

# Language Matters Portfolio

## Introducing Humanity-Centric Language: An Inclusive Framework for the Development of an Anti-Racist Curriculum

This resource was developed by and for Scottish tertiary institutions as a sector-led and co-produced resource

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You just look like you've got a tan.  
Do you have hair under your hijab?  
Do people eat insects in your country?  
I just don't see colour.  
I don't think of you as black.

# Call it racism.

**#CallItRacism**



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## Language Matters in the Anti-Racist Curriculum (ARC)

“Each set of demands” for “‘real’ education” – from *The 1905 Niagara Movement Speech* to *The 1966 Black Panther Party Platform* all the way to *The 2016 Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice in the Movement for Black Lives*, among others – “is in fact calling for the recognition of the humanity of Blacks, on the one hand, and the removal of the misrecognition that leads in every age to an education unworthy of them and their future, on the other.”

Kal Alston  
Philosophies of Race, Justice and Education, 2021

## Introduction

Language, as the systematic use of codes and symbols (verbal, written and body gestures) by humans to communicate with each other (Kim, 2003), has a powerful impact on culture, identity and the development of communities and societies. In The Language Matters Working Group of the Anti-Racist Curriculum (ARC) Project, we address the power of language within the practice of Higher and Further Education (HE/FE) as it relates to building a diverse, empowered community of learners and to developing the foundations of anti-racist curricula and practices. Through a range of blogs, provocations, case studies and think pieces, we outline why language matters, explore the complexities of language, and introduce the Framework for Humanity-Centric Language (HCL), a radical approach inextricably connected to the development of an anti-racist curriculum — and more.

The purpose of the HCL framework is to support an anti-racist environment, culture, and curriculum. Adopting this framework will have three essential outcomes. Firstly, the curricula will be more reflective of the world in which we live, de-centering Western paradigms as the primary source of all knowledge. Secondly, student and staff experiences will be enhanced

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**Introducing the Framework for Humanity-Centric Language (HCL), a radical approach inextricably connected to the development of an anti-racist curriculum — and more”**

due to an environment that is safe for and embraces all participants. Thirdly, practices in HE/FE (e.g. teaching and learning activities, engagement initiatives, research activities, leadership and management) will support the learning aspirations of all within the sector.

## The Framework: Introducing Humanity-Centric Language (HCL)

### Humanity-Centric Language: A Definition

Humanity-Centric Language (HCL) is a proactive approach to the use of language within anti-racist curriculum work. HCL captures the spirit of an anti-racist curriculum as conceptualised by the ARC project. In encouraging and embracing a plurality of voices and narratives, HCL challenges the monolingual, English hegemony within UK HE/FE practice while creating an equitable learning environment for staff and students.

### Humanity-Centric Language recognises non-verbal communication as an explicit purveyor of meaning

HCL recognises that non-verbal communication is linguistic transmission of information that broadcasts our feelings and intentions. Estimates place non-verbal communication as the vessel of between 50-70 percent of all communication. Furthermore, research suggests that subtle patterns of non-verbal behaviour that are widespread often influence racial bias.



### *Humanity-Centric Language liberates the entire community*

Placing HCL at the core of learning is essential for reshaping systems of learning to meet the needs of a diverse community of people via an anti-racist curriculum.

**HCL is grounded in the recognition of the humanity of every individual.**

**HCL undergirds anti-racist curricula. It is about honesty in histories, fairness in assessment, including a range in topics discussed, genuine diversity of sources, highlighting the full range of contributions to a discipline, respecting differences in accents, accounting for differences in cultures across the globe, and providing all persons equitable access to rich, cognitively demanding opportunities to learn.**

**HCL does not work in the service of empires or act as propaganda for industries, governments or special interests; it aims at supporting a liberatory and equitable present and future for all.**



## The Core Dimensions of Humanity-Centric Language

Humanity-Centric language has these **four core dimensions**:

### 1. Asset-view of students

Viewing all students as being capable of transformative learning, that translates into actively seeking to counter deficit views of students rooted in racial bias and/or other forms of prejudice, and overturning the oppressive force of such views on students' self-understanding.

### 2. Power-consciousness

Understanding the role of power, privilege and oppression in any teaching/learning context. This includes understanding whose voices and which ways of knowing are socially privileged. In practice, it includes working *with* students to make power, privilege and oppression transparent, and also to critique and transform situations of injustice.

### 3. Building Community

Ensuring that teachers, students and others within the tertiary educational context are reflecting on their own limitations and actively seeking to understand whose voices are being left out, and who, if anyone, is being silenced. Building community has the central aim of supporting each person (staff or student) to see themselves as a "citizen" of a growing democratic, inclusive community. Such a community is one in which each person **feels heard** – that is, feels that their presence as a person is valued.

### 4. Epistemic Justice

Having awareness of the colonialist, imperialist and patriarchal forces of domination that have informed knowledge systems and the production of knowledge within disciplines. In practice, this means making epistemic injustices **transparent** to students and empowering students and staff to critique these and work towards bringing in an 'ecology of knowledges' to bear on the further development of the given field of knowledge.

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... working **with** students  
to make power, privilege  
and oppression transparent ...”

## Getting Started: Incorporating HCL in your Anti-Racist Practice

### Action 1 – Personal reflection on the use of language in teaching and interactions

This action calls for academics to reflect on their own positionality and how that is influential in their HE/FE practice. The reflection has the objective of identifying points for professional development with respect to anti-racist curriculum development. This can begin by reviewing the use of language in their practice, and creating a personal action plan for making their language and teaching practice humanity-centric.

### Action 2 – Team discussions on the use of language in a course or programme

Curriculum development and delivery is a team effort in tertiary education. Therefore, this action calls for teams at course, programme or departmental level to take the time to collaborate with academics, students, teaching directors, quality assurance managers, support staff and others involved to identify areas for the development of HCL, a team vision around creating HCL in their context, and a timeline for building HCL and anti-racist curriculum into their practice.

### Action 3 – Institutional discussions on the use of language

This action calls for institutional-wide reviews, for example, as part of the ILIR (Internal-led Institutional Review) or the ELIR (Enhancement-led Institutional Review) that include representatives from all internal and external stakeholders, for identifying best practice of HCL and anti-racist curriculum development and delivery within the institution. On this basis, sessions for sharing practice, and creating institutional strategies for supporting professional development in HCL, for embedding HCL into policy, and for encouraging HCL in teaching, learning, administration, management and all other areas of practice.

The HCL Framework and the supporting sections of this portfolio serve to support all to take these actions in their own context.

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## Think Piece 1: Setting the Context: Empowering Language as part of an Anti-Racist Curriculum



In the UK, we are proud to call ourselves a multi-cultural society, but the way people who do not fit a narrow definition of citizen or resident are treated by institutions challenges this categorisation. Several systemic practices are effective in reducing their culture and experience to caricatures or erasing them and their contribution altogether. Tertiary education as a tool of socialisation can reinforce this inequality in several ways.

First, the disciplinary decisions over whose contributions to elevate or recognise often centres white and Western parties. Secondly, the paradigmatic approach of science can erase or minimise lessons learnt from lived experience under the banner of the search for objective truth. This can be a form of erasure that disproportionately affects members of the community who are not white, male, upper class and heterosexual. Thirdly and relatedly, the language used in teaching and other forms of interpersonal interaction can dehumanise vast sections of the global population and cause students and staff to feel unwelcome in HE/FE and in the wider UK society.

