

DECOLONIZING MULTILINGUAL PEDAGOGIES

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Introduction

Teachers' roles in multilingual and multiethnic contexts are critical not just to ensure an effective teaching–learning environment, but also to create equitable educational opportunities where children from all linguistic and ethno-racial backgrounds can safely take up their epistemologies, identities and practices to learn. The question of whether students engage in learning depends largely on how teachers value and leverage students' knowledge systems, and cultural and linguistic practices (Heugh, 2015; Makalela, 2015).

Many nation-states, embracing (neo)liberal ideologies, include linguistic rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2015) in their constitutions and even in educational policies. Yet, they continue to reinforce language ideologies that strengthen the hierarchy of languages and erase multilingual epistemologies and repertoires.

Much has been written about the importance of multilingualism in education to educate Indigenous and minoritized children equitably (see, for example, Cenoz, 2009; García 2009; Hornberger 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 2009). But as Ndhlovu and Makalela (2021) have pointed out, the mainstream understanding of multilingual education has been pre-eminently colonial, defending language and multilingualism as colonial apparatuses of domination. In particular, little has been said about *how to decolonize multilingual pedagogical approaches* so that they embrace epistemologies, identities, and language practices of Indigenous and language minoritized communities. Language pedagogical practices remain carry-over products that are based on a Greco-Latin thought and knowledge systems, which often contradict Indigenous and other minoritized knowledge systems and language practices (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, 2019).

Built around the “colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo & Walsh 2018), a monolingual mentality in teacher training, textbooks and assessment shapes ways of teaching multilingual students. Despite persistent efforts to create ideological and implementational space (Hornberger, 2005) for the knowledge systems and language practices of Indigenous and language minoritized people, the epistemologies of colonizers and dominant people still pervade educational policies and practices (see García et al., 2021). This is the product of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called “abyssal thinking”, that is, reasoning that only validates the understandings of those on the dominant side of the line, opening up an abyss that renders the knowledges of the others invisible.

Just as colonial languages were constructed as monoglossic entities that could be taught and used as medium of education, minoritized communities were also assigned a language that was named, described and classified by missionaries and linguists to fit their own epistemologies. The named languages that were the products of these descriptive grammars had little to do with the ways Indigenous and minoritized communities used language to make sense of their own worlds (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

We argue that decolonizing multilingual education first and foremost requires us to engage in a critical understanding of the historical conditions in which languages are used and how power relations among people are created. In what are considered “post-colonial” contexts such as Africa, Asia and Latin America, but also in the Global North, such as in the US, language education policies and pedagogies continue to be framed within colonial and nationalist ideologies (Hamid et al., 2013; Tupas, 2015) that benefit those with institutional power – speakers of the dominant language and of the dominant social/racial/ethnic class. Such ideologies reinforce a deficit approach toward the language practices of Indigenous and minoritized communities.

In this paper, we start by describing four contexts with different histories of colonization and domination over Indigenous and other minoritized speakers. We do so to show that settler colonialism, whether early or late, European or not, has had an important role in creating hierarchical categories based on constructs of race/ethnicity, language, and gender. The exclusion of those considered to be racially and sexually inferior from a school system that operated in the language of the dominant colonizers and based only on the knowledge system of the powerful, has created the *coloniality of schooling* that exists today. We use the term coloniality in the sense given to us by the Peruvian sociologist, Aníbal Quijano (1991, 2000), that is, a system of domination that perdures after the colonizers have left.

The coloniality of schooling is also prevalent in multilingual education programmes that were developed in the 20th century across different contexts. These programmes sometimes “cross-dress” (Cusicanqui, 2012) as responding to the needs of the minoritized population, and yet, in practice, as we will see, they only superficially modify the existing power structures. As a result, many bilingual and multilingual education programmes also produce subjectivities of inferiority and educational failure among Indigenous and minoritized students.

Despite the very different histories of colonization, what is common to the four cases we present – Nepal, Peru, South Africa and the United States – is the ways in which language has been constructed for schooling, or “invented” as Makoni and Pennycook (2007) would say, to dominate over racial and ethnic minorities without power. Common also is the ways in which language pedagogical practices have insisted on teaching monolingually, or even bi/multilingually, but always based on a monoglossic construction that excludes the epistemologies and dynamic languaging of multilingual speakers with less institutional power. *To decolonize multilingual education, more is needed than simply developing bilingual and multilingual programmes where minoritized languages are used.* The questions for us are: How can teachers/educators challenge colonial ideologies in language education? What do decolonizing projects in multilingual education look like? Multilingual pedagogies that do not engage with transforming the power relations and systemic oppression over minoritized communities are simply not enough. Teachers working with multilingual students from Indigenous and minoritized communities could focus on developing their students’ critical historical consciousness (Freire, 1970) of how inequities have been constructed through school and the framing of language. After considering these questions, we end this chapter by identifying the principles of multilingual pedagogical practices that are capable of disrupting the coloniality of schooling.

