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Decolonizing (World) Englishes

Mario Saraceni and Camille Jacob

1. Introduction

Even though decolonization was rarely mentioned explicitly, the academic field of World Englishes can be said to have been animated by a decolonizing “spirit,” especially in its early stages decades ago. In the 1980s the work of Braj Kachru, S. N. and Kamal Sridhar, Edwin Thumboo, Ayo Bamgbose, Larry Smith, Peter Strevens, Peter Lowenberg, and many others had the goal of redressing the inherent inequality that existed between varieties of English in the Inner Circle and those in the Outer Circle. Such inequality had its roots in empire and colonization, and so the ambition to achieve equal Englishes was also the ambition to decolonize the language and its varieties. Key to this was the recognition of the plurality and validity of the forms and functions of English in such postcolonial countries as India, Singapore, Nigeria, Kenya and so on, and the consequent claims of “ownership” that people in those settings could make over the language. English, in all its localized forms, rightfully belonged to anybody who used it. This project, however, has received significant criticism over the years. On the one hand, those who see the expansion of English as a cause of linguistic imperialism have accused World Englishes scholars of providing a justification for the continuing dominance of English over other languages. On the other hand, a more recent critique has pointed out how the World Englishes egalitarian ethos actually reflects and is based on the aspirations of a rather restricted elite of creative writers and intellectuals who enjoyed the privilege not only of possessing a sophisticated mastery of the English language, but also of using that very mastery as the core of their profession. Consequently, the idea of World Englishes ends up being an illusion masking the reality that sees English very much entangled with severe forms of inequality that still exist in postcolonial societies. “Equal Englishes” is then a mere beautiful facade of what is, in effect, “unequal Englishes” (Tupas 2015). In this chapter we argue that World Englishes needs to engage with decolonization more in depth and in more complex ways and examine its subject matter and its research paradigms by adopting a “decolonial strategic framework” (Rutazibwa 2019) consisting of three aims: to de-mythologize (what is “English?”), to de-silence (which aspirations, struggles, lives are entangled with “English?”) and to de-colonize (how do we de-centralize the development of knowledge about “English?”).

2. The Meaning of Decolonization

In a panel discussion entitled “Understanding Decolonization in the 21st Century,” organized by Chatham House on February 14, 2020, Tristram Hunt noted that “the origins of the Victoria and Albert Museum are embedded in the British imperial and colonial stories, and this is why I think to decolonize the V&A in many ways doesn’t make sense because you can’t” (Hunt 2020). Hunt, who is the director of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), also remarked elsewhere that “for a museum like the V&A, to decolonize is to decontextualise: the history of empire is embedded in its meaning and collections” (Hunt 2019). He therefore rejects the notion of decolonizing the museum on the grounds that colonial history is too much an intrinsic part of it and cannot be dislodged from it. In response to Hunt’s argument, Sumaya Kassim contends that this line of reasoning consists in sticking to “a script that continues to be rehearsed despite being resisted, debunked and complicated even as it is first documented” (Kassim 2019), and that perpetuates “a one-sided story” serving the interests of “colonial apologists.”

The script that Kassim refers to is evident, too, in debates surrounding monuments of imperialists in public spaces. In 2015, the “Rhodes Must Fall” movement in South Africa advocated the removal of a statue of British imperialist and white supremacist Cecil Rhodes from the University of Cape Town, on the grounds that the values that Rhodes represented were completely incompatible with those of an educational setting and, in general, of post-Apartheid South Africa. The principles of the movement quickly expanded to other university campuses and other countries, including Britain, where a statue of Rhodes adorned Oriel College at Oxford University (Ahmed 2020). The controversy that ensued was similar to that about the decolonization of museums. Those who opposed the removal of the statue argued that “Rhodes cannot be expunged from the history of Oxford, Britain and South Africa” (Hutton 2015). Recent renewed calls for the removal of statues of slave traders from British towns in June 2020 have been met with the same argument. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson posted a comment on Twitter in which he said that “We cannot now try to edit or censor our past. We cannot pretend to have a different history” (June 12, 2020).