To combat this systemic practice of exclusion and the erasure of the majority of the world's population from an education system that touts its international or global credentials, the focus must be on creating an anti-racist curriculum that goes beyond concepts of diversity and inclusion to actively deconstructing practices created for the sole purpose of supporting inequality and oppression. This includes deconstructing practices in teaching and assessment, which we discuss in our [Case Study Series, Provocations](#) and [Think Piece 4: A Reflection on HCL in Assessment](#).

HE/FE practitioners, including curriculum managers, managers of teaching and learning quality, and lecturers, must do the work to understand the range of previous learning experiences and learning contexts that the diverse students entering the UK institution have taken part in. These students could be from diverse racial or class backgrounds within the UK or from countries in the so-called global South who are often actively sought out by UK institutions to fulfil internationalisation agendas. Such students are then

subjected to a range of educational practices that categorise their ethnicities as less than human ([Case Study 1: African and Oceanic Art art tutorial](#)) and punish them for a use of language that does not match a narrowly held view of what 'standard academic English' is ([Case Study 2: Master's dissertation on Chinese students' experiences of studying in the UK](#)). Practices like these position HE/FE as a socialisation tool of inequity and exclusion.

To counter this, an anti-racist curriculum grounded in HCL addresses not only matters of curriculum content and pedagogy, but also of the creation of the environment in HE/FE that signals *belonging* for all its members regardless of their identifying characteristics or nationality. The creation of an empowering framework for Humanity-Centric Language (HCL) is proposed here as the first step to achieving the goals of an anti-racist curriculum.

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**“Racism exists on our campuses  
and in our society. Call it what it  
is and reject it in all its forms.  
We stand united against racism.”**



**This working group created the resources in this portfolio for the following three key reasons:**

- To put forward a framework for language to be the foundation of an empowering and welcoming environment, particularly for those who have suffered race-based oppression, marginalisation and disenfranchisement.
- Develop resources for personal and professional development of staff and students to support adoption of HCL and ARC within their practice.
- Inspire HE/FE practitioners to break the inequalities in structure and practice supported by current uses of language by encouraging personal, programme level and institution-wide reflection on why language matters.

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**Blog Series:****Perspectives on Why Language Matters to the Anti-Racist Curriculum****Blog 1:****Language matters to break imperial hegemony**  
by Argyro Kanaki

**Objective truth**, as far as it regards race, demonstrates that language matters. Race is a concept which signifies and symbolises social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies. As a social construct, racial representations are always in flux and situated in social and historical processes. These salient matters for race and racial discrimination are all mediated by language. Race is socially and historically constructed and shaped by discourses that give specific meanings to the ways we see the world, rather than reflecting illusory or simply misleading notions of objective, stable, and transcendent truths.

**The myth of the native speaker** influences practice and the construction of higher and further education students' views of the ideal speaker of English. Language functions here as a 'technology of erasure through cultural assimilation' (Glenn, 2015, p. 68). Particularly over the past few centuries, a great deal of language teaching and learning in the global context has been shaped by the violent, strategically manoeuvred, and racist practices of colonial expansion, especially European imperialism, white supremacy, settler colonialism, and chattel slavery.

**The hegemony of English** needs to be acknowledged in the geopolitics of scholarly publishing (Von Esch et al., 2020). Literature is sometimes available in English, but a small portion of it addresses or appears in languages other than English. We should promote the importance of review and consideration of literature multilingually to see how issues of race and language are addressed in diverse contexts. Additionally, we recognise that one unintended consequence of reviewing or reading literature published only in English is that other languages become marginalised. That is, literature about Language and Culture is predominantly available in English, and only a small portion of it takes a viewpoint from another language, especially when addressing languages other than English. Reviewing and

considering literature multilingually is an important first step in unpicking how any issues of race, anywhere, are addressed in language-diverse contexts.

**The idealised native speaker is part of racial labelling.**

Only native speakers are models for imitating. Racial hierarchies of language and language speakers support that some languages/varieties/dialects have more value than others. In education, English has become the prerequisite language as English is promoted against other languages in British society (Kanaki, 2021). Standardised English, as notionally taught in literacy, needs to be revisited and reviewed. It creates social inequalities and legitimises marginalisation. For many globally powerful languages, most notably English, the desirable language form, which becomes constructed as a 'standard,' is associated with Whiteness and colonial power (i.e. white European or white American power). It therefore plays a powerful role in maintaining white hegemony. These idealised forms of Language came to be conceptualised as 'standard' and therefore crucially instrumental in maintaining white supremacy and White hegemony (Lippi-Green, 2012).

**'Anglocentrism'** is a widespread bias in contemporary social sciences. The influence that Anglocentric discourse has on global knowledge production, research methods, and the theoretical framing of research questions, is rarely debated. Race is debated in English, capturing interpretation of experiences, providing a lens on race that is biased towards an Anglo interpretation of the world. 'Anglocentrism is nothing special at all, and at the same time, it is something truly exceptional. It adopts a very common cognitive bias called ethnocentrism, in which the norms, values, and repertoires of meaning belong to a specific group, and are imposed on other people. At the core, "Anglocentrism" is a tacit belief in the natural and neutral status of English words and meanings, and a lack of attention to the way in which such words shape and form research results, and claims we make about humanity at large' (Levisen, 2019, p. 2).