Linguistic coloniality and schooling

Coloniality, as “the most general form of domination” includes “the cultural complex” that supports the superiority of “European rationality” as the universal way of knowledge construction (Quijano 2007: 171). In rejecting epistemological heterogeneity, the European coloniality of knowledge has been reinforced through colonial languages, ideologies and technologies of knowledge such as language policies, pedagogies and textbooks. In his *Decolonizing the Mind* (1994), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o describes how the imposition of colonial languages and epistemologies in education have contributed to the “colonial alienation” of Indigenous and minoritized people. It is important for teachers to understand the historical conditions of the coloniality of languages to begin the project of “epistemological decolonization” (Quijano, 2007).

Despite their contextual differences, the four cases we present in the next section clearly show that the move from monolingual to multilingual education in the second half of the 20th century has not resulted in transforming the social conditions of the linguistically minoritized population. The recognition and use of non-dominant languages in education is simply *not enough* to overcome power inequalities rooted in the history of colonialism and linguistic nationalism. Multilingual education has to be accompanied by multilingual pedagogies that disrupt the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2007). We start first with a discussion of each context in alphabetical order.

Nepal

Nepal was never governed by any European colonial administration. However, the coloniality of European rationality and epistemology has been pervasive since the mid-19th century, influenced by the presence of the British Raj in the Indian subcontinent. Beginning with an English medium school for the royal family in 1854, the British regime in the subcontinent was influential in promoting a European ideology of linguistic nationalism.

Since the mid-1950s, Nepal has followed an ideology of *ek-desh-ek-bhaashaa* (one nation—one language) which defined Nepal as a homogenous community of people speaking Nepali (Phyak, 2018, 2021; Yadava, 2007). To enforce that ideology, schools played an important role, with textbooks and teacher recruitment nationalized and education taking place strictly in Nepali. And yet, Nepali was considered to be the first language only of the ruling and the dominant caste group.

The multilingualism of Nepal is historically built on the rich oral practices of Indigenous and language minoritized communities. The 2012 census data show that Indigenous communities speak more than 80 different named languages besides Nepali. Named languages such as Newar, Limbu/Yaakthung, Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Tharu and Rai have a rich written literature and literary traditions as well. Whereas Indigenous and local minoritized languages were banned in public schools, even in the playground, until 1990, the State allowed private and missionary schools for middle class and elite students to use English as a medium of instruction. These divisive policies not only segregated the students in terms of their linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds, but also perpetuated an ideology of deficit among speakers of Indigenous/minoritized languages (Phyak, 2021). The students in public schools were taught in Nepali while the elite schools used English as a sole medium of instruction. This policy constructed a public assumption that languages other than Nepali and English have no relevance in education.

Due to the pressure exerted by what was known as the People’s Movement, the 1990 Constitution recognized Nepal’s linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity as part of the State’s identity. Subsequent policy emphasized the need for mother tongue education, at least in words. In 2015, the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal stated that Nepal was

a “multilingual, multicultural, and multi-ethnic country”. Despite the recognition of multilingualism, the voices of Indigenous people and other marginalized groups for multilingual education have not been fully heard, mostly because Indigenous/minoritized languages are still seen as a problem in education and the public sphere.

Some local governments and schools have started to implement mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE); although there is a significant policy–practice gap. MTB-MLE embraces both political and educational dimensions of multilingual education. It represents Indigenous people’s historical struggle for language rights and right to speak their mother tongues in the public sphere and builds on the knowledge that multilingual education supports quality learning for all children. But many of these programmes are experimental and use ‘mother tongues’ only to transition quickly to Nepali. Others teach the ‘mother tongues’ only as a subject, instead of using them as medium of instruction. In curricularizing languages other than Nepali, many Indigenous and minoritized speakers are further alienated. In the existing discourse, mother tongue education is viewed as the education only for minoritized language speakers. But their home practices, often also multilingual, bear little resemblance to what schools have constructed as their ‘mother tongues’. Both policy documents and pedagogical practices continue to enforce separatist language ideologies.

Peru

When the Spanish conquistadores arrived in present-day Peru, the Inca Empire ruled most of the territory. Quechua was predominant, and there were independent states where Quechua, Aymara and other Indigenous languages were spoken. As part of the process of domination that accompanied colonization, Spanish conquistadores created categories of exclusion. The Indigenous population was assigned a different and inferior biological race and language. These ‘other’ people were then considered ‘non-human’ and incapable of communicating because they lacked what was considered the only valid language (Cerrón-Palomino, 2010).

