Centrelink, one of Australia's key social services institutions.

Care of Aged People

This vignette comes from field notes on Thandiwe's experience working in the care of aged people. Thandiwe, a woman in her 40s from Zimbabwe of Ndebele heritage, speaks Ndebele, Shona and Xhosa languages.

Thandiwe has just done her handover to the afternoon shift crew when she overhears her supervisor speaking on the phone. "I honestly do not understand the language that your mum is speaking. It sounds like she's speaking in tongues, and no one in the ward seems to understand what she is saying. Can I please put you on the phone so you may help us interpret what language she is speaking, if you can understand, please?" Out of curiosity, Thandiwe follows the supervisor and waits close enough to the room so she could hear what the patient was saying, just in case she could help. Just as she had hoped for, the language sounded familiar. However, she could hear the person on the other side of the phone (the patient's daughter) say, "Sorry, I cannot understand what she is saying, but it sounds like the language spoken by our helper many years ago in South Africa. Don't you have any translators from South Africa in your facility?" Just as the supervisor was thinking of what to do next, Thandiwe sneaks in and says, "She's speaking Xhosa! I've just finished my shift and have a few minutes to help with the translation if there is something that needs urgent attention". The supervisor literally hugged Thandiwe and says, "You're a lifesaver. I'll reassign you to this patient for your next shifts".

Legal Interpreting

The legal sector is another area where there is growing evidence of tapping into language and community resources, also known as language brokering. The Madi community from South Sudan has linguistic practices and cultural processes they use in conflict resolution situations. One participant, who is an elder and an interpreter in this community, told us that these are often tapped into by the legal institution, and these work with the community elders for amicable conflict resolutions. As the participant told us, when conflict arises among community members, "they advise us why we are here in Madi, not in English". Hence, Madi takes the position of the vehicle language for negotiating peace in conflict situations, as shown in the vignette that follows.

In at least their court system, which is more or less going to our culture because I attended, erm, one of the guys had a problem in the house,

and they go to the court and we went to witness. What the judge said, “Do you guys have a community?” And the answer was “yes”. “Did the community seek to try to solve this problem?” And the answer is “no”. And he said, “Okay, I’ll give you a chance. Let the community go and try. If he can solve it. If they solve it, it’s good. If they cannot solve it, then it comes from me”. And that’s our special thing that the Madi does. We don’t want the problem to go to the police. We don’t want the problem to go to court. At least let us try it first. If we try and we fail, we cannot solve it, then it can go. That’s why we have a chairperson to lead us. And that’s what we do. If I have, like, a fight with my wife, we have the chairman. She can go to the chairman and he will address this problem. If he cannot solve it, then the problem will go to the police. That’s all we’re doing.

Social Security Work – Centrelink

Alimu, in his 50s from South Sudan, had a story to tell. His background is Madi in South Sudan. Alimu grew up in the 1960s and 70s Uganda and was attending an English medium school, but in 1979, when he had just started secondary school, the family was forced to leave Uganda and return to Sudan, their homeland. There, Alimu switched to an Arabic medium school. He completed his secondary education and a bachelor’s degree in accounting in Arabic medium. During his years in Uganda, Kiswahili was spoken around him, so he picked up this regional language in his daily interactions with people. Prior to coming to Australia, he was earning a good wage in an English-speaking country’s embassy, where he was involved in translation and interpreting work in English, Kiswahili and Arabic. When he arrived in Australia, he did not have the required local National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accreditation that would establish him as a professional interpreter. He was not accepted in that role. However, he slotted into the ‘voluntary’ interpreter role after his community recognised his skills, and he was called upon by people not only in the Madi community but also the broader South Sudanese community to ‘help’ them with interpreting and translation. Sometimes, he also identified the language needs of people outside of the Sudanese community and voluntarily provided interpreting help. He told us the story of how one of his self-appointed volunteer language events brought him to the attention of the service provider and resulted in that office formalising his role and placing him on their payroll for two years when he still had no NAATI accreditation.

I was in the Centrelink queue, and this lady came. She was in front of me at the desk and she was from Burundi. But I think she got her asylum through Tanzania to come here. But she could not speak English. Now,

they could not communicate with these people. And then I feel so sorry for her. And I ask, “What language did she speak? She said Kirundi and Swahili?” I said, “Okay, I can help you”. And then they gave us an interpreter. They gave us an interpreter, and then the lady was served, she got what she wanted, and that officer asked me, “Now what we can, I think I can give you an opportunity to come and sit with us here from morning to midday. When somebody like that comes, you can help us here”. And they have been paying me money on that day for at least two years.

Language Use in the Informal Economy

Women in grassroots businesses and small entrepreneurship are at the forefront of African heritage languages, driving the informal economy and meeting the needs of newly arrived migrants who are still learning the dominant language. For example, a collection of African ‘ethnic’ businesses in the Western Suburbs from Blacktown’s Main Street, through Merrylands, Guildford, Fairfield, and the town centre in Liverpool, represent these grassroots businesses. All these are run by women. In some cases, these women’s shop floors become the space where newly arrived people with no relatives congregate to ask for all sorts of advice and buy familiar items on display when they find it too daunting to enter mainstream grocery shops.

One example, as reported in Vera’s study on African migrants in Australia (Williams Tetteh, 2015), is the story of Ishetu. In the example, Ishetu, a woman from Congo, and her husband started an ‘ethnic’ business primarily because her husband was tired of the racist discriminatory workplace practices he had experienced. With their collective capital, the husband’s business experience and Ishetu’s hair-braiding skills, they set up an African hair-dressing salon in one of the suburbs mentioned previously. Ishetu also spoke Lingala, Kiswahili, Lugbara, Kakwa and Arabic and had arrived in Australia with “no English”. She had no way of certifying her hair braiding skills, so she utilised the Adult Migrant English Program’s (AMEP) to study English. This enabled her to attend TAFE to standardise her hair-dressing skills and receive a certificate to start their family’s hair-braiding business. Ishetu explained that her linguistic abilities in the languages she brought had helped her learn English, and her further study at TAFE so that she was able to train successfully in hair-dressing to earn the certificate.