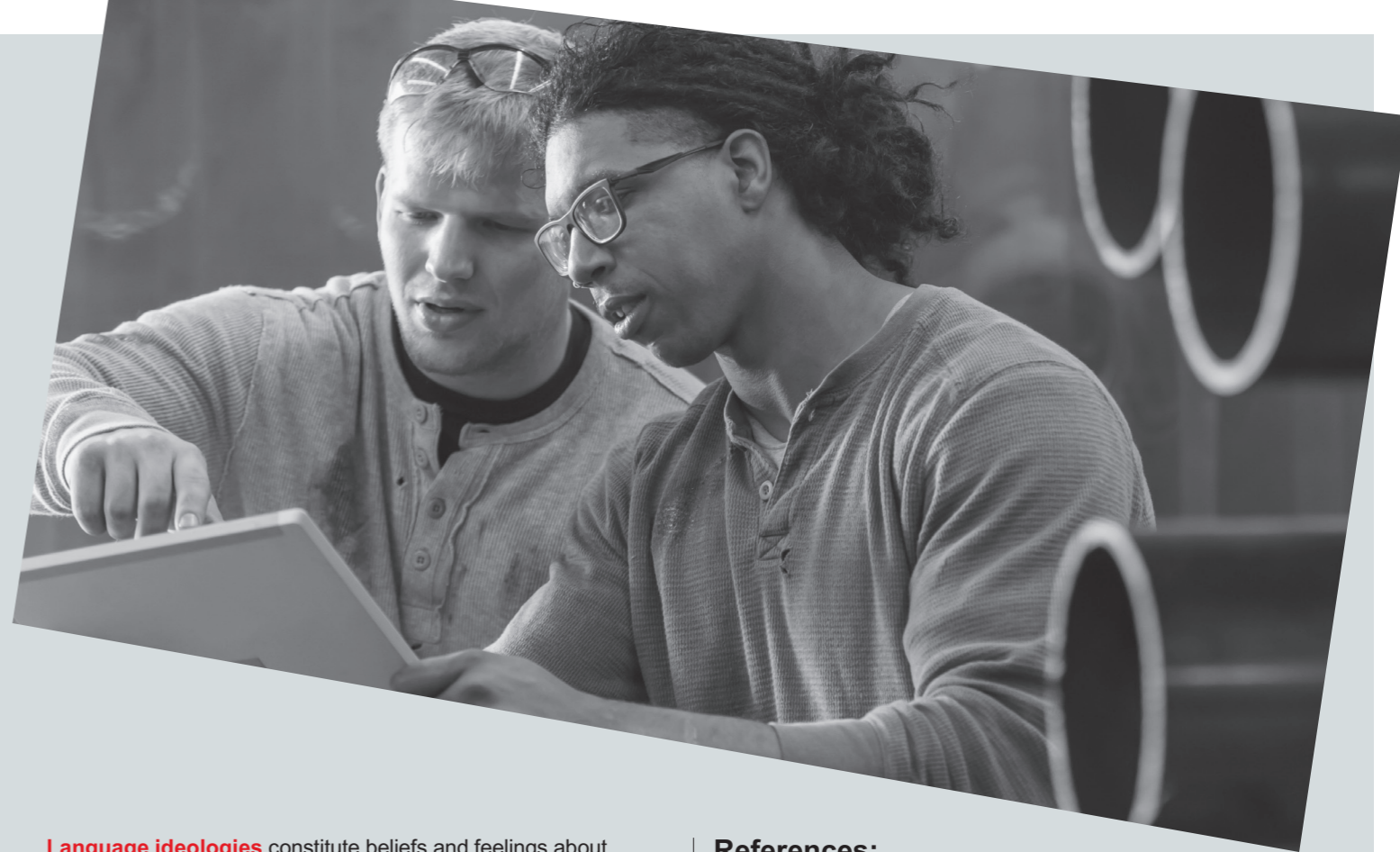
**Language ideologies** constitute beliefs and feelings about language. 'Language ideologies are thus best understood as beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language that are socially shared, and which relate language and society in a dialectical fashion: language ideologies undergird language use, and in turn shape language ideologies; and, together, they serve social ends, in other words, the purpose of language ideologies is not really linguistic but social. Like anything social, language ideologies are interested, multiple, and contested' (Piller, 2015, p. 4).

Language ideologies are beliefs about language that represent the interests of a particular group in society. This principle is best demonstrated with reference to a well-studied language ideology that can be found in many societies, namely the so-called 'standard language ideology'. The standard language ideology refers to the belief that a particular variety — usually the variety that has its roots in the speech of the most powerful group in society, that is often based on the written language, that is highly homogeneous, and that is acquired through long years of formal education — is aesthetically, morally, and intellectually superior to other ways of speaking the language. While only relatively few members of a society can speak that variety, its recognition as superior is universal, and thus serves to justify social inequalities.

The standard language ideology can make it seem fair and equitable — both to those who benefit from it and to those who are disadvantaged by it — that speakers of that variety should occupy privileged positions in society, while non speakers should be excluded from such positions (Piller, 2015, p. 4). In similar ways, discrimination across language varieties (dialects, accents, jargons) is intertwined with national histories of conquest, colonisation, and occupation across all the major languages, and, especially, in English. Composing anti-racist curricula for tertiary education means that both teachers and learners are able to identify, and discuss, with a view to deconstructing and dismantling, the forms, the logics and the content of the 'standard language ideologies' haunting every education system.

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**Blog 2:**  
**Language Matters to construct anti-oppressive pedagogy**  
by Andrea English

Language (verbal and non-verbal) matters because language is associated with how we think, how we construct knowledge, and ultimately how we act. When we think about the type of language we use in HE/FE teaching (i.e. in our pedagogical philosophies, practices and decisions about how and what to teach), and in how our disciplines are discussed, I believe there is a need to identify the boundaries between two types of language.

On the one hand, we need to identify language that is a product of deep colonial and imperialist thinking, language that reproduces racial privilege and dehumanising beliefs and practices. On the other hand, we need to identify language that is rehumanising, *humanity-centric* in that it supports student and teacher voice, inclusion, belonging, liberation, freedom, critical thinking of all students, and the co-construction of anti-oppressive, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal pedagogy and decolonised disciplinary knowledge.

Language is a significant factor in achieving the type of epistemic justice that Boaventura Santos has identified as an essential precondition for social justice. Anti-oppressive, decolonised pedagogy involves choosing language that empowers all within teaching and learning contexts. Such language can have an impact on the broader educational environment in which teaching and learning take place: it can support students to learn how to transform HE/FE discriminatory socio-political cultures which have prevented some individuals from success and empowerment.

My reflections on why language matters to developing anti-oppressive pedagogy are influenced by these ideas:

***Words impose themselves, take root in our memory against our will. [...] Shifting how we think about language and how we use it necessarily alters how we know what we know.***

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 1994, p. 174

***...we have to hold in mind that the modern world is an administered world structured by all sorts of official languages. More often than not, they are languages of domination, entitlement, and power; and there are terrible silences where ordinary human speech ought to be audible, silences our pedagogies ought somehow to repair.***

Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 2000, p. 47

***Acquiring the ability to function in a dominant discourse need not mean that one must reject one's home identity and values, for discourses are not static, but are shaped, however reluctantly, by those who participate within them and by the form of their participation. [...] today's teachers can help economically disenfranchised students and students of color, both to master the dominant discourses and to transform them.***

Lisa Delpit, *Other People's Children*, 1995, p. 163

More broadly, my thoughts on anti-oppressive pedagogy are informed by the critical pedagogy and relational pedagogy traditions, especially the work of Ira Shor, Paulo Freire, Maxine Greene, John Dewey, bell hooks, Rochelle Gutiérrez, Boaventura Santos, Henry Giroux, and Lisa Delpit.

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**Blog 3:**  
**Language Matters to construct an equal world**  
by Kathy-Ann Fletcher

Our world as we know it is socially constructed. The way we view race, nationality, gender, sexuality, as well as matters of belonging and separation, are shaped by our socio-cultural origins and nurtured through a process of socialisation. The vessel of this socialisation and education is the language in word, song, symbols and body language tropes moulded by generations of interactions, wars, political wrangling and beliefs that betray the biases of our system.

The social construct of language communicates legal, educational, cultural, medical and historical knowledge among other disciplinary areas. Therefore, it shapes the political, social, economic and legal structures of its jurisdictions and continues to play a role in maintaining unequal structures in global society.

It is important to explore matters of language in creating an anti-racist curriculum because of the power of language to disenfranchise, to convey belonging, to welcome or to castigate, and to transfer beliefs and knowledge to subsequent generations.

Language matters as a group is important especially in the context of HE/FE in the UK. The British empire forced its 'members' into subjugation to the English language in the British Isles and the Colonies for real and psychological power. The formerly enslaved population of the 'New World' were separated from all others who shared their original language as a method of control, to force compliance and to prevent a group of people who understand each other from forming a community of belonging to gain the confidence and support to mount effective rebellions.