As in much of Latin America, the Spanish colonial government repressed all cultural and linguistic expression of the Indigenous populations, especially after the revolt of Túpac Amaru in 1780. The white ‘*criollos*’, children of Spaniards considered white and born in the Americas, continued with this same policy and ideology once they took power after independence. Up to the 1960s, the education of Indigenous Peruvians focused on transforming them into monolingual speakers of a ‘standard’ Spanish with Catholic values (Contreras 1996, Trapnell y Zavala, 2013; Zavala, 2015, 2018; Zavala & García, Forthcoming).

The formal inclusion of *lenguas originarias* in the education of some Indigenous communities started with Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) in Peru and other Latin American countries in the 1960s. This was tied to government-based reforms enacted by the populist military government ruling at the time related to the redistribution of land through agrarian reforms (López, 2003, 2020; Ruelas Vargas, 2021). The 1979 Peruvian Constitution was the first time when Quechua and Aymara were considered ‘of official use’ (and other ‘aboriginal languages’ were considered part of the cultural patrimony of the country). Unlike Spanish, which was the official language in the entire country, Quechua and Aymara were of ‘official use’ in some areas. The updated 1993 Constitution (which is the current one) upgraded Quechua, Aymara and other aboriginal languages to ‘official languages’, but continued to consider them as such only in the geographical areas where these languages prevailed. Despite this official recognition, IBE has become apolitical in the past 30 years. Its emphasis has become the revitalization of especially Quechua and Aymara, as discrete linguistic objects (Trapnell & Zavala, 2013; Zavala & Brañez, 2017), and detached of

any intention to revert the unequal treatment that Indigenous populations have received and continue to receive.

While the stated aim of IBE is for people who speak a *lengua originaria* to learn to read and write in their own *lengua* and Spanish and to be able to communicate effectively in different contexts (Ministerio de Educación del Perú, 2016), the offering of IBE has become limited to the first two or three grades of primary school and exists only in rural schools, similar to Nepal. This means that while the *lenguas originarias* are included in the early grades, rural students who speak little Spanish when entering schools would become de facto *castellanizados* (Hispanics) after their IBE ends. In the cities, Indigenous bilinguals are taught in Spanish only. Although named bilingual and intercultural, IBE has not discarded monolingual epistemologies, and assigns the two languages to a role of first and second, each considered the standard, and separating these now curricularized languages from the languaging of Indigenous communities (Kvietok-Dueñas, 2019). Pedagogical practices in IBE have generally reproduced a deficit discourse that these students do not speak either the Indigenous language or Spanish, well.

South Africa

South Africa was ruled by the Dutch and the British at different historical periods dating as far back as 1652. Since then, the ways of speaking of the autochthonous Africans and other Black Africans who have migrated to the country have been marginalized and castigated as the “clucking of the turkeys” (Alexander, 1989). During this early period of the Dutch settlers, schooling was meant to produce slaves to serve the settlers and literacy instruction was carried out through the medium of Dutch. African languages were, according to the Dutch, incomprehensible as turkey sounds and not suitable for communication between the masters and the African slaves.

The apartheid government in South Africa was established in 1948 after the white Afrikaner descendants of the Dutch came to political power for the first time. Apartheid not only segregated people according to the colour of their skin but was also inspired by the European Enlightenment ideology of one nation, one language. The apartheid architect, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd decreed: “Those who speak different languages must stay in separate quarters” (Alexander, 1989: 21). This philosophy of separation was at the heart of the apartheid regime that saw division of the speakers of Bantu languages into what was referred to as Bantustan homelands – internal territories that were formed based on what were defined as language differences. Makalela (2015) has referred to this language boundary formation as *linguistic apartheid*. This means that only one African language would be used in the schools of each of the ten Bantustan homelands. This one homeland–one language situation resulted in the selection of one African language used as the medium of learning and teaching from Grade 1 till Grade 8 and then reversed to Grade 1 till Grade 3 after the 1976 Student Uprising. This Bantustan arrangement mimicked the nation-statism ideology of one language–one nation and advanced colonial assimilation of South African languages, people and culture into European values where only European languages are used in high domains of life.

Until 1990 and the end of the apartheid rule, schooling in South Africa was strictly in the languages of the white colonizers – English or Afrikaans. Despite the subsequent recognition of 11 languages with official status (Republic of South Africa, 1996), the South African language education system today still reflects a monolingual coloniality, leaning towards English only. But even when school is said to be bilingual or multilingual, it does not match the actual dynamic linguistic practices of students. The current language in education policy encourages multilingualism in schools and leaves the responsibility to school governing bodies to promote multilingualism, which includes using more than one language for learning and teaching (Department of

Education, 2007). In practice, however, this policy is interpreted through monolingual lens where use of African languages as media of learning and teaching is reserved for Grades 1 to 3 and then a transition into English medium from Grade 4. This approach has in actual fact not changed the old colonial practice of subtractive bilingualism where African languages ceased to be the media of learning and teaching from Grade 4. Contrary to this school monolingual practice, the student speaks many languages that overlap in their everyday meaning-making process. It is in this connection that this policy–practice gap leaves teachers disoriented, and their students disproportionately disadvantaged in the post-apartheid and post-colonial South Africa.