In the shop, she used her linguistic repertoires, which included two key lingua francas within the wider African community, Kiswahili and Arabic, to communicate with a broad range of prospective clientele and to build a varied and trustful customer base. Coupled with her husband’s previous business skills, these were all very useful resources they were able to draw on to run their business, which also passed for a community meeting place where mostly women from the languages she spoke would attend and feel

welcome. Additionally, as noted by Jacobs-Huey (2006) such businesses include ‘kitchen beauticians’, made up mostly of women providing local informal “services to their friends, relatives, and acquaintances” (p. 18). All these businesses have migrant languages undergirding their existence and their operational processes. As such, they do not only contribute to the economy but also, in the true spirit of Ubuntu, such shops are iconic and indexical as places where newly arrived people feel welcomed.

The stories highlighted previously paint a positive picture of how speakers of African languages contribute to the social and economic well-being of their communities, despite the marginalisation of their languages. It is the social value of these languages that plays an important role in fostering healthy and resilient communities, which leads to economically stable communities. This echoes Ndhlovu (2019), who noted that not everything of value in people’s lives has economic value and that, in this case, the value is in the African language-mediated wisdoms about honesty, good moral nature, hospitality, respectfulness, courage, forgiveness, kindness, generosity, compassion and caring for the land and nature (not seeking to extract economic value from it). One would therefore hope that with continued heritage language activism, like we are doing here, these languages will become visible and recognised in the Global North’s market economy. A looming problem, however, is that the active users of these languages are adults who naturally acquired the languages from their home countries. A key area of heritage language activism that evolved from our research interests is the LangDentity language school we mentioned earlier. The LangDentity project focuses on teaching African languages and cultures to young African children born and raised in Australia.

Heritage Language Maintenance and Social Resilience

Our discussion on heritage language maintenance and social resilience focuses on LangDentity and its role in providing heritage language training in Shona and Ndebele in Australia. The vignettes presented here are from fieldnote compilations of conversations Thembi had with Zimbabwean background parents in relation to the importance and viability of the LangDentity project and its objectives in the context of Australia.

Most young people born in Australia or who migrated as toddlers find no relevance or need to learn their heritage language as everything they need is accessible in English. Eyane’s sentiments regarding her heritage language illustrate this when she said:

I associate (language) with a way of doing things, just domestic stuff, I don’t think I hold too much of an attachment to it apart from this . . . everywhere else my day-to-day life is in English.

On the other hand, the few who feel they have been disadvantaged by not getting exposed to their heritage express anger and embarrassment, as shown in Thando's outburst:

I'm angry at my parents for not teaching me the language when I was young. It's so embarrassing that I can't share anything about my culture with my friends, worse with my boyfriend . . . they also grew up here (in Australia) but know a lot about their heritage cultures.

It is apparent that, while some parents have used home-grown measures to maintain their languages, some have failed, despite promotions by the Community Language Schools program funded by the Australian government. In Wang et al. (2023), we discuss parental emotions with regards to language maintenance and conclude that the Australian monolingual mind-set (Clyne, 2008) and multilingualism systems that marginalise African languages and contribute to unsuccessful language maintenance. Some of the systemic challenges are captured in these statements:

Have you ever seen a job advertisement in Shona or heard of any job interview where one's Shona skills set them apart from other interviewees? Everything is done in English here, so be realistic; those language lessons won't add value to our children.

It doesn't feel right to be paying that much for my children to learn our mother tongue. I heard that other weekend schools are free.

We face a paradox: on the one hand, the evidence discussed in the preceding paragraphs shows African languages sustaining the social and economic markets. On the other hand, some speakers of heritage languages believe that their languages are of no value. According to Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021), these sentiments reflect the coloniality of language, whereby colonial languages, like English, have eroded the African languages and values of Ubuntu in favour of the Eurocentric values that focus on quantitative – economic value. This goes back to the colonial agenda and its intent to weaken the social fabric of the communities they invaded by presenting European languages, including English, as the only key to success. To date, most former British colonies believe that their local languages have no value and thus strive to excel in acquiring and using the 'valued' English language at the expense of their heritage languages.

Pioneering research on language maintenance has long shown that failure to maintain languages leads to the death of cultural heritage, wisdom and identity (Fishman et al., 1966; Fishman, 1972). Our *emic* (insider positions) in the African diaspora have allowed us to observe some consequences

of an identity crisis, such as family dysfunction and mental health issues in young people. This goes against the Australian Settlement policies, which seek to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being of all ages” in line with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). It is for these social and health reasons that the coloniality of language cannot be left unchallenged.

In the next section, we highlight this problem and suggest a re-imagining of language policy and planning regimes within the Community Language Schools provision in ways that will facilitate the process of carving a niche for African languages both within the continent and globally. We show how unlocking and leveraging these non-economic yet significant forms of social capital have the potential to decolonise the Global North market economy.

The State of Community Language Schools among African Communities

When compared to other English-speaking nations, Australia is regarded as a leader in the provision of community language services (Edwards, 2004). However, this status has plateaued after coming a long way and needs to continue to evolve to include emerging languages such as African languages. Historically, Community Languages Schools began as informal after-hours Ethnic Schools operated by migrants who sought to maintain their languages in an era where Australian authorities had imposed a ban on the use of migrant languages. Thus, although heritage language maintenance strategies have been in place since 1857, they were formally established as Community Language Schools in response to Lo Bianco’s (1987) National Policy on Languages. This policy, which included provisions for the maintenance and development of languages other than English, came about as a result of the 70s and 80s professional and community activism for language and social justice (Borland & Mphande, 2009). These schools operate as complementary providers of language education to mainstream schools and receive funding through the Australian Government’s School Language Programme, whereby the registration, accreditation and funding processes are strictly regulated by each State and Territory Department of Education (Community Languages Australia, 2023). Currently, Community Language Schools offer programs for approximately 1,400 community languages nationally. Unfortunately, only a handful of those are African languages (Somali, Yoruba, Shona, Ndebele, Swahili, Akan, Dinka), a rather dismal representation compared to the various African languages spoken in Australia (Borland & Mphande, 2006). Furthermore, these languages are not registered in every state. For example, Shona and Ndebele are only officially registered in Victoria.