This torturous tactic demonstrates the importance of language for a coherent community. Understanding why language matters will help us achieve the deconstruction of this colonial power by language, make HE more accessible and relevant to a global society, and shape our view of each other in a more equitable manner.

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**The way we view race, nationality, gender, sexuality, as well as matters of belonging and separation, are shaped by our socio-cultural origins and nurtured through a process of socialisation.”**

**Blog 4:**  
**Language matters**  
**to confront racism**  
by Ethelinda Lashley-Scott

Language is the principal method of human communication. It consists of words used in a structured and conventional way and is conveyed by speech, writing, or gesture.

Many current curriculums in the UK still reflect the post-colonial teaching and learning style of ‘whiteness’. Whiteness should be looked at “not as simply a category of identity, but as a position of power formed and protected through colonialism, slavery, segregation, and oppression” (Nichols, 2010, p. 4). Currently, content can exclude and dominate.

Alwan (2020) suggests that some use of institutional language or terminology can reinforce feelings that promote mindsets of unworthiness. She also feels that it is important to review our use of words regularly to promote positive intentions.

Language shapes our thinking and how we view the world and shapes our expectations, so developing a collective vocabulary that embodies the cultures and lives of the speakers and writers will provide a shared construct between people. A crucial step forward in this process is to address this linguistic blindness of postcolonial studies.

In the creation of an anti-racist curriculum, educators need to change practices and have the ability to respond to a diverse range of learning communities. A key conceptual tool to support counter narratives is Critical Race Theory (CRT) as this can shift the grounds of debate from the dominant Western mainstream approach.

Language also includes non-verbal communication. Watson and Gelder (2017) suggest that ‘Body language is a powerful indicator of an individual’s emotions in social interactions, with positive signals triggering approach and negative one’s retreat and defensiveness’.

There have been some studies in the effect that non-verbal behaviour and communication has in health care. People from minority backgrounds have reported that they have less trust in their white doctors based on physical gestures. Some of this mistrust derives from the observation and experience of demeanour and voice tone.

Could there be a correlation between this hypothesis and white teachers delivering anti-racist pedagogy non-verbal communication?

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**Language shapes our thinking and how we view the world and shapes our expectations, so developing a collective vocabulary that embodies the cultures and lives of the speakers and writers will provide a shared construct between people.”**



In a culturally diverse classroom, understanding what people mean through their body language can be a challenge. For example, the meaning of a handshake can vary from culture to culture. Therefore, overcoming any barriers, regarding interpretation of meaning, is an imperative to gain mutual understanding.

There may be barriers that arise when considering non-verbal communication, especially relating to intercultural educational contexts. These obstacles often prevent the message from reaching the intended receiver. Language barriers generally arise in several areas: (1) the way a message is originated and sent by a sender; (2) the context (environmental interruptions); and (3) the way it is received and understood by a receiver. They can be impediments to building a positive relationship. For both sender and receiver, they can cause misunderstandings that can lead to conflict, frustration, offense, embarrassment, racial discrimination, hurt feelings, frustration and disappointments.

The work of Arbu-Arqoub and Alserhan (2019) has investigated strategies for developing a better awareness of how to read and interpret non-verbal communication, based on the writing of Axtell and Fornwald (1991). In this work, there is reference made to the Taboo Touch.

**The Taboo Touch:** Communication through touch is an important form of non-verbal communication that conveys positive and negative messages. For example, shaking hands, hugging, kissing, and touching a Muslim or an Arab woman outside the family is taboo. The Arab and Islamic communication style is deeply rooted in the Arabic language and in both Arabic and Islamic cultures. But it is the opposite in Western cultures. Muslim and Arab women greet others by putting their right hands to their hearts with a slight bow. Another example: in Poland and Germany it is common to greet children by patting their heads, but this is offensive and taboo in Thailand and India because the head is the most sacred part of the body (Axtell, 2007).

Arbu-Arqoub and Alserhan (2019) suggest the following thoughts and actions to try and overcome misrepresentation.

Use the receiver's body language.	Frequently check for understanding.
Politely ask for clarification and avoid assumptions.	Build awareness of body language of the people from different cultures.
Use non-verbal messages appropriately.	Observe and try to do like the others.
Avoid stereotyping.	Hire qualified interpreters and translators.
Adjust behaviour according to the cultural context, situation or environment.	Do not judge immediately. Body language has different meanings in different parts of the world.
Respect cultural differences.	To communicate effectively you need to learn the other person's body language.
Check meaning. Communication across cultures — never assume that the other person has understood your message.	Do not judge people's behaviour.
Use pictures, diagrams, or graphics charts, because they speak a thousand words, communicate across language, and explain complicated concepts to help the receiver understand what the sender is trying to convey.	Do not judge gestures individually but in a cluster.  Do not interpret hand or face gestures in isolation because a whole cluster is more reliable than trying to interpret individual behaviours.
Forgive others and yourself — give the benefit of the doubt.	Individual linguistic ability is important, so people need to be trained.
Understand how the message may impact the feelings of the receiver.	Think about your receivers and how they receive your message.
Do not take a strangers' non-verbal behaviour personally even if it is insulting in your culture.	Do not judge someone from other cultures by your own culture until you know them well.
Be patient with people that have a different culture.	Develop an awareness of your own non-verbal communication patterns that might be insulting in certain cultures.
Recognise that you cannot change a culture or yourself overnight.	Be open to understanding and respecting other cultures.
Do not assume you understand any non-verbal signals or behaviour unless you are familiar with the culture.	Be sensitive to the actions of people and try to understand without judgement.
Avoid using body language that contradicts your words, for example, smiling when irritated, laughing when worried.	Cultural sensitivity.

Paulo Freire's quote below reflects the power of non-verbal communication:

*Sometimes a simple, almost insignificant gesture on the part of a teacher can have a profound formative effect on the life of a student. I will always remember one such gesture in my life when I was an adolescent. [...] At that time I experienced myself as an insecure adolescent, not at home with a body perceived more bone than beauty, feeling myself to be less capable than other students, insecure about my own creative possibilities [...] On this occasion our teacher had brought our homework to school after correcting it and was calling us one by one to comment on it. When my turn came, I noticed he was looking over my text with great attention, nodding his head in an attitude of respect and consideration. [...] The gesture of the teacher affirmed in me a self-confidence that obviously still had much room to grow. But it inspired in me a belief that I too had value and could work and produce results [...]*

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 2001, p. 46

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The term ‘language’ is itself difficult to pin down or operationalise. The codes, symbols and interpretations are often subject to cultural ‘insider’ knowledge of meaning that can be deliberately or inadvertently obscured from the so-called ‘outsider’. The political and social construction of language and meaning over centuries was meant to support power and exclusionary ambitions and therefore language has complexities beyond ‘what is the right thing to say, when and to whom’ or ‘how to manage your body language to give a more positive impression of yourself’. Language is complex largely because it describes not only a collection of objects but a third order system of conceptual organisation.

Language is not limited to words in written or verbal form but includes gestures, facial expressions and body language. With the advances in technology, language is expanded to include emojis, gifs, emoticons and other symbols on mobile devices and the internet used in text messaging or social media posts to communicate shared meaning. Therefore, language is not becoming simpler, it is becoming more complex as the range of what is included in language includes more features and facets of communication.