The United States

The territory that today is the United States was inhabited by Indigenous nations with diverse cultural and language practices before the European invasion. European colonizers arrived from Spain in the 16th century and settled in what is today Florida and California, and in the early 17th century throughout the Southwest region. The first settlers from England arrived in 1619 on the eastern coast of the territory, at the same time as enslaved Africans. Through war, forced occupation and enslavement, the US gained more territories and resources in the North American continent as well as in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean, while categorizing the dominated Mexicans, Native Americans and the enslaved African Americans as racially and linguistically inferior.

Educational projects for enslaved, Indigenous and colonized populations up to the mid-20th century discouraged their development of literacy and were designed to destroy their knowledge systems and language practices. Those considered racially and linguistically different were considered inferior and segregated in schools. Their schooling was poor, with below-grade-level instruction in under-resourced schools, and in English only.

As a result of the civil rights struggles spearheaded by Chicax, Puerto Rican and Native American people in the 1960s, bilingual education programmes started to emerge. But this use of languages other than English in education soon became only a transitional measure, similar to the other three cases here considered, until the student became ‘English proficient’. The developmental maintenance bilingual programmes that had been organized by racialized communities demanding better educational, social, occupational and housing opportunities during the 1960s began to disappear. In its place a different type of bilingual education emerged – the so-called ‘dual language programmes’. The shift from ‘bilingual’ to ‘dual language’ as the 20th century came to a close, indexes an apolitical programme, distanced from the civil rights struggles that accompanied early bilingual education. Many American dual-language bilingual programmes have turned from their original purpose of educating language-minoritized children, and in particular Latinx students, to serving English speakers who want to become bilingual. Thus, although the trend toward an apolitical multilingual education is similar in the US as in Nepal, Peru and South Africa, the present apolitical nature of American dual-language bilingual programmes is different. Because Spanish as a ‘world language’ enjoys more privilege than the indigenous minoritized languages of Nepal, Peru or South Africa, American dual-language bilingual programmes are often used as instruments to gentrify neighborhoods, attracting white middle-class families to schools and communities that were previously populated by Latinx working-class families (Delavan, Valdéz & Freire, 2017). These dual-language programmes reinforce the colonial understanding of bilingualism as double monolingualism and promote standards in an invented ‘academic English’ and ‘academic Spanish’ that minoritized bilinguals cannot meet. Mena and García (2020) have referred to the Spanish taught and validated in many of these bilingual schools as “Spanish from elsewhere”, for it leaves out the bilingual practices of Latinx people in the US. In these bilingual programmes, racialized

bilinguals often learn that the dynamic language practices in their families are something of which to be ashamed. The fact that bilingual programmes use a language other than English as a medium of instruction does not in any way alleviate the coloniality of schooling.

Decolonizing multilingual pedagogies

As we have seen, the simple use of multilingualism in education based on Western European notions of bi/multilingualism as the addition of multiple named languages does not suffice to educate minoritized bilingual speakers in socially and cognitively just ways. Bilingual and multilingual programmes often reproduce the language epistemologies that have been precisely constructed to dominate and exclude minoritized populations from power and privilege. For example, the MTB-MLE programme in Nepal still embraces a standard language ideology that excludes oral and Indigenous epistemologies of languages (Phyak, 2021). The intercultural bilingual education programmes in Peru teach in a version of the Indigenous language that has been standardized away from the practices of the community. The same happens in South Africa where the very dynamic multilingual practices of African students are not recognized in programmes that teach in an indigenous African language or Afrikaans or English. And as we have seen in the American case, the use of Spanish in schools has been curricularized in ways that often exclude the dynamic bilingual practices of the Latinx community. To decolonize multilingual pedagogical practices would require adopting a different epistemology about knowledge, language and bi/multilingualism. The notion of named languages would have to be disrupted, as the pedagogical focus becomes connecting to the dynamic languaging of people and their knowledge systems. More than simple pedagogical strategies are thus needed. For this, it is important to go beyond the ideology of policy-as-text and focus on diverse languaging practices that students bring into the classroom.