We attribute these low registration numbers to some systemic structures that are blind to the smaller African communities with emerging migrant languages (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012). For example, official registration requirements for a Community Language School stipulate that the school must have a minimum of 20 regular students and must meet face-to-face at a specified physical address (Community Languages Australia, 2023). This system must have been designed to cater to early migrant communities with larger populations, or they may have been designed for humanitarian and refugee background migrants who are usually settled close to each other for communal purposes. While these communities are likely to have at least 20 students attend face-to-face classes, this criterion excludes smaller communities of emerging languages, which may be sparsely settled all over the states and territories. This leaves such communities unable to officially register their schools to access government funding because they fail to tick all the boxes on the registration form. Hence, while provision is made for heritage language teaching, there remains a lack of access to this provision, enabling a sociolinguistic injustice and an undermining of the linguistic diversity and social inclusion agenda (Piller & Takahashi, 2011).

Therefore, LangDentity, a hybrid online/face-to-face language school serving an emerging community of Shona and Ndebele speakers, experienced challenges where administration was valued over language maintenance efforts. However, after two years of advocacy, lobbying and community engagements, LangDentity is now registered. The language lessons can now have a wider reach and even more positive impact on the lives of students. Positive feedback from the current parents and students attest that people with a culture and identity stand stronger and better together:

I never sat at the table to eat sadza with my children because they never loved sadza. But since they learnt about foods from Zimbabwe and did the activity on cooking sadza, they now enjoy eating sadza with me. (Mother)

Today, I asked my teacher at school if I can tell the class about tourist attractions in Zimbabwe because I think they must know that Victoria Falls is one of the wonders of the world and is found in Zimbabwe. (Student)

Thank you, I was greeted in Shona today with all the accompanying body language to show respect. (Mother)

These testimonies inspire hope. Such ethnolinguistic affirmation by our children, “our most valuable possession and our greatest potential resource” (Cress Welsing, 1991, p. 239), if maintained, augurs well for our further development in Australia.

Way Forward: Decolonising African Languages in Australia

We conclude this chapter by exploring the question of decolonisation: So how might we decolonise language and include the languages in the margins in Australia? The previous sections have shown existing Global North deficit constructions of Global South languages, with a focus on African languages in Australia and highlighted evidence of the performances and contributions of African languages and their accrual of returns with examples from both the formal and informal economies. Based on the examples we provided, the chapter joins the ongoing and existing calls within socio-linguistic research advocating for decolonising multilingualism.

First, we can begin to decolonise African languages by including the voices from the margins with epistemological and methodological inclusions that embrace their stories and their ways of doing life in their languages. By so doing, we will need to pay attention to the lenses we apply to our understanding of African languages and the spaces they occupy. Second, we call for a critical and holistic look at policy that sociolinguistic research informs by including ideas that draw attention to the stories and experiences of lesser-known languages and their speakers. As we have shown, besides the economic reprieve that community languages bring to social justice, education and health services. Policymakers should also realise that ethnic values, though non-economical, yield resilient, hence economically stable, communities. Finally, a key stance towards decolonising language systems will entail putting mechanisms in place that engage the language needs of African communities and enables them to participate in language maintenance initiatives through community language schools. Acknowledging the presence and contributions of African heritage languages in this manner can help children and the youth realise that these languages do not only have a valid position in society but they also have a place in their cultural and mental development and achievements.

In summary, the task of keeping African heritage languages going in a context where these are minority languages is big but one that is worth pursuing. Despite their relative recency in Australia (but see Pybus, 2006a, 2006b), African languages and their speakers form a part of the whole of what makes up the multilingual and multicultural Australian society (Clyne, 2011). African languages are traditional, oral-based languages, which typically means that they are used for spoken communication at home and are invisible in the public settings and the linguistic landscape in the Australian Global North context. In addition to the economic benefits discussed in this chapter, African languages are vital for the preservation of cultural and linguistic identity and for building strong connections and support networks (Hatoss & Sheely, 2009). They also help to build resilient ethnolinguistic

communities. Yet their invisibility extends to these contributions and the returns they accrue. Their invisibility is perpetuated when exclusionist and deficit discursive constructions in dominant Global North tropes go unchallenged. The periphery languages and their speakers positioned as the 'other' are making contributions to their spaces where they are the centre. Those spaces must not be disparaged because the invisible contributions add to Australia's multilingualism and multiculturalism. Admittedly, it is not easy for there to be a level playing field where every language is at the centre. But we can begin to decolonise multilingualism when we are intentional and acknowledge contributions from both the centre and periphery languages and their speakers.

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CONCLUSION

Revisiting the True Purpose of Decolonizing Knowledge

Finex Ndhlovu and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

1. Decolonizing as Method

Decolonizing as a methodology entails new approaches to research predicated on a decolonial mindset as opposed to Eurocentrism and colonialism.¹ At the centre of a decolonial mindset is openness to options while taking seriously Indigenous, African-centered, feminist, womanist and subaltern interventions and their critique of Eurocentrism, colonialism and patriarchal sexism. At the same time, a decolonial mindset is oriented towards experimentations, explorations and suspension of final answers or solutions to a problem. Questioning is taken as a medium and mode of arriving at possible answers from diverse angles, including those from Indigenous, Black, African, feminist, womanist and subaltern perspectives, which have been pushed to the margins. This is why decolonizing as a methodology requires us to concede space to other ways of knowing, to be open-minded and willing to learn from others (Ndhlovu 2021). Decolonizing as a methodology reminds us of the need to see anew to explore unfamiliar sociohistorical contexts (Hamdan 2009).

This is necessary because the methodologies, theories and traditions of knowing developed under the aegis of 19th-century colonialism “are no longer fit for the job because they are both historically and conceptually out of date” (Chabal 2012, viii). We need to think from a non-Euro-modernist and decolonial standpoint to enable us to question several assumptions that are normally taken for granted. Because internalized Euro-modernist theory often gets in the way of thinking anew, it is our thinking that we must change if we are to decentre the overbearing hegemony of the colonial

discourse successfully. For Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o (1981, 2009), this is about pushing back the frontiers of the cognitive empire: “that form of imperialism which invades the mental universe of its victims, in the process imposing particular knowledge systems, displacing others, and consequently shaping the intellectual consciousness of its victims” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019, 1). So, although the formal occupation of territorial spaces by colonial forces has ceased, the empire hasn’t gone away. Empire is still firmly resident in the minds, cultures, education systems and research agendas (Ndhlovu 2021). It is for this reason that Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o’s call in a book written four decades ago entitled *Decolonizing the Mind* (1981) remains instructive. Ngũgĩ says that decolonizing as a methodology must lead to cognitive and social justice and delink us from the empire of the mind that was enforced through what he calls ‘linguistic encirclement’ – a call that has been made repeatedly in this collection of chapters.