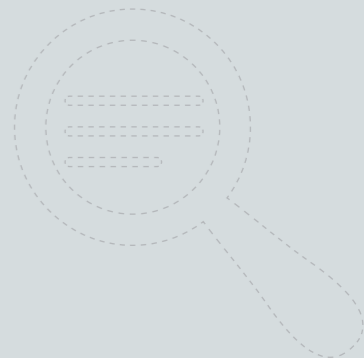
We agree that language is a repertoire. As a concept, language embraces the totality of linguistic and non-linguistic resources of an individual and their dynamic use in different contexts for meaning making praxis. The resources are concrete accents, language varieties, registers, genres, modalities such as writing – ways of using language in particular communicative settings and spheres of life, including the ideas people have about such ways of using, their language ideologies (Blommaert, 2010, p. 102). ‘They are also our beliefs about what language is, how language works, how it is used’ (Weber & Horner, 2012, p. 3).

The challenge in creating a framework to make language practice in HE/FE humanity-centric is addressing that complexity of language and its range of influence and the socio-political-construction of meaning. We are seeking neither to oversimplify the concept nor make it too complex but to create a balance to support a more empowering use of language in HE/FE practice.

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Case Study:  
Master’s dissertation on Chinese students’ experiences of studying in the UK

A female student, Lynne, from China was studying for her Master’s in Education. Lynne had done very well in her course work and forged relationships with students and some of her lecturers. Considering her marks, she was on track to receive a distinction at graduation.

For her coursework, she had to take research methods and other education courses, and decided to pursue qualitative research for her Master’s thesis. She conducted interviews with other Chinese students to try to identify key features of their experience studying in UK Higher Education. In order to get high quality interview data, she conducted the interviews in Chinese, so that the students would be free to express themselves. She then translated the interview data into English and stated this in the thesis.

When Lynne received her final mark, she had barely passed.

The marker had written that the student’s interview data was not ‘clear’ and therefore did not provide ‘evidence’ for the results she had detailed. Beyond this, other factors were marked down as ‘incorrect’ such as aspects of the methodology, despite the fact that Lynne had references to research indicating that it was a valid approach.

Because of the marker’s comments, Lynne’s immediate feeling was that she was being treated unfairly on account of not being a native speaker. She felt that the marker was looking for ways to mark her down. She wondered whether it was something about her, about speaking Chinese and being Chinese, or about choosing to focus her work on Chinese students.

Lynne experienced devastation, shock, and fear. She was very upset because the mark brought down her average such that she might not get a distinction. She could not comprehend how she could have done well in her courses and essays, and suddenly be assessed as if she was unable. She did not know how she could explain this to her family back home after she had done so well thus far.

She was also afraid because even though she felt there was bias in how she was being marked, she did not want to ask questions as she thought that could make matters worse. She did not feel she had any power to change anything. Lynne sought advice from a lecturer with whom she had a good relationship. After the discussion, she had the confidence to speak with the course organiser and ask some questions about her mark.

Just before graduation, Lynne returned to the lecturer to tell her that she had helped her immensely and that without her help, she would not have been able to handle the stress of the situation.

How can we improve these types of situations?

There needs to be a concerted effort to counter racial bias in the marking of assessments. Remedying the centrality of English will call for academic staff and institutions to undertake a period of training and development in order to understand educational processes outside the UK from which their students originate and to cultivate a radically inclusive humanity-centric view of language, as we have outlined in our framework.

Additionally, empowering students, who may not have the cultural or linguistic capital, to have the confidence to navigate difficult situations in which they feel they are being treated with racial bias is exceptionally important. This empowerment involves providing them with resources and opportunities to build relationships and be part of a community. International students, in particular, need opportunities to build networks with home staff and students from the beginning of their degree. These relationships are fundamental to positive experiences and can create a network of power, so that students do not feel alone and isolated in times of crisis.

Further Discussion

Assessment of English as an Additional Language

Seeing bilinguals and multilinguals as problematic is a historical and social phenomenon. Researchers continue to record its production, its results and its ubiquitous reproduction today.

For English learners around the world, varieties of English are shaped by interactions between communities, porous national boundaries, and hybrid languages and cultures. For Canagarajah (2006), English is now a ‘heterogeneous language’ with multiple forms and diverse grammars. Many studies have been conducted to assess the proficiency of English language with second language learners. This is mainly because all the studies succeed in demonstrating, first, the difficulties of assessing a proficiency and, indeed, the ambiguity of the concept itself (Hulstijn, 2015).

Assessments of language proficiency test language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and phonetics or pronunciation; content ‘proficiency’ turns out to be more about subject knowledge but acts as a basis and foundation for positive and less positive assessments in the other areas. Testing language and content proficiency is a complex task. As García (2009) points out, ‘The difficulty in offering fair and equitable assessment for bilinguals has to do with being able to understand the interrelationship between language proficiency and content proficiency – two important objectives in all testing’ (p. 370). There is still debate around whether those two important objectives are independent or always interrelated.

García and Kleifgen also propose ‘translanguaging pedagogies’ which mean that teachers will teach English, using the home language as a scaffold, for students’ learning (García and Kleifgen, 2010).

Ralph (2008) proposes some key features and practices of authentic assessment in a second language classroom. First, the key principles for authentic, and fair, assessment come from constructivist learning. According to that, learners engage alone or with others in various assessment activities that require personal meaning-making, and reflective self-regulated interpretation. These assessment activities are more about how learners learn, and what they learn, rather than how quickly and/or how much they learn.

For the range of proficiencies in languages, Canagarajah (2006) suggests choosing: multitask, multirater and multicandidate tests. The multiple tasks would help assess the candidate’s skills in different communicative activities. Multiple raters would help assess the candidate according to a range of holistic and discrete-item criteria. Multiple candidates could create a communicative interaction where language use has to be negotiated. Such a format would also involve a spoken component, with the possibility of face-to-face interactions between examiners and candidates (p. 238).

Moore (2001) also reviews English as a Second Language assessment in Australia and finds that alternative means of assessment can be successfully applied in practice. She suggests some alternatives such as:

- 1. the use of portfolios;
- 2. learner self-assessment;
- 3. longitudinal classroom-based record-keeping that is profiling; and
- 4. criterion-referenced (curriculum-embedded) performance-based assessment.

García and Kleifgen (2010) propose additional ideas to assess students. Their work is explored by Roy (2016) who further explains: ‘For example, in terms of accommodation, they suggested the following: presentations, responses, setting, timing/scheduling, and reinforcement. Their ideas reiterated suggestions previously described. The term ‘presentations’ referred to allowing more repetition, explanation, simplification, test translation for students, and assessing students in their home language if that language was well developed. ‘Response’ involved allowing students to dictate their answers or display knowledge using alternative forms of representation. ‘Setting’ included individual or small group administration of the test or multiple testing sessions. ‘Timing’ referred to allowing more time to finish the test. ‘Reinforcement’ indicated the use of dictionaries and glossaries were allowable, hence, these ideas added to the discussion. One of the main ways to understand and assess bilingual and multilingual students was to observe and listen to them for a long period of time. This form of assessment also permitted the development of a multidimensional portrait of bilingual students’ (Ibid., p. 238).