Decolonial multilingual pedagogical practices will look different across contexts because they must be attuned to the local effects of coloniality (Rajendram, 2021a, b). Nevertheless, we identify three principles of a decolonizing multilingual pedagogy that would centre the epistemologies and practices of minoritized bilingual students:

1. Using folk linguistic resources and the communities' funds of knowledge
2. Leveraging speakers' translanguaging, that is, their unitary linguistic/semiotic repertoire
3. Developing learners' critical consciousness regarding the historical role of language in domination

Although we describe each principle separately, we warn readers that they do not work in isolation. For example, leveraging minoritized bilingual students' unitary linguistic/semiotic repertoire is only fitting if their epistemologies and funds of knowledge are included for the purpose of raising their critical consciousness.

Using folk linguistic resources and communities' funds of knowledge

Rather than focusing on the modern scientific knowledge about language and language education espoused by Western structural linguists, decolonial multilingual pedagogies embrace language practices, epistemologies and abilities of non-linguists, the actual users of languages. This "folk linguistics" (Preston, 2002), defined as "the beliefs about, reactions to, and comments on language by what we call 'real people' (i.e. nonlinguists)" (p. 13), builds on the knowledge and language practices of community members.

For decolonizing multilingual education, first, teachers need to collaborate with the local community and students so as to identify community expertise and funds of knowledge (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) and document a wide range of other linguistic, political, cultural and aesthetic epistemologies. The community elders with knowledge of other systems of spirituality, music/song, storytelling, medicine, ecosystem, plant, food preservation, history, culture and place have space for sharing their expertise/experiences, and collaborate with teachers in preparing lessons, curricula and instructional material. Since each community has a wide range of funds of knowledge about science, ecology and food, among others, the pedagogies must adopt a context-specific approach. The stories, songs and epistemologies of the community members are recorded, transcribed and used in teaching different subjects. This process provides teachers with opportunities to understand the linguistic and epistemological worlds of multilingual children (see García, 2009). Including such elements as local literature and stories, histories, traditions and legends, songs and music can offer a transformative approach to develop equitable multilingual pedagogies (Panda, 2012). The inclusion of such elements helps to integrate community knowledge into the classroom and represents the identities and worldviews of the students from diverse communities.

One example of decolonizing pedagogy is reported by Hough, Magar and Yonjan-Tamang (2009). They have analyzed how an Indigenous/folk approach in Nepal, for example, could create an equal educational space for Tamang ethnic minority students. Rather than adopting national textbooks, the researchers worked with the community members and students to document and use the knowledge of herbal medicines, healing practices, numerical systems and spirituality to teach science, mathematics and environment in an integrated manner. They used folklore, cultural practices, belief systems and local histories to teach language and social studies by inviting community elders and parents to share their knowledge with students. The oral history approach was adopted as a method of documenting and teaching these Indigenous knowledges to students. The language practices in this process were fluid and heteroglossic, involving those associated with what is named Tamang, as well as Nepali. The project team allowed students and teachers to use both Nepali and Tamang to learn contents of teaching and did not modify language practices because they believed that doing so would decontextualize the languaging used in the oral histories (Hough et al., 2009).

Most often, however, multilingual education policies pay attention to teaching Indigenous/minoritized languages as if it were a curricular subject and adopting a standard language ideology. Because the curricula are developed following national frameworks provided by the ry of Education, they systematically erase the local language practices considered to be non-standard or dialectical variations (Pradhan, 2019). Rather than engaging non-linguist speakers in the process of curriculum-making, linguists/experts develop materials for teaching Indigenous languages by using a standard language that excludes the beliefs and language practices of Indigenous communities.

The efforts to adopt folk linguistics as a guiding principle have been mostly short-lived. In the US, for example, as we said, developmental maintenance bilingual education programmes organized by Chicanx and Puerto Rican communities for the socio-economic improvement of their communities disappeared as the Civil Rights era ended (García, 2009). As two-way dual-language bilingual programmes have grown, emphasizing the needs of the majority English-speaking students, some educators and scholars have fought back, opening up spaces to leverage the language practices of the bilingual community (see, for example, CUNY-NYSIEB, 2020) and to develop the critical consciousness of teachers (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017). In Nepal, experimental mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) was implemented in six districts with

Athapariya, Rana Tharu, Tamang, Magar, Santhal, Rajbangshi, Uraun and Maithili communities. The programme adopted a bottom-up and ‘engaged approach’ (Davis & Phyak, 2017) in which community members and students were key agents who developed curricula, materials and pedagogical practices. Rather than focusing on what linguists think about language, MTB-MLE was built on the knowledge, beliefs and comments of the people from the local community. And yet, this too was short-lived because the Ministry of Education’s overall intent was to improve the learning of the dominant languages, Nepali and English. Since national education policies reinforce the ideologies of nationalism and neoliberalism, the agenda of implementing mother-tongue education becomes less important in education reform plans (Phyak, 2021).