Decolonizing as a methodology means embracing a posture that recognizes that every body of thought is partial, incomplete and cannot – on its own – fully address the myriad societal questions. We must bring together diverse global knowledge traditions into informed conversations that recognize and value the messiness and complexity of encounters and relationships while simultaneously foreclosing endemic obsession with binaries, dichotomies and dualisms. In other words, decolonizing as a methodology invites us to puncture, disrupt and trouble the pre-eminent form for enabling colonial knowledge and re-form it as part of offering exemplars or emergent academic practice. Such alternative styles of reporting information and engaging with others might lead us to other ways of conceiving the world; decolonizing but presented in a format that breaks with the stranglehold of the normative approaches. Chapter 11 by Glenys Collard and Celeste Rodríguez Louro which uses yarnning (story-telling) as methodology is one such example of an attempt to delink from the stranglehold of normative colonial approaches.

2. Decolonizing as Alternative Epistemology

Methodology and epistemology are inextricably intertwined. With reference to alternative epistemologies, Bernd Reiter (2019) introduces the concepts of ‘fuzzy epistemology’ and ‘fuzzy realities’ as summary terms for the suite of strategies we might employ to craft alternative pathways. A fuzzy and multivalent approach to producing knowledge and its applications holds the promise of charting the next steps for decolonizing in the sense that it does not seek to force reality into a narrowly constructed sense of what it means to know. Fuzzy epistemology and fuzzy thinking are better able to capture

the complex reality “in a world where regularities are epiphenomenal at best, but never foundational” (Reiter 2019, 114). The point of greater significance here is that to make sense of the world, “we must travel and think in free-ranging patterns, not charging ahead in crazy ways” (Yunkaporta 2019, 21).

Indigenous and Southern ways of knowing showcased in the collection of chapters resonate with this key hallmark of fuzzy thinking. The contributors make no claims to absolute truth or authority but to open space for an ecology of knowledges: the co-existence of diverse knowledge traditions, which, in their totality, help us better understand our complex, fuzzy and interconnected world. As Tyson Yunkaporta, an Indigenous Australian academic, teaches us: “Indigenous thinking knows the world is complex and finds deep ways to communicate this knowledge through pictures, carvings, stories” (Yunkaporta 2019, blurb). Yunkaporta goes on to caution against simplistic categorization and one-sided dialogues in knowledge creation. Echoing the words of Francis Nyamnjoh (2017a, 2017b) on interconnections and ontologies of incompleteness, Yunkaporta (2019, 14) posits that Indigenous “knowledge endures because everybody carries a part of it, no matter how fragmentary . . . you [must] talk to everybody and listen carefully.” The robust dialogic conversations between Global Souths and Global Norths entered in this volume promote the aspirational goals of fuzzy epistemology: an invitation to partake in fuzzy and open-minded research agendas that bring back to the centre displaced and marginalized traditions of knowing, especially those from the Global Souths.

Therefore, the true purpose of decolonization discourse is choosing “to build bridges between comfort zones and discomfort zones and between the familiar in the fields of struggle and oppression” (de Sousa Santos & Meneses 2020, xviii). As Wallerstein (2004) reminds us, because the structures of knowledge are uncertain, we must continuously revisit epistemological questions, including ones that seem settled and have now crystallized into some kind of ‘common sense’ or traditional orthodoxy. What might seem like a senseless winding path is, in fact, a valid and legitimate way of making sense and figuring out how the world really works. Here, we wish to return, one more time, to the work of Tyson Yunkaporta, who has this to say about Indigenous Australian worldviews when it comes to the dichotomy of linear/non-linear thinking:

We don’t have a word for non-linear in our languages because nobody would consider travelling, thinking, or talking in a straight line in the first place. The winding path is just how a path is, and therefore it needs no name.

(Yunkaporta 2019, 21)

South African educational sociolinguist Leketi Makalela underscores a similar point in relation to the African Bantu peoples who follow an organizing principle of circumlocation – a cultural construct underpinning high levels of indirection that is highly valued (Makalela 2016, 2018). Circumlocation values an ecosystem of ideas that are holistic and integrated (inside and outside) where the environment external to the idea presented is highly valued (‘beating about the bush’). This way of making sense is dialogic in nature – derived from a cultural locus of call-response communicative patterns that fully engage the speaker/hearer as a critical and active participant in the process of meaning-making (Mothlaka & Makalela 2016). In different yet interconnected ways, contributors to this volume echo these lines of argument advanced by Indigenous and decolonial theorists. The crucial point is about embracing a ‘students of society’ approach, which requires researchers to be influenced by society in the work they do.

A student of society approach requires researchers to be

aware that the predicaments of those they research, teach and publish on are not discipline-bound or confined to a particular geographical space, and that doing them justice requires working in teams, within institutions and in local and global networks of cooperation, as well as with stakeholders beyond the ivory tower.

(Nyamnjoh 2020, 15)

This is something that all contributions to this volume have sought to do: inverting the normative ‘common-sense’ assumptions about the role of researchers in society. Both the theoretical and empirical chapters underscored the importance of learning and co-creating in partnership with diverse stakeholders in finding solutions to societal challenges. This means that although researchers have huge influence and privilege (by virtue of their expertise and disciplinary affiliations), the knowledge they hold is not the ultimate panacea for the myriad problems faced by humanity across the globe. A ‘students of society’ approach says solutions are to be found within our diverse social communities of practice, with academic/researcher expertise being only one part of the bigger picture.

3. Decolonizing as an Anchor for Convivial Frontier Scholarship

The leading African social anthropologist Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2017a, 2017b, 2020) advocates for convivial frontier scholarship as part of his advancement of decolonizing praxis. To him, convivial frontier scholarship “involves conversing and collaborating across disciplines, organisations and

communities – integrating forms of knowledge informed by popular ideas of reality. Convivial scholarship is predicated upon recognizing for incompleteness – in persons, disciplines, and traditions of knowing and knowledge-making” (Nyamnjoh 2020, blurb). It also involves mobilizing diverse knowledge traditions and professional resources to advance collaborative engagements that link our academic pursuits to public interests, including the interests of the marginalized, minorities and global Indigenous communities (Ndhlovu 2019).