Those who maintain that history cannot be re-written tend to believe, more or less innocently, that it is simply a fixed sequence of events, and forget that how those events are (or not!) talked about in history books varies depending on who writes those books, from which perspective, what is emphasized and what is left out. The historiography of the British Empire offers perhaps one of the most striking pieces of evidence of the importance of history as narrative. While some scholars still tenaciously cling on to a romantic view of the empire as a benign force that helped spread civilization, democracy, and liberty around the world (see, for example, Ferguson 2003), others, less influenced by patriotic feelings, have not refrained from revealing the atrocities perpetuated by British imperialists. When the empire was coming to an end, the systematic destruction of archival documents relating to such atrocities is a very clear illustration of how history is manipulated for specific reasons (Elkins 2015). And, in fact, “interpretations of the past are shaped by

the political demands of the present” (Vince, forthcoming), and the political demands of post-imperial and post-war Britain have produced a vignette in which the British empire civilized the world and, eventually, also saved it from the threat of the Third Reich.

Decolonization, then, is not about attempting to remove segments of history. On the contrary, it is about engaging with colonial history seriously, understanding how it determines many aspects of the present, and changing practices accordingly. So the removal of statues of dubious figures, like Cecil Rhodes or Edward Colston, a slave trader commemorated in the iconography and toponymy of Bristol should be regarded as something that “begins a conversation about how we are shaped by our past and that we are accountable for how it configures the present” (Bhambra 2020). From this perspective, decolonization is only a means, not a goal, towards a different system of relationships to others, to land, to knowledge (Cairns 2020).

These debates point to (1) the concept of decolonization as both event and process (Jansen and Osterhammel 2017), and (2) the continuation of uneven political, economic, epistemic, cultural, and social power relations that are the legacies of imperialism and colonialism. The former includes the acknowledgement that “the colonizers did not simply turn off the light and vanish into the night” (Jansen and Osterhammel 2017: 15) and that political, economic, cultural, and social relations between former colonies and the metropolises remained closely entangled even after the formal advent of independence. Decolonization is also the process of disentangling some of these relations, or at least questioning and reshaping them from the perspective of the former colonies. The second aspect is an extension of the first, the recognition of the coloniality of present modes of learning, using language, organizing a state, defining citizenship, and “continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system” (Grosfoguel 2007: 219–20). Taking a decolonial approach thus means recognizing the entanglement, or intersectionality (after Crenshaw 1989) of multiple global and localized linguistic, racial, epistemic, political, economic, spiritual, and sexual hierarchies (Grosfoguel 2007: 217).

In conclusion, decolonization

has two key referents. First, it is a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study; it re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view. Second, it purports to offer alternative ways of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political praxis.

Bhambra et al. 2018: 2

Having outlined our theoretical backdrop, in the rest of this chapter we discuss how the principle of decolonization applies to discourses about English and to the World Englishes academic field.

3. Decolonization and World Englishes

Paraphrasing Tristram Hunt's words above, the origins of English in the world are embedded in British imperial history. The so-called "spread" of English (see below for a critique of this term) was a direct result of the expansion of the British empire. "Expansion of the British empire" is of course an expression that, if left unpacked, may hide the actual human activities that went on during imperialism: land grabbing, mass murder, slavery, concentration camps, looting, buccaneering, subjugation, and exploitation of entire societies. It is these activities, nominalized into the less offensive "British empire," that are the primary historical reasons why people in New York, Kingston, Lagos or New Delhi use English in their daily lives. The origins of the World Englishes academic field can be said to stem, at least in part, from the awareness of the imperial matrix of English in the world. Braj Kachru's critical reflections in the late 1960s and 1970s, which would later develop into the World Englishes paradigm, focused very much on the decolonization¹ of English. "What is 'colonial' about English?," and "How can the process of 'decolonization' of the language be initiated?" he asks (Kachru 1987: 255).

Kachru's answer to those questions, throughout his academic career, and which indeed formed the core of the World Englishes ethos, centered on the need for "Third World" varieties of English to be recognized and for attitudes towards them to change:

It will [...] be appropriate that the native speakers of English abandon the attitude of linguistic chauvinism and replace it with an attitude of linguistic tolerance. The strength of the English language is in presenting the *Americanness* in its American variety, and the *Englishness* in its British variety. Let us, therefore, appreciate and encourage the Third World varieties of English too. The individuality of the Third World varieties, such as the *Indianness* of its Indian variety, is contributing to the linguistic mosaic which the speakers of the English language have created in the English speaking world. The attitude toward these varieties ought to be one of appreciation and understanding.