Decolonizing multilingual education must be based on the knowledge and desires of language minoritized communities. The following statement by the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, is relevant here:

I have been exhorting Africans, and especially the intelligentsia to define themselves so that we, as a people, can devise and implement our own political and socio-economic programmes of action. We have to meet prevailing global challenges from within our *own worldview* and proceed to action from our own authentic possibilities based on the culture and competencies of Africans themselves.

Khoza, 2013: xi

But schools, as instruments of the powerful in the nation-state, reproduce worldviews and epistemologies that do not match those of minoritized multilingual communities. As Ribeiro (2010, 25) has said:

If the school, as an ultimately colonial creation necessitates both the construct of the mother tongue and that of the standard medium, then perhaps there is little room left for maneuvering towards a more non-hierarchical, empowering multilingualism.

One way of working towards this non-hierarchical, empowering multilingualism lies in including the epistemologies, knowledge systems, histories, stories and artistic expressions of marginalized bilingual speakers. For this, it is important for teachers and policymakers to work with non-linguist speakers and understand their language practices, beliefs and ideologies of languages.

Leveraging speakers’ translanguaging

Multilingual learners and speakers *do* language with a unitary network of linguistic/semiotic features which they leverage to make meaning, that is, they engage in translanguaging (García & Li, 2014; Li, 2018; Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015, 2019). Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) have defined translanguaging as “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (p. 283). Bilinguals do not ‘have’ two languages; they ‘do’ language with a *unitary language/semiotic repertoire*, a network of features and meanings from which they select those that are more fitting to their situations (Otheguy, García & Reid, 2019). And yet, traditional multilingual pedagogies use different named languages in isolation and prevent multilingual students from leveraging all their resources. In fact, some programmes, such as the dual-language programmes in the United States have been specifically designed to keep the two languages separate (Howard et al., 2007). This follows the sociolinguistic principle of diglossia,

that is, the compartmentalization of languages that Joshua A. Fishman (1967) proposed as the only way to maintain stable societal bilingualism. Although many critical sociolinguists (for example, Martín-Rojo, 2017) have shown how it is power and dominance that keeps diglossic compartmentalization of languages, the principle is still followed in bilingual education programmes for minoritized populations. For translanguaging pedagogical practices that honour the students' unitary repertoire to take root, educators must insist on the unitary nature of the linguistic/semiotic repertoire, as well as its potential for social and cognitive justice in education.

Indigenous communities in Nepal and Peru, and racialized/minoritized communities in South Africa and the US have been at the forefront of decolonizing multilingual educational practices. For example, recent work undertaken by scholars on learning and teaching in South African classrooms show the potential of teachers to decolonize the linguistic apartheid and leverage more dynamic multilingualism as the core African cultural competence for learning and teaching (Makalela, 2015, 2017; Madiba, 2014; Mwaniki, 2012, 2016; Mkhize, 2018). Teachers developing translanguaging pedagogical practices draw on the African value system of *ubuntu*, which predates colonialism, as a model for translanguaging theory, practice and pedagogy. Under the notion of *ubuntu* translanguaging, multilingual South Africans depend on infinite relations of dependency between named languages. For multilingual South Africans, no languaging act is complete with only linguistic features that are said to belong to one language. In this non-Western decolonial model of language education, practices that are externally described as the use of English and African languages share the same classroom space in all school subjects. In doing so, pedagogical practices respond not to language criteria that has been externally constructed and imposed, but to the language of multilingual people, to their own acts of languaging. In this way, multilingual students can access their full linguistic/semiotic repertoire, and not just a part.

As different ways of languaging are allowed into classroom spaces that were historically reserved for colonial languages, transformations start occurring. Teachers who have previously heard only with what Flores and Rosa (2015) call a "white listening ear", that is, ways of listening by those, white or non-white, who have institutional privilege, often see the language practices of minoritized communities as inherently deficient and in need of remediation. But as they start hearing students' languaging with a different ear, they start understanding how the overlapping of linguistic practices previously heard as different languages interact in translanguaging acts of reading, writing, speaking, listening and signing.

Rather than following the prescriptions of any method of teaching a foreign or second language, teachers need to use their own personal and community histories of language experiences as a tool for creating translanguaging school spaces. One specific example from Nepal is the recent work by the Newa Settlement Newa School (NSNS) Campaign of the Newar Indigenous people in the Kathmandu Valley to establish pre-primary schools that focus on teaching the Newar history, culture, knowledge and place. In these schools, teachers deconstruct the boundaries of languages and speak what are said to be Newar, Nepali and English simultaneously, that is, they engage in translanguaging. Since their textbooks focus on Newar histories, stories and cultural practices, teachers and students find the relevance of using Newar in the classroom. Their textbooks are multilingual (in Newar, Nepali and English) and adopt 'a flexible translanguaging approach' (García 2009; García & Li, 2014) to embrace the students' total linguistic/semiotic repertoire not only to create an engaging classroom environment, but to recognize the students as multilingual beings (see Phyak, 2021).