To sum up, Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) view monolingual biases in language assessments as key equity issues facing linguistically and culturally diverse students across the globe because ‘many language-assessment and teaching practices work to the detriment of bilingual children worldwide’ (Otheguy, García, and Reid, 2015, p. 283). These children are not allowed to perform to the best of their potential. To extend this line of thought, assessment in Higher and Further Education needs to be reconsidered and re-evaluated particularly in terms of English language skills, content knowledge and curriculum time or share, in order to threaten and eventually undo monolingual biases.

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## Think Piece 4: A Reflection on HCL in Assessment

### Critical reflection report – Why was it developed?

Marketing is a discipline heavily in need of decolonisation within the context not only of HE/FE but wider business practice. Where HE/FE and Marketing meet, especially in terms of the language we use and insist our students use, there is an urgent need for us to reconsider the rules. One small step that I have initiated among final year students in Marketing is the Critical Reflection report. This assessment asks the students to articulate their personal perspective regarding the marketing discipline, supported by the knowledge they accumulated over the course of their four years of study.

I provided them with four topics: Digital Transformation, The Future of Work in the Marketing Department, Accountability in Marketing and Issues of Privacy, Security and Data Protection in the Digital Economy. Their task was to choose one of the topics, explore the literature and contemporary industry thought, identify the challenges and/or opportunities posed to the marketing discipline by that topic and reflect on their perspective of addressing those challenges/opportunities.

The purpose of this piece of work was two-fold:

Firstly, I want my students to be able to express their perspectives and stand behind this piece of work as theirs and not just a mere regurgitation of ideologies, theories or strategies within the academic and practical canon. It is through this breaking of the rule of 'I' that I believe many of the irrelevant and sometimes limiting ideologies that do not reflect the diversity in our global, national and local communities will be effectively challenged and changed.

Secondly, I have noticed that there is a fear among my students to take the risks that are necessary to produce engaging and innovative pieces of work around a topic. This is largely because the result they receive is often along the lines of 'that is not an academic way of writing', or 'that is not how it is done in academic writing'. Academic writing is its own identity that has crafted generations of writers.

Therefore, the concept of 'academic writing' is what they focus on before they address the core of what they are developing, e.g. marketing strategy, industry analysis, etc. This focus on language, tied to receiving a 'good' grade, means we never know what we do not know and can cloak our lack of knowledge under the correct wording. I want them to focus on developing the knowledge, their perspective or ideologies, and then think about ways to communicate that clearly and effectively.

Ultimately, I want to use this piece to remove the students from the prison of language in developing their view of themselves as marketing professionals or academics by:

1. Breaking the passivity in academic writing. Pundits criticise academic writing for its passivity. I believe part of the solution is removing some of the unnecessary restrictions, such as use of personal pronouns or 'I'. These allow for more precise writing, clearer communication about who the speaker is and what are their perspectives. Breaking these norms does not carry the perceived negative implications for the quality of writing. In fact, it enhances our students' and our ability to communicate within and outside academia and therefore expands the influence of the sector across the society.
2. Allowing true critical interrogation. There is no fear of 'that is not what so-and-so' argue because the focus is true critical interrogation of established paradigms and ontologies within a discipline. Some of our language rules prevent true critique of our disciplines because students are limited in how they can analyse prevailing knowledge. Language and the rules around the use of language that are somewhat unique to the HE/FE context prevents us from empowering our students to be engaged not only in profession but in society. It is about breaking the fear of going against the grain and giving our students license to truly engage with the range of our disciplines because they are released from the fear of saying it incorrectly from the beginning.
3. Empowering my students to see their place and their professions' place in society, and the potential dangers and benefits. Marketing and the changing technological landscape can be tied to epochs that enforce inequality and inequity and removing the barriers re: language is one way to get our students to engage critically with these subjects, especially those like marketing, where there is the belief that decolonising is not relevant. However, uncovering the role of marketing and business generally in society and politics is important to the holistic activity that decolonisation needs to be.

### Reflections on steps to support Humanity-Centric Language in the creation of an Anti-Racist Assessment

#### **Consider: What is the purpose of the assessment?**

**Disrupt:** Disrupting the HE/FE Assessment agenda by relaxing the writing style rules. This will challenge positions regarding the quality of the writing. More relaxed does not mean poorer quality. Reconsider what it means to have an authorial voice.

**Fight the hegemony:** Equip to challenge authority and agendas that are damaging. The argument (especially regarding language) 'this is how it's always been done' is not a sound or rationale argument to keep damaging methods. Breaking the language power is one essential to breaking the hold over paradigms and systems.

**Focus on inclusion:** Can our students place themselves in their writing? Can you hear their voice? Can you understand their interests, perspectives and ideologies? Get a sense of who they are? This is important for them to place themselves in HE/FE and academia, to see it as a place useful for them to attend and engage, and gives everyone that sense of belonging. The inclusive approach to assessments and language will support our students (especially undergraduates) to take ownership of their work and go beyond 'this is just an assignment that I need to pass'.

**Remove hierarchy in assessments:** Language and insistence on a certain way of writing is a way of enforcing the academic hierarchy. Many of those rules are based on pedantry around grammar and the use of pronouns. We need to reconsider these rules to place all scholars, who work and show their work, on even ground. Students would still be required to show rigour and thought behind their work but would be free to challenge established norms and views in discipline and even of lecturers and academics.

**View our classes as open space:** Our teaching and learning spaces should be places of hope for students to confidently pursue their place in our discipline and assessments should reflect that openness.

**Take a less punitive approach to breaches of 'academic language':** This will help develop a less pedantic way of engaging with discussions and the lessons to be learnt regarding communicating effectively within our various disciplines.

## Provocations

### A Provocation: Reflections on the Academy's Culture of Language and Its Role in Helping or Hindering an Anti-Racist Curriculum

by Barbara Becnel

#### Contesting a Culture of Academic Writing that Limits Readership, Knowledge, and Leads to Other Harms

Here I argue there is a hegemonic and hierarchical culture of academic writing that is worthy of deconstruction. I use the word 'culture' because this scholarly use of language is ritualised, I posit, with rules and customs that have evolved into a tradition for a select few. This makes academic writing more than just an innocuous practice of authoring ideas. The culture of obscure writing has meaning that empowers academy members, though it could undermine their status were it not for Eurocentric supremacy, which I will explain momentarily.

I begin by theorising about how academic writing empowers its authors on a couple of levels. It limits the understanding of the work and the audience for the work. Such a circumstance elevates the writer to that of expert, a positionality that virtually all scholars desire, that is to be known for knowing more than anyone else about a particular topic. Also, by limiting the understanding of the work and the audience for the documentation of that work, it controls the environment of who would constitute legitimate or duly recognised opposition to the findings.

Though that element of what elevates academic writing could represent a double-edged sword, in that the people under investigation in the work, for example, are not able to comprehend how they have been depicted in this work. So, it cannot be validated by the original source, which could undermine the findings of such scholars and their work. In general, though, it has not. Why this has not been questioned over centuries brings us, I contend, to our ARC brief.