The significant point is one about respectful dialogical conversation with diverse communities of practice – as equal partners – in joint projects of co-creating alternative approaches that would work for all. It is about how interconnections, interdependencies, collaboration and cooperation (not competition) give us a better chance to disrupt and unsettle the global politics of power that is endemic in academic disciplines. We need a language to explore spaces and modes of being that do not exist in the spaces of current Euro-modernist frameworks but that do exist in most other communities around the world (Ndhlovu 2021). In pursuit of this goal, this volume drew on insights from across Africa, Australia, the South Pacific, Western and Eastern Europe and Latin America to encourage interdisciplinary conversations among a diverse cohort of scholars from differing epistemological and ontological backgrounds. The volume brought into conversation the voices of literary critics, historians, sociologists, critical applied linguists, critical sociolinguists, language and literacy education specialists, creative artists and experts in Indigenous studies. The dialogic conversations among this diverse cohort of scholarly communities yielded a methodological posture that rests on frontier scholarship with its emphasis on border crossing and the unbounding and fusing of identities, epistemologies, ontologies and world views.

In frontier scholarship, “everyone and everything is malleable, flexible and blendable” (Nyamnjoh 2017a, 258). Thus, frontier scholarship contests and disrupts those taken-for-granted and often institutionalized ideas and practices that ring fence and provincialize disciplines and research agendas: everyone collaborates and co-creates with everyone in search for alternative pathways that transcend dualistic assumptions about reality and scholarship that are the legacy of the Euro-modernist imperial scientific tradition. When applied to language studies, a frontier perspective looks at languages as constituting concentric circles of continua with varying degrees of relatedness (Makoni 2003). This entails looking at languages through a prism that challenges and unsettles the notion of languages as self-enclosed partitions. Through working based on interconnectedness, the metaphor of frontiers enables us to talk about speakers’ language repertoires as opposed to the ‘number’ of discrete language-things that a speaker supposedly moves in

and out of (Fardon & Furniss 1994; Ridge 2000; Makoni 2003). In other words, conceptions of language as interconnected patterns, frontiers and scrambled systems hold the promise of delinking the present social scientific enterprise from the overwhelming hold of the past (read, colonial models).

4. Decolonizing as Acknowledgement of Incompleteness as a State of Being

The idea of incompleteness is advanced by Nyamnjoh (2017a, 2017b), and he deploys it in his contributions to the decolonizing of knowledge. In *Drinking from the Cosmic Gourd* (2017b), Nyamnjoh draws on Amos Tutuola's intellectual and literary tradition to introduce a project that is anchored on the triumvirate of incompleteness, conviviality and interconnectedness. The significant point is one about why – in a world peopled by infinite possibilities, tastes and value systems – we are much better off working together and reaching compromises because our ideas are incomplete without the ideas of others. This is because there are no final answers to any problem, but only permanent questions and ever-exciting new angles of questioning (Nyamnjoh 2017b, 6–7) that call for collective creative imagination. Echoing the ontology of incompleteness thesis, contributors to this volume have argued in support of the promises that an ecology of knowledges paradigm holds for articulating the possibilities of decolonized epistemological pluralism in our conversations on the role and place of language in society.

The ecology of knowledges paradigm “is founded on the idea that knowledge is interknowledge. It is based on the recognition of the plurality of heterogeneous knowledges and on the sustained and dynamic interconnections between them without compromising their autonomy” (de Sousa Santos 2007, 66). This is about confronting and challenging the epistemological dominance of Western modern science, which has crystallized into some kind of global/universal orthodoxy. Ndhlovu and Kelly (2020) suggest that the critique of the hegemony of Western scientific thought is ubiquitous across a wide range of fields, such as postcolonial studies, critical race, world systems, Indigenous studies, development studies, sociology and critical applied linguistics (Andreotti et al. 2011, 40). A crucial point at the centre of the debate is one about unsettling a pedagogical posture that assumes that Western mainstream culture and knowledges are the global norms toward which all other (marginalized or peripheral) forms of knowledges and cultures of learning must gravitate (Battiste 2004; Ndhlovu & Kelly 2020). For Ndhlovu and Kelly (2020), this ideological habit that universalizes dominant epistemologies overlooks two crucial points. First,

throughout the world, there are very diverse forms of knowledge of matter, society, life and spirit. Second, there are many and very diverse concepts of what counts as knowledge and the criteria that may be used to validate and legitimate forms of knowledge (Ndhlovu & Kelly 2020). This points to the impossibility of a singular, unified, universal and general epistemology that is always relevant to all contexts throughout the world. The challenge of inclusion and visibility implicated here can be overcome “as long as we drop the search for totality and recognize that we are always speaking from situated, and therefore limited, perspectives” (Jordão 2020, 840). All contributors to this volume make this line of argument loud and clear, with relevant theoretical and empirical illustrations.

At the centre of the debate is the fundamental point about the existence of diverse and multiple ways of socially experiencing science, which must be integrated into one another in a judicious way. The ecology of knowledges paradigm advanced in this collection of chapters proceeds from two social and cultural developments. The first is about the new political emergence of peoples and worldviews from societies in the periphery of the Western modern world system where the links between modern science and the designs of colonial and imperial domination exist side by side with other ‘non-scientific’/non-Western epistemologies that prevail in people’s everyday practices. The second is the unprecedented rise of alternatives that cannot be brought together under the banner of a single, unified global alternative (de Sousa Santos 2007, 2014; Shi-xu 2014). It is under these circumstances that the ecology of knowledges paradigm provides epistemological consistency in ways that accord with pluralistic thinking in our globalized yet culturally diverse world. This is at the heart of the discourse and praxis of decolonizing language, as projected in the contributions that constitute this volume.

Conclusion

The late Nobel Prize Laureate and critical literary scholar Toni Morrison (2019) once asked in relation to the field of African American Studies: “What is the true purpose of the discourse?” This pertinent question exercised the minds of contributors to this volume in the context of their explorations of decolonizing languages and cultures. The contributors adopted critical approaches that demonstrate what decolonizing languages might look like in scholarly, theoretical and practical terms. What is distinctive about this volume is that it revisits those foundational questions that have always been at the heart of the decolonization initiatives and struggles. The concluding chapter highlights how decolonizing is, *ipso facto*, a movement and a

discourse that seeks to subvert Eurocentric epistemology and the ontologies it enabled so as to counterbalance, pluralize, and, in doing so, overcome the universalizing habits of colonial discourses and hegemonic epistemology (Shi-xu and Pardo 2016). Decolonizing aspires to be an option that opens the way for new imaginations of freedom from universalizing postures. It is an approach that is opposed to the colonizers' model of the world in which rapprochements among the multiple ways in which diverse global societies and civilizations read and interpret the world were closed. The volume reminds us that in reframing our struggle for new futures beyond the colonizers' model of the world, we must emphasize possibilities of existing otherwise, rethinking, unthinking, unlearning and relearning within a context in which the knowledges that have carried and driven the modern world for the past five hundred years has plunged us into a civilizational crisis. To come out of this civilizational crisis there is an urgent need for recovery, mobilization and deployment of other knowledges. The 20 chapters that constitute this volume capture the kind of posture, attitude and action we need in pushing forward the agenda of resistance, refusal, resurgence and a re-existence otherwise.