Like the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, other Indigenous communities in Nepal such as the Limbu and Tharu are actively involved in creating space for Indigenous languages in schools. In the eastern hills of the country, the Limbu people are collaborating with the local schools to implement multilingual education. They hire local teachers or educate the existing teachers

who could speak Limbu to teach different subjects. These Indigenous teachers focus on Limbu history, *Mundhum* (oral cultural performance of the Limbu people), and their artistic/aesthetic performances, as the content of teaching. Building on Indigenous folk linguistic practices and epistemologies, teachers encourage students to use all linguistic and other semiotic tools to make sense of the content of teaching. To transform the monolingual separatist language ideology, the Limbu Indigenous teachers allow students to leverage their translanguaging to also address the gap in existing knowledge of Limbu. They embrace translanguaging as an approach to help students understand and connect Indigenous history, place, and culture to their own personal and community lives. The translanguaging practices in the school convert the school into an equitable multilingual space that connects the school with home. As Phyak (2021) has observed, Limbu teachers' translanguaging practices go beyond "linguicentricism" (Spolsky, 2004) and embrace Indigenous epistemologies, histories, cultural practices and places as a resource for engaging students in a deeper-learning process. That is, to decolonize multilingual pedagogies teachers must not focus on language per se. The trans- in translanguaging means to transcend the category of named academic language that schools have produced, as well as transcend the histories constructed by colonialism. Translanguaging is a tool to understand and express epistemologies, histories and cultural practices that have been excluded from traditional multilingual schooling.

Schools for minoritized multilingual students are found in different contexts. Multilingual education programmes for Indigenous Nepalis and Peruvians are often located in rural isolated regions. Programmes for racialized bi/multilinguals in the US and South Africa are often found in urban areas. But there are also schools that serve minoritized students who live in physical borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987) and cut across geographic boundaries of nation-states, as well as languages. This is the case of the transfronterizx students in the school in El Paso, Texas, described in the study by de la Piedra and Esquinca (2022). These students go back and forth to Juárez, Mexico, on weekends and school breaks. Although the two cities are close in distance, people cross American and Mexican immigration controls, making the trip much longer. Although the teacher's science lesson described by de la Piedra and Esquinca (2022) is expected to be solely in English, she uses her students' linguistic and knowledge resources to teach science. In her classroom, students' translanguaging is the norm, and through collaborative learning, her students construct their understanding of science. For example, in one lesson about forms of energy, and how materials – and their molecular structures – conduct sound, students read extracts and watched videos in English. However, Ms. O checked her bilingual students' understandings, asked for examples from their everyday lives and especially their experiences with Mariachi music, and followed the students' translanguaging *corriente* (ongoing) (García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2017). In so doing, Ms. O recognized her role not only as a language teacher who needed to expand the students' repertoire, but also as a co-learner of the rich epistemologies and experiences with which her students made meaning. Her multilingual pedagogy leveraged translanguaging to disrupt colonial understandings of named languages and scientific knowledge, while positioning her transfronterizx students as creative, intelligent individuals with a repertoire of rich linguistic practices (de la Piedra & Esquinca, 2022).

The work of CUNY-NYSIEB (www.cuny-nysieb.org, 2020; García & Kleyn, 2016) has focused on developing translanguaging pedagogical practices that take into account the funds of knowledge of racialized bilingual communities and disrupt the policies of language separation and monolingualism that are prevalent in their education. In the dominant context of American schooling, it is often problematic to change the ways in which the language allocation policies of strict language separation have been established. The work has consisted of listening to students and educators and attempting to open up translanguaging spaces (Li, 2011) however and wherever

it is possible. For example, Sánchez, García and Solorza (2017) have described the opening up of three types of translanguaging spaces in dual-language bilingual classrooms – a translanguaging scaffolding space, a translanguaging documentation space and a translanguaging transformative space. In all these spaces, teachers are encouraged to start not from the bilingual programme’s ‘target language’ (that corresponds to a named language) but from the actual knowledge and languaging of bilingual students, which disrupts the expectation of double monolingualism so prevalent in these programmes.

Developing learners’ critical consciousness regarding the histories and experiences of domination and the role of language

To liberate minoritized multilingual speakers from the colonial production of language that has plagued their education, it is important to develop what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire called *conscientização*. According to Freire, the goal of education is to “perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (1970: 35). Teachers can develop this awareness first, before they can engage their students in this process. The dialogic engagement with students further strengthens critical political awareness of both teachers and students. Phyak (2021) has argued that educators must develop a “critical historical consciousness” to create space for Indigenous and minoritized languages. In the US, critical education bilingual scholars have identified four elements of pedagogical practices that advance the critical consciousness of teachers – historicizing, interrogating power, critical listening, and experiencing discomfort (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017; Heiman, Cervantes-Soon & Hurie, 2022; Palmer et al., 2014).