Academic writing is a tool that anchors the acceptance of knowledge in Western culture, even when that acceptance is imaginary because it has not been examined by the masses, by the very people being researched. Yet, its findings have often been culturally absorbed as truth by the masses themselves because of the supremacy of a Eurocentric cultural acceptance of knowledge produced by primarily white academics. This is the culture that dominates our understanding of knowledge, of academic writing, and of what constitutes a legitimate contesting of that knowledge or of the way that knowledge is authored.

Implicit in what I have already written is that academic writing disempowers the people and communities researched by scholars. Non-academics do not get to read about themselves because academic writing is incomprehensible to them — and not because they are illiterate. It is the arcane writing style itself demanded by the tradition of scholarly authorship that is to blame. This is disrespectful to those being researched. I would also argue that academic writing can be characterised as a betrayal of the people and communities for which insights are being offered for public consumption — or for those few members of the public who can understand what has been written.

The betrayal, then, is situated in the intent of the scholar to write *about* those who are being studied for *others* to make determinations of the good or bad, right or wrong, of the behavior or culture or experience of those being researched.



At the same time, those upon whom such judgements are being heaped have no way of defending themselves, of eschewing the veracity of the research findings. I use this strong word, 'betrayal,' because academic writing positions itself as being indisputable in its inaccessibility to the average reader. It is not clear to me, therefore, that everything written, which relies on the abstruseness of the tradition of academic writing, is a fair representation of the people or culture under investigation. How can we know?

My pushback on traditional academic writing is to present scholarly work using clear and straightforward language. Where feasible, I try to include a story or two to relate a lived experience of some sort to analysis and theory. My aim is lucidity, as well as to explain in a lively and interesting way complex ideas. To test the validity of my theorising, I always share my work with representatives of the people who privileged me to be able to study them, their culture, and their community. I respect their feedback.

For instance, I would never have submitted my PhD proposal to the University of Edinburgh for acceptance into a doctoral program had the two imprisoned street gang leaders I asked to read the proposal told me that my theorising inadequately or improperly reflected their lives. Fortunately for me the two death-row prisoners were excited by what I had written and how, as an outsider, I had managed to illuminate certain aspects of their lives and street-gang culture.

#### **Provocative Questions and Statements as Powerful Tools for Crafting ARC Strategies**

I have created my own fun personal theory that provides a rationale for using provocative language via questions and statements involving ARC. I say 'personal' in that I use it for motivation but do not name this theory when I write. I will share it here for the first time: The Picasso Theory of Epistemological Change.

I love the title that I created. This concept came about because of an ancient mythology course I was taking recently outside of my PhD studies. A comment was made by one of the students about Pablo Picasso's abstract paintings. That depiction of his work was contested by the instructor: 'What if it was just him trying to show what he sees of his subject when that subject is viewed from different perspectives.'

That triggered an idea for me: What is needed with ARC is to get everyone to see our existing academic curriculum and traditions from a different perspective. In other words, we need to shift the epistemic lens of both the oppressed and the oppressors in academia to make substantive change in the curriculum and in the production of knowledge at universities and colleges. One of my strategies for causing people to see something different regarding racism-related topics is to grab their attention with provocative questions and statements rather than to be gentle. My aim with provocative language is to write in a way that is unavoidably thought-provoking. So far, my techniques have worked to prod discussion and debate.

Here are some examples:

- *Has the discipline of criminology in the United States been an anti-black discipline since its inception?* This is a topic I was permitted to lecture about in a theoretical criminology course at the University of Edinburgh's Law School last semester.
- *Should there be a 'black criminology' given that some black scholars label traditional criminology as 'white criminology'?* This question was posed by me and presented to the criminology students in preparation for my lecture.
- *Are racialised microaggressions more psychologically burdensome than overt racists acts?* This was a topic I discussed at a webinar organised by some professors and PhD students at the University of Edinburgh last year.
- *Black-White Allyships: How Strong are the Ties That Bind?* This is a blog that I wrote last October for Black History Month for the University of Edinburgh. I argued that the ties were not strong at all, and that black people should consider reimagining allyship to lean more toward collaborating with other people of colour, along with some committed white people, rather than to try repeatedly to gain significant support from relatively conservative white Americans.
- *Epistemology of the Streets: Why Youth Gangs Ignore the Rule of Law.* This is an article I wrote for a law journal a couple of years ago.
- *Culture of the Condemned: A Critique of How Death Row Became a Symbol of Heroism for America's Street-Gang Generation.* This is the title of my PhD thesis.
- *Assessing How Cultural Similarities Between America's Gang Leaders and Academia's Elite Influence Student Agency, Equity, and Relevance in Knowledge Production.* This is a paper I wrote and presented recently for a conference hosted by the University of Toronto's Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies and for a University of Warwick conference.

So, I do not believe that we need to avoid provocative questions and statements with this work. In fact, I believe that such atypical boldness can be used strategically to establish our pro-ARC positionality in the materials that we produce, as well as to expose some academy traditions involving the use of language that have not and do not serve our project's goals.

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**We need to shift the epistemic lens of both the oppressed and the oppressors in academia to make substantive change in the curriculum and in the production of knowledge at universities and colleges.”**



**Provocations**

**A Provocation:**  
**Idealisation of English and the model of the native speaker**  
by Argyro Kanaki

In this piece, I want to provide some food for thought around two matters: idealisation of English and the model of the native speaker. In order to do that, I am using specific excerpts of literature that demonstrate people's testimonies on these matters, and specifically, on their feelings on legitimacy, and authenticity, in speaking languages. I hope that these testimonies, which I offer as fodder for rumination, rather than prescriptions for thought or action, will make people who think that language matters consider its influence in all aspects of human life.

**Eva Hoffman (1989) *Lost in Translation*:**

*‘This is America, where anything is possible, and this slip-and-slide speech, like jazz, or action painting, is the insertion of the self into the space of borderless possibility. I listen breathlessly as Tom talks, catching his every syncopation, every stress, every maverick rush over a mental hurdle. Then as I try to respond with equal spontaneity, I reach frantically for the requisite tone, the requisite accent. A Texas drawl crosses a New England clip, a groovy half-sentence competes with an elegantly satirical comment. I want to speak some kind of American, but which kind to hit? “Gee”, I say, “what a trip, in every sense of the word”. Tom is perfectly satisfied with this response. I sound natural enough, I sound like anybody else. But I can’t bear the artifice, and for a moment, I clutch. My throat tightens. Paralysis threatens. Speechlessness used to be one of the common symptoms of classic hysteria. I feel as though in me, hysteria is brought on by tongue-tied speechlessness’.* (Hoffman, 1989, p. 219).

**Ilan Stavans (2001) *On Borrowed Words*:**

*‘A language is a set of spectacles through which the universe is seen afresh: Yiddish is warm, delectable, onomatopoeic; Spanish is romantic, perhaps a bit loose; Hebrew is rough, guttural; English is precise, almost mathematical — the tongue I prefer today, the one I feel happiest in ... No, perhaps spectacles are the wrong metaphor ... Changing languages is like imposing another role on oneself, like being someone else temporarily. My English-language persona is the one that superimposes itself on all previous others. In it are the seeds of Yiddish and Hebrew, but mostly Spanish ... But is the person really the same? ... You know, sometimes I have the feeling I’m not one but two, three, four people. Is there an original person? An essence? I’m not altogether sure, for without language I am nobody. Language makes us able to fit into a context. And what is there to be found in the interstices between contexts? Not silence, Richard—oh, no. Something far less compelling: pure kitsch. ... I often find myself becoming pure kitsch—a caricature of myself. Kitsch ... is vicarious experience and faked sensations. I’ve sometimes talked about a life on the hyphen, as a neither/nor, a life in the in-between, but it is precisely that in-betweenness that makes me so uneasy’.* (Stavans, 2001, p. 251).