Kachru 1976: 236

Kachru's plea was about a radical change of mindset with regard to the forms and functions of English beyond the inner circle and, consequently, with regard to the cultures in which English had been absorbed and nativized. His sentiments were inspired by those expressed by creative writers in postcolonial settings, such as Raja Rao in India and Chinua Achebe in Nigeria, who had made claims of "ownership" of the English language. These writers felt that although it had arrived within very dubious circumstances, English had become integral to the social fabric of postcolonial societies and their creative efforts were testimony to the extent to which the language had set new roots and regrown in the new lands. In one of his most frequently cited essays, Achebe stated: "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English [...], altered to suit its new African surroundings" (Achebe 1965: 30). The deliberate alteration of the English language, of its lexis, grammar and rhythm, was key to the process whereby the

language would simultaneously lose its colonial baggage and become capable of expressing Caribbean, African and Asian cultures. Speaking about Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura* (1938), Srivastava (2010: 316) notes: "In translating Gandhian notions into English, Rao forces the erstwhile colonial language to adapt to Kannada rhythms and structures of speech. He is transforming it into a tool for the Indian bilingual patriotic intelligentsia to identify themselves as 'Indians.'" In this way, English "becomes the vehicle for radically anti-colonial notions." Turning English into an instrument of decolonization is the central idea here: "What writers like Desani, Rao, and Rushdie are trying to do is to decolonize the English language so as to recover the deeper springs of Indian consciousness which lie hidden beneath the crusts of language" (Dissanayake 1985: 241).

This subversion of the English language has been described in terms of two distinct processes by Ashcroft et al. (1989): *abrogation* and *appropriation*. The former, defined as "a vital moment in the de-colonizing of the language" (38), involves rejecting all the parameters of correctness – in terms of values, behaviour as well as language – emanating from the former colonizers' cultural base, while the latter is the re-forging of the language to make it capable of expressing local values and ideas. In this way, English ceases to be somebody else's language and becomes one's own. Kamal Das (1973: 26) expresses this notion in "An Introduction" particularly cogently:

The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses.
All mine, mine alone
It is half English, half Indian

Crucially, a localized form of English can be used to "write back" to the center of the former empire, that is to respond to centuries of representations of the colonies from a British imperial perspective—as *Orientalism* was deconstructed by Edward Said in the case of the "Middle East" and North Africa (1978). The idea of "writing back" originally came from Salman Rushdie's article "The Empire writes back with a vengeance" (1982). In it, the writer states that the English language, "tainted by history," "needs to be decolonized," and this can be done if writers are willing and able to "infuse English with new rhythms, new histories, new angles on the world." He uses the expressions "assaults on the classical frontiers of the language" to refer to this kind of alteration of English, giving metaphorically violent undertones to such literary efforts. Interestingly, the Caribbean/British poet John Agard (1985) encapsulates this sentiment in his "Listen Mr Oxford Don" poem, where he declares "mugging de Queen's English is the story of my life" and "I making de Queen's English accessory/to my offence." Language becomes a weapon of resistance as well as attack.

Rushdie then refers explicitly to the transplantation of English in new places, a key concept in World Englishes: "English, no longer an English language, now grows from many roots; and those whom it once colonized are carving out large territories within the language for themselves" (Rushdie 1982). These notions constitute the very core of the World Englishes ethos: British imperialism transplanted and, to some extent, imposed English in new sociocultural milieus, but the language subsequently went

through a process of nativization and acculturation and was re-shaped, appropriated and ultimately freed of its colonial heritage. In the next section we discuss the limitations of this analysis.

4. The Limitations of the Decolonization Spirit in WE

Our critique in this section is articulated along two main lines of reasoning. First, we question the casual and often uncritical way in which the notion of language appropriation in former British colonies is talked about and, secondly, we argue that the primacy of the formal aspects of language such as syntax, vocabulary or accent, is ill conceived when discussing decolonization and the place of language within it.