Historicizing refers to acknowledging the ways in which minoritized communities have been shamed for their language practices in schools over time. In carrying out this practice, educators put front and centre the linguistic terrorism that schools have produced for minoritized students, even in bi/multilingual programmes. Teachers also could engage students in *interrogating power*, that is, questioning whose histories, voices, languaging practices and communities are prioritized in education. Teachers need to acknowledge the fact that the legitimacy of languages in modern education is deeply rooted in the history of colonialism and cultural assimilation. In so doing, teachers could bring the diverse knowledge of the community as valid sources of knowledge. *Critical listening* involves paying close attention to the histories and voices of those who have been historically oppressed. Finally, *experiencing discomfort* means de-centring those with institutional power, whiteness, English and helping students recognize that being ‘nice’ to minoritized students is just not enough.

In the US dual-language education is the preferred bilingual education model at present. Because it includes both language minoritized students learning English as well as those learning the minority language, it has been often used, as we have said, as a tool of gentrification to attract white middle-class Americans to certain neighbourhoods, by giving them access to learning a language other than English in elementary school. For example, as described in Poza and Stites (2022), Mr. Stites teaches 8th grade social studies in English in one such programme. The school is located in a neighborhood that had been historically Latinx, but in recent years it has been gentrified. The Latinx working-class residents had to move out due to rising rents, and many now commute to the school.

Mr. Stites adapted the unit he was teaching on American expansion to the western territories in the 1800s so that students would reflect on the process of gentrification in their community. Students first analyzed primary and secondary sources, examining changes in land ownership, patterns of colonization and occupation and the removing (and killing) of Indigenous people. At the same time, students

were asked to find information on the current pattern of gentrification in their neighbourhood through social media posting, news articles and interviews. Mr. Stites encouraged their students to do their inquiries not in English but using their full language repertoire. He included multilingual materials in the classroom and students had the choice to submit their assignments in the form of video clips of interviews, role-playing skits, artwork, performances of lyrics of songs and jingles, or written essays, all showing how they were using their entire linguistic/semiotic repertoire. The historicizing in Mr. Stites's lesson included collaboratively interrogating power, as well as the development of critical listening of minoritized speakers. In so doing, the learning experience created discomfort, not just for minoritized students who were used to that experience, but also for white English speakers whose understandings of their privilege now led them to initiate action. The classroom space was turned into a space for language and sociopolitical advocacy, as language majority students transformed their views of bilingual Latinx students' language practices as deficient.

In Peru, Zavala (2015) studied a bilingual Quechua–Spanish teacher in a small Andean urban area who encouraged her students to think critically about language use. During an activity, she asked her students to discuss why Quechua was not taught in schools in the past, and why their parents, despite speaking Quechua with their own parents, decided not to speak Quechua with them. A lively conversation ensued in which students shared how Quechua speakers have been marginalized and silenced. Then, the teacher asked in Quechua and Spanish, “Will we keep feeling ashamed of speaking it?” In unison, some students responded with a ‘no’ in Spanish and others with a *manam* in Quechua. For this teacher, teaching bilingually could not be disconnected from the historical roots of oppression that continues until the present. The teacher also engaged in critical listening with her students to empower them to reaffirm their bilingual identities.

Putting it all together

This chapter is not to be read as covering teaching methods and strategies, with steps to solve challenges in multilingual classrooms. This would have reflected the coloniality of knowledge that we are critical about. We have tried then, to communicate principles, and have given examples of how these principles have taken form in diverse contexts. This chapter serves as an open invitation to teachers/researchers to dialogue on how abyssal thinking (de Sousa Santos, 2007) about language, education and multilingualism erases multilingual students' ways of being, becoming and knowing. We have argued that decolonizing multilingual education should engage in a process of “epistemological reconstitution” (Quijano, 2007) by using community epistemologies and languaging practices built on particular histories, cultures and places. We reiterate that there is a risk of reproducing colonial ideologies in multilingual education programmes if we do not explore community knowledges and the language practices through which they make sense of their multilingual words. Indeed, there are no fixed sets of rules for decolonizing multilingual education and pedagogical practices. As an unfinished project, decolonizing multilingual education engages us in understanding historical conditions of epistemic violence and valuing heterogeneous epistemologies.

Related topics

Chapter 2 Looking at multilingualism from the Global South; Chapter 7 Translanguaging and trans-semiotizing; Chapter 13 Indigenous education and multilingualism: global perspectives and local experiences; Chapter 17 Translanguaging pedagogies in the Global South: review of classroom practices and interventions.

Further reading

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(Includes chapters on decolonizing language education programmes and its pedagogies.)

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