**Dee Rutgers (2017)** in her blog entry presents the story of Melissa Lozada-Oliva, a poet, educator and heritage language speaker of Spanish, which she spoke partly because her mother did, living in Boston. Her story describes her linguistic but also social struggles.

*‘From an educational perspective, Melissa’s story too is a story of unequal access to knowledge, but to new rather than previously acquired knowledge. This we learn from Melissa’s description of her Spanish-speaking self as “sitting in the corner of a classroom, chewing on a pencil, not raising her hand”, as well as in the story of “her parents meeting in an ESL (English as a Second Language) class” where they “trained their mouths” and “tied their tongues to a post with an English language leash”. Hers is the story of children whose home languages differ from that of schooling, being denied full access to education because of unequal opportunities to participate in the learning process in mainstream schooling. Conversely, it is the story of social separation in pull-out ESL classes, where heritage-language speakers may receive language instruction from a specialist language teacher, but do so away from the mainstream learning context.*

“

**Changing languages is like imposing another role on oneself, like being someone else temporarily.”**

*Both English-only mainstream and ESL pull-out educational approaches rest on assimilationist policies and practices, whereby learners of an additional language are expected to achieve native-like language proficiency (incl. pronunciation) in the societal language, usually at the expense of their home languages and mother tongues. This, as Melissa’s story reveals, often comes at great personal cost and loss in terms of a sense of belonging to the heritage language community. Moreover, research has revealed that these approaches contribute very little to raising the academic achievement and well-being of multilingual learners. Research on effective schools and classrooms for multilingual learners has highlighted that ESL pull-out classes, in fact, deprive additional language learners of the opportunity to be exposed to the socially and academically rich interactions associated with mainstream schooling, both of which are key to their linguistic and academic development. ESL pull-out classes have also been found to feed into the social stigma associated with segregation. Conversely, research has consistently found significantly better outcomes for approaches that nurture the students’ home languages alongside the language of school; that provide high language support embedded in academically challenging mainstream education; and that view multilingualism as a resource rather than a problem for learning.’*

*From a sociolinguistic perspective, Melissa’s story of multilingualism is a story of unequal status and of battling linguistic stereotypes. It is the story of how a language belonging to a cultural group is reduced to simplistic associations and cultural tokenism; of Spanish being reduced to “spicy food”, to “Zorro”, to “red lipstick on a toothbrush”, to sexiness. It is the battle of desperately trying to lose one’s accent to avoid being socially stereotyped and stigmatised, and to become accepted as “American”. It is the story – as shared by many minority- or migrant-background language users – of assimilating into the dominating society and the challenges this poses for maintaining heritage languages and their associated cultural identities. Her poem powerfully describes how these dominating social forces play out at the individual*

*and psychological level, telling the story of a cross-generational transformation of a language from one that her mother’s tongue “had always been in love with”, to one that features “on a resumé as a skill”; from one that connected the speaker to their community, to one that serves a largely instrumental and economic purpose. It reveals the internal struggle of, on the one hand, wanting to take pride in one’s heritage, as something that cannot “be eaten and then shit out”, while on the other hand “not really believing it”, as the heritage language has gradually lost its full range of purposes within an individual’s life. Within this story of unequal status and linguistic stereotypes, Melissa’s Spanish has become a language she has to “choose to remember”, as reflecting the individual struggle and strength involved in heritage language maintenance at the societal level’.*





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**It is the story – as shared by many minority- or migrant-background language users – of assimilating into the dominating society and the challenges this poses for maintaining heritage languages and their associated cultural identities.”**

Finally, BBC Worklife, and Christine Ro (2021) report linguistic racism and explore how it is manifested:

*‘Globally, non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers three to one, although defining the term “native English speaker” is complicated. The term usually refers to anyone who speaks English from early childhood, as their first language. But many children grow up learning multiple languages simultaneously – for instance, if their parents are from different places, or if a nation has several official languages.*

*A particular status is attached to English that sounds as if it comes from countries that are wealthy, majority white and mostly monolingual. According to this limited view, multilingual countries like Nigeria and Singapore have less “legitimate” and desirable forms of English (even though English is an official language in both). Globally, the most respected types of English are varieties such as British, American and Australian, says Sender Dovchin, a sociolinguist at Curtin University in Perth, Australia.*

*Within any country, certain forms of English bring fewer benefits. To give just one example from the US, African-American English remains misunderstood and discriminated against. And on an international level, certain types of speakers face judgements based on perceptions of their nationality or race, rather than*

*their actual communication skills. “When English is spoken by some Europeans, including for example French-, German-, Italian-accented English, they can be considered really cute, sophisticated, stylish and so forth”, explains Dovchin. But, she adds, English spoken by Asians, Africans or Middle Easterners may be viewed as challenging and unpleasant.*

*This linguistic stereotyping applies even when those Asians, Africans or Middle Easterners are in fact native speakers of English. Just seeing an Asian face makes some Americans consider that speaker’s English to be hard to understand, regardless of how they actually speak or where they were born. I was born in the US, hold a UK passport and have an English degree, but like many other people of Asian descent, I’ve had the surreal experience of people complimenting my English fluency.*

*These perceptions feed into linguistic racism, or racism based on accent, dialect and speech patterns. The overt form of linguistic racism can involve deliberate belittling or shaming, such as “ethnic-accent bullying” that occurs despite someone’s actual English proficiency. Or it can be more covert, like the unwitting social exclusion of people with foreign-accented English, or a seemingly well-intended compliment toward an Asian American’s English.*

*These examples show that it may not be obvious to the perpetrators what they’re doing, because there are a number of subtle psychological mechanisms at play. Cognitively, it takes more work to understand a less familiar accent. The extra brainpower involved, as well as warmer feelings toward members of one’s own group, can lead to negative attitudes toward a person speaking a different type of English. Overall, it’s common to assume that non-native speakers are less truthful, less intelligent and less competent; psychology studies suggest that people attach less credibility to statements spoken in a foreign accent.*

*These subtle mechanisms feed into behaviours that can impact negatively on people speaking different forms of English. I’ve been guilty of this in practice. I’ve found myself gravitating to colleagues I can easily banter with (so that I don’t have to explain or replace Americanisms like “inside baseball” or British terms like “take the piss”). I’ve edited away Indian English expressions in reports, like ‘upgradation’, without wondering why I treat “upgrading” as the better term. And in bouts of impatience during work conversations, I’ve spoken over or finished the sentences of colleagues who are more hesitant’.*

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**AdvanceHE**



**Offensive questions, stereotypes and 'jokes' have a lasting impact on individuals, affecting their mental health, career progression and overall welfare at college or university.**

It's time to stop sweeping these microaggressions under the rug.  
Call racism out for what it is and challenge unacceptable behaviour.

It's time to take a stand.

**#CallItRacism**

**Call it racism | Challenge racist behaviour | Change racist structures**