Note

- 1 See Contour 4 for more on the student of society approach to decolonizing.

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AFTERWORD

Decoloniality and the Politics of Southern Voices

1. Setting the Decolonial Stage

Following the structure of the book that is organised around two main parts – one theoretical and the other empirical and applicative – we start our discussion by highlighting the importance of the notion of praxis, in line with the ideas of Paulo Freire (2000: 51) for whom praxis means “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.” This means we avoid the modernist split between theory and practice that commonly underlies Northern epistemologies and methodologies that have pushed Southern voices into the background by transforming (i) the South into raw materials for research; and (ii) the relationship between Northern and Southern researchers into a form of intellectual and physical exploitation (Makoni et al. 2023). In general terms, exploitation as an economic, political, ethical and epistemological form of domination characterizes both colonialism and the emergence of an idea of modernity, as framed by Mignolo (2007: 472):

By the end of the seventeenth century, when the ego-politics of knowledge was affirming itself and modernity/coloniality was entering the “new age” of Enlightenment, in the linear history of Christian Europe, the exploitation of the reaches of the New World (mines and plantations) was in full bloom and with it the slave trade from Africa.

The idea of race and the “birth of the racial subject” are also a product of capitalism (Mbembe 2017: 179). Together with them, several forms and levels of violence and vulnerabilities were produced and multiplied, such as the objectification and dehumanization of black people, as pointed out by

Fanon (1967) in the notion of a zone of non-being, and the production of the racial ladder, as signaled by Asante (2023).

Dehumanizing also includes a politics of silencing, invisibility and inaudibility. This is why the intellectual, activist and psychiatrist Franz Fanon considered language as a key element in the process of liberation and colonial cure. For him, the condition of speaking cannot be reduced to the reproduction of structural elements of language. It is about connecting oneself to a certain frame of reference, to memory and to an idea of community and belonging: “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (Fanon 1986: 17). This also includes music, dance, drawing and several other forms of communication and expression. It is not by chance that Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o (1986) explored the role of African literature, theater and fiction. By defending the use of African languages, which includes aesthetic genres, Wa Thiong’o (1986: 87) claims a “quest of relevance,” which means a liberating project “within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe.” Similarly, Paul Gilroy considered black music as a powerful tool of communication and subjectification in colonial and post-colonial eras:

The power of music in developing black struggles by communicating information, organising consciousness, and testing out or deploying the forms of subjectivity which are required by political agency, whether individual or collective, defensive or transformational, demands attention to both the formal attributes of this expressive culture and its distinctive *moral* basis.

(Gilroy 1993: 36)

In line with that, we argue that songs may contribute to expanding the (Southern) framework of what counts as language and communication (Severo & Makoni 2021). Another example includes considering Southern patterns of interactional practices with implications as to how languages are framed from the perspective of conversational analysis, as stated by Ameka and Terkourafi (2019) regarding African ways of conversing, which includes the following elements: opaqueness, obscurity, ambiguity, long-windedness and circuitousness, contrary to Grice’s cooperative principles and its “western-centrism” (Ameka & Terkourafi 2019: 76).

We explore a critical perspective in the following interconnected sections: Blackness and Afrocentricity as voices of the South and shifting the geography of sociolinguistic reasoning toward a new ethics of relation.

2. Blackness and Afrocentricity as Voices of the South

Our critical perspective also draws upon the work of Mbembe by focusing on the categories of Blackness and race as “open-ended signifiers” (2017: 6), which help us comprehend how power relations have historically been shaped, transformed, evolved and subverted. This means that if, on one side, colonialism/modernity/capitalism invented the idea of “Black” as inferior or non-human, on the other hand, this term signals a vibrant source of energy and possibilities. Similarly, the idea of the South includes historical relations of exploitation and dehumanization as well as a source of creativity and imagination. We thus follow Connell’s (2023: 2) definition of Southern theory:

Think of Southern theory as a tremendously rich and varied outpouring of contributions to human thought, born from the violent and troubled history of empires and colonialism, still being enriched today by many thinkers, and you will get close to the heart of the idea.

Since North-South constitutes a dialectical relationship, going through the journey toward Southern views and practices may also contribute to a process of rehabilitation of the Global Norths (Ndhlovu & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, this volume).

By exploring the dual meanings of domination and transgression inscribed in the notions of Blackness and South, we intend to contribute to a decolonial attitude in the field of language and communication studies, as has been explored by scholars in this volume and in other similar recent publications (Deumert & Makoni 2023; Makoni et al. 2022; Makoni & Severo 2022; Ndhlovu & Makalela 2021; Pennycook & Makoni 2020; Deumert et al. 2020). The notion of Blackness includes the following aspects (Mbembe 2017: 6): it is an existential sign; it designates a “heterogeneous, multiple, and fragmented world”; it covers historical destructive events and experiences; it covers wounds and scars; it signals to a capacity of reinvention and transgression; it is a “symbol of a conscious desire for life.” By engaging with Southern epistemology, on the one hand, we face the devastating consequences of coloniality and exploitation in knowledge production; on the other hand, we create space for a continuous process of revision, reinvention and creation that includes the historically excluded voices and modes of knowing, sharing and learning. This means we – Southern scholars – connect ourselves with an ongoing process of self-knowledge by questioning power relations and expanding, recovering and reinventing old/new ways of framing language

and communication. This includes interrogating our training in linguistics and applied linguistics:

What does it mean for us, today, as linguists, to work in a discipline that has been shaped in significant ways by colonialism? How has this history affected our practices and concepts, our theories, knowledges, and epistemes? Do we, in the twenty-first century, want to continue doing linguistics in ways that were scripted for us in the nineteenth-century Europe? (*Deumert et al.* 2020: 4)

By raising such questions, we face the logics of knowledge production in the West that have historically erased or overlooked non-European modes of knowing, sharing and learning. One example is how Africa and African history and subjects have been systematically ignored. In relation to it, Asante (2023: 66) points out how the pan-European academy has built and kept its own “guardians, deans, guardrails, protocols and regulations that substantially emphasize[s] a white cultural and racial supremacy.” This means that we are dealing with a powerful industry that regulates the regimes of truth in our societies. In this context, resistance also includes our capacity to set and maintain solitary intellectual networks, such as those suggested by Pennycook and Makoni (this volume). One example of how knowledge production can be affected by a new “ethic of relation” (Asante 2023: 67) is the notion of Afrocentricity, which connects the history of human knowledge with African history, which includes: (i) considering the role of Egypt as a founding intellectual and ideological ground; (ii) breaking down the hegemony of the European notion of truth and history; (iii) expanding our sense of what counts as communication and human society; (iv) avoiding classifying the world in terms of pre and post-colonial eras as if colonialism were the only “tag for periodizing African history” (Asante 2023: 72); and (v) dismantling the racial paradigm that supports the racial ladder in knowledge production, dissemination and appropriation.

We also focus on the idea of autonomy in the process of Southern knowledge production, which implies dealing with the continuous traps of reproducing the same Northern logics, as pointed out by Mbembe in relation to the process of self-recognition faced by the “Black Man/Woman”: “At what point does the project of a radical uprising in search of autonomy in the name of difference turn into a simple mimetic inversion of what was previously showered with malediction?” (Mbembe 2017: 7). We understand that the decolonial project of autonomy is a political one, based on collective dialogue, commitment, responsibility and recognition. This is the opposite of “Oppressive regimes [that] seek [to] rule over politics” (Gordon 2020: 22).

From a political and ethical perspective, language and communication are key tools because they allow us to reframe our representations and modes of saying, narrating and acting in and upon the world (Makoni & Severo 2022; Hardt and Negri 2009). This requires that we shift our geography of reason, which also includes “shifting the geography of knowledge production” (Gordon 2020: 132) about language and communication.

The Northern theory-practice dualism is invariably geopolitically converted into a subject-object relationship, where one side is seen as a theory builder and the “Other” as “data.” One procedural way of making the Southern voice invisible is the disciplinary mechanism of “datafication” (Sadowski 2019). It is one of the key objectives of decolonial sociolinguistics to reconceptualize, from Southern perspectives, this extractionist relationship by interrogating the Northern ethics of material construction and conceptual regimes of analysis. This can be achieved effectively if researchers occupy a grassroots locus of articulation and employ non-extractionist methods of inquiry. This volume has appropriately ticked this box. For example, the chapter by Collard and Louro engaged in a form of epistemic and methodological disobedience when they refused to use the Western canonical genre of interview recording to “collect data” from members of the First Nation in Australia. Rather, they opted for “relational” modes of material construction, which, in their words, “honoured First Nations ways of being and doing in the world.”

3. The Politics of Language Studies: Shifting the Geography of Sociolinguistic Reasoning

What is at stake here is the disciplinary concept of “the expert,” which is framed from within extractionist methodologies of generative linguistics, applied linguistics and language documentation. The structure of sociopolitical relations in the world is shaped by the idea of the “expert,” and this relation of domination is reflected in the student-teacher relation in undergraduate programs of linguistics (presupposed units of analysis, theories, etc.). For example, as Riemer (2023) showed, the unique form of hypothesis which indicates that there is an embodied essence in linguistic complexity is secured by the notion of the linguistic expert. The immediate question is how can this Platonic singularity within linguistics reflect/refract and enact sociopolitical imaginaries? One compelling answer is that the ideological singularity of the object of linguistics is embedded in the monoglot ideology of the modern nation-state as an “imagined community” in Anderson’s (1991) sense (Pratt 1986). To avoid this ideological trap of universal singularity, Makoni and Pennycook (this

volume) grounded their argument in the notion of language ontologies: “Languages are not local instantiations of a universal and invariant category of language, but potentially different things assembled out of local resources, stories, and relations to land, water and history.” Concepts such as monolingualism, multilingualism and code-switching could only be understood as a result of this colonial ideology of language. Some communicative patterns of interaction in the Global Souths, which we analyze as instances of bilingual code-switching may be viewed by their users as their default media of communication, i.e., they do not see themselves as code-switching (Gafaranga 2007). We agree with Makoni and Pennycook (this volume) that the discourses of language endangerment which view “heritage languages” or “minority languages” as threatened by hegemonic languages operate within the same framework of “invented multilingualism” (see also Ndhlovu & Makalela 2021). Banda and Mambwe (this volume) are correct in suggesting reworking or reconstituting the concept of multilingualism from a Southern perspective.

In colonial monoglot ideologies, language (as a named code) predates communication, and it is upon this ideological assumption that national and official language (educational) policies are developed. In other words, the machinery of language planning and policy is formulated from a colonial ideology of language. Neoliberal imperial language policies are more effective when they are dressed up in an anti-colonial discourse. The Islamist language policies in Tunisia (see R'boul, this volume) and Sudan are telling cases in point (Abdelhay et al. 2011). If language is a product of communication, then the decolonial perspective should rethink language policies without “languages.” Besides, although a decolonial lens recognizes the existence of “indigenous languages,” the concept should be viewed as a discursive variable since their value and force depend on the language epistemologies within which they are formulated and ordered. This point was succinctly captured by Mudrooroo (1995 cited in Pennycook 1998: 5) when he argued that the “construction of the Indigenous person in Australia is in the main a matter of discourse, of language, and if we are to gain a glimpse of the reality existing as a trace within the language we must seek to deconstruct it.” In some conditions, post-Independence language policies which constitutionalize colonially constituted “indigenous languages” could promote linguistic imperialism through what is Orientalistically “imagined” as an indigenous/local practice (Abdelhay et al. 2011).

A similar observation extends to the concept of “native speaker/mother tongue.” Our problem is not with the concept itself but with the Western theoretical universe of linguistic purity in which it is indexed, idealized,

racialized and commodified. De Korne (2017: 111) articulated this entangled relation in the following interesting words:

Purist ideologies of language and culture – fostered and encouraged by nationstates and formal schooling in the interest of homogenisation – have become deeply embedded in language-related disciplines, including documentary linguistics, applied linguistics, and education. As a result, dialect variation, multilingual repertoires, and intergenerational change are often viewed as problems by linguists and educators, who promote an elusive monolingual speaker norm which risks excluding learners and multilingual speakers.

Shifting the geography of sociolinguistic reasoning could render a radically different conception of “native speakerhood” (e.g., Suleiman 2014). One of the powerful concepts which has recently been integrated into decolonial thinking to liberate us from the “monolingual native speaker” as the standard locus of orientation is “translanguaging” (Banda & Mambwe, this volume; García & Wei 2014). Although translanguaging studies have fundamentally reshaped the field of bilingualism, we have yet to witness translanguaging as a medium of knowledge production and not just as a decolonial perspective. Makalela (2016) has further rethought the concept of translanguaging within the Ubuntu philosophy to disengage the concept from any shades of individualism. However, the question still remains as to whether the notion of Ubutu translanguaging is still too linguistic.

Public or disciplinary discourses of linguistic anxiety are not strictly about functional communicative concerns but rather about deep-seated (extralinguistic) sociopolitical issues (Suleiman 1999). Symbolic language anxiety is a way of doing politics by the proxy of linguistics (ibid). Similarly, Duchene and Heller (2007: 4) noted that “discourses of language endangerment are fundamentally discourses about other kinds of threats, which take place, for specific reasons, on the terrain of language.” It is in this sense that metaphorical concepts such as “language wars” and “threatened/endangered languages” are misleading since they are fundamentally imagined through the liberal ideology of “counting languages,” which views diversity as a source or cause of social disintegration and conflict. However, this does not mean or imply that language is a “neutral” medium of communication; rather, it is always implicated in conflicts, whether functionally or indexically, as a site of identity politics in games of power relations (Suleiman 1999).

As Perley (2012: 133) succinctly noted, “the expert” as a geopolitical location in the field of linguistics is an effect of a systemic process of converting the embodied and embedded communicative speakers of

non-European languages into “zombie voices”: “[U]ndead voices that are disembodied and techno-mechanized. They are cursed with being neither dead nor alive. They become artefacts of technological interventions, as well as expert valorisations of linguistic codes.” For indigenous peoples, it does not make sense to see professional linguists of documentation and revitalization studies moving around saving “disembodied things” called languages (McCarty 2017). Currently, Southern voices and epistemologies are stringently regulated and excluded through the editorial use of algorithmic metrics of “bibliometric coloniality” (Mills et al. 2023) which depends on “the politics of citation” (Abdelhay et al. 2023). Nowadays, in a number of universities in the South, a published piece is generally (de)valued by promotion committees according to the Scopus ranking of the journal in which it is published.

The politics of citation is systematically linked with the politics of voice. For example, the “voice” of political struggles and resistance movements in the Souths can be tamed and subdued through cultural re-entextualization or re-appropriation and retranslation performed through Orientalizing discourses of representation. The sacred applied linguistic rule of “language in use” is strategically de-universalized by this Eurocentric metapragmatic regime. For example, it is remarkable that peoples in the Arab world and North Africa named their political struggles which broke out at the end of 2010 “revolutions” ثورات; however, this actual usage is generally expunged or negated in Western media discourses by using a different vocabulary (the Arab Spring) to refer to the “same” political dynamics (Abdelhay et al. 2021). The issue here is not a matter of a different epistemological representation of the “same reality” but rather a matter of a different ontological reality that the Western imperial discourse could not reconcile with its negative view of the “Orient” (El-Affendi & Al-Anani 2023). Bluntly, Western revolutions such as the French Revolution are used as the geopolitical template to define what counts as a “revolution” in the Souths. Shifting ways of speaking is never a matter of “saying the same thing in a different way.” A way of speaking enacts an ideologized version of reality, particularly when this ideology is consecrated and circulated through globalized registers of communication such as English. Suleiman (1999: 10) illustrated this point by reference to ideological labels used to conceptualize Zionist settler colonialism:

[T]he terms West Bank and Gaza, the occupied territories, Arab occupied lands, Palestinian occupied lands, the territories occupied by Israel, the territories, the Israeli administered territories, lands which came under Israeli control in 1967 and Judaea and Samaria are all ideological ways of speaking.

Acts of translation and interpreting are always situated within specific ideologies of language and entangled with relations of power, material interests and subjectivities. For example, translation practices can regiment, naturalize and transform the hegemony of gendered, racialized, nationalistic and monolingual ideologies of the dominant group (Nakamura 2023; Flores 2023). Due to the monoglot mindset, official translation or interpreting is informed by a metaphysical conception of language, which reduces communication to a linear process of meaning transfer from one brain to another. What is erased in this instrumentalist ideology of translation, particularly when access to legal interpreting is controlled, is the historical indexical “voice” of the accused (see Rusho, this volume).

The mainstream modern linguistics also expunged the contribution of the peripheral Southern historical trajectories and voices in the construction of the standard language of the empire by mobilizing a conceptual apparatus based on the false dualism of prescriptivism vs. descriptivism (Windle & Nascimento, this volume). Descriptivism involves a straightforward implementation of ahistorical criteria to determine what counts as “a language.” Thus, descriptivism disempowers by turning linguists into technicians. Unsurprisingly, descriptivism views activism and scholarship as a contradiction in terms. However, as Windle and Nascimento (this volume) noted, this contradiction does not arise in scholar-activist discourse since language for the activists is, to use Joseph’s (2006: 17) terms, “political from top to bottom.”

4. An Open-Ended Conclusion

As we write now, there is an ongoing mainstreamed genocidal war on the Gaza Strip launched by the Zionist colonial regime explicitly supported by the USA and Western powers. This genocidal war has vindicated the decolonial argument in two ways. First, by appropriating the protesting description by the South African scholar-activist Catherine Kell, the indiscriminate mass killing in Gaza has revealed that we are living in a crisis of humanity and not a humanitarian crisis. The struggle for “a decolonial humanism” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016) is more badly needed now than ever before. Second, the fact that it is South Africa, which brought the case of genocide to the International Court of Justice and requested provisional measures, including the immediate cease-fire, supports Wa Thiong’o’s (1986) decolonial transcultural argument against all forms of colonial encirclements. This is why the politics of Southern voices require that we engage with a new ethics of relations that can shift the geography of reason and dismantle the racial ladder.

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