4.1 The Grammar of World Englishes

The following sentence by Salikoko Mufwene, in his series editor's foreword to Edgar Schneider's *Postcolonial English: Varieties Around the World* (2007), encapsulates the premise of World Englishes: "Having been appropriated by new speakers in diverse contact ecologies, English has been adapted to different communicative practices and indigenized to express local and novel cultures" (xi). Mufwene's succinct description is representative of the prevalent manner in which this core concept is talked about in the literature, from a syntactic point of view. Namely, the use of the passive voice not only allows for a more agile prose, but it also has the advantage of foregrounding "English" by placing it in the subject position. In fact, on the surface, there is nothing particularly remarkable about this syntactic choice, which can be easily explained by the fact that, after all, the topic of Schneider's book, and indeed of the vast majority of WE literature, is indeed the English language and its distinct worldwide varieties. However, one potential problem with such constructions is that they hide agency or relegate it to a secondary position. In this particular case, "new speakers" are mentioned, but the focus is very much on "English" and on the verbs "appropriated," "adapted" and "indigenized." We argue that this kind of syntax is not just a matter of style but it encodes a general and rather problematic orientation towards the role of English(es) in decolonization. The erasure or de-emphasizing of human agency produces discourse where English is elected as the primary subject but is also somewhat detached from the social fabric within which it is in reality intricately embedded. In turn, this causes both over-simplified representations of the relationship between language and society and an exaggeration of the role of language in complex societal issues, mechanisms, processes, such as decolonization or the unequal distribution of wealth.

4.1.1 Who Owns What?

The topic of appropriation and ownership of English can serve as a good illustration of the issue of over-simplification of society. Just as an example, Rose et al.'s assertion (2020: 50) that "English has been appropriated first by the Outer Circle countries where English is used locally as a second language, such as India and Nigeria" is both a cliché

in the literature and an instance of extreme simplification of the role of people and societies. Here, human agency is rendered metonymically with reference to whole countries and hence obfuscated. Discounting a literal interpretation, i.e., that countries such as India and Nigeria have somehow appropriated the English language, the meaning of this sentence is that *people* in India and Nigeria have gained ownership of the language (e.g., by altering it to make it suitable to their respective sociocultural environments). Even so, this is still a huge generalization, which describes a complex phenomenon in very broad brushstrokes. For a start, statements of this kind depict English as uniformly present among very large populations, even if in reality this is far from being the case. In India, for example, “There is a wide range of estimates on the circulation of English,” but “Ultimately, the only real consensus is that it is spoken by an elite minority” (Bhattacharya and Mohanty, forthcoming). Even if quantifying the use of English in a country is a futile exercise, the significant point here is “the colonially induced élitist nature of English-language use” (Tupas 2016: 57). And the nativization of the language, intended as its deliberate moulding according to local sociocultural environments, is a privilege of precisely the intellectual elite.

English is not only a language of the elite, but is also a language that “benefits the already English-rich ... more than the English-poor and the gap between them increases progressively” (Mohanty 2017: 275). Mohanty’s words echo Rao’s:

English has certainly benefited the already privileged—those economically well off and those with a tradition of formal education in the family. ... In a country with increasing inequalities, English has become a source of social division and exclusion, thereby undermining the social justice agenda of education in a democracy.

Rao 2016: 205–6

But even this view might not necessarily tell the whole story. For example, Vaish (2005: 203) claims that in India “English is a tool of decolonization in the hands of subaltern communities and can help them access the global economy.” The ways in which English is entangled with economy, identity, nationalism, power and so on certainly should not be reduced to a single monochrome portrayal: the English language is “a site of competing (and contradictory) ideologies” (Canagarajah 2000: 130). And, still with reference to South Asia, Mahapatra and Mishra (2019) remind us:

Sometimes, [English education] is the means through which identity is constructed and at times, resisting English becomes a way of affirming an identity. If English was the chief means of constructing colonial modernity and structuring a nationalist identity among the elite, rejecting it in favour of the vernaculars and identifying with common masses was a means of expressing anti-colonial sentiment and structuring an alternative identity. With the growing importance of English globally, and the opening up of India to the global economy, English education is also seen as a means of acquiring a new identity, an identity of resistance to the traditional upper-class, upper-caste hegemony in India.

Mahapatra and Mishra 2019: 352

So, the obfuscation or over-simplification of human agency in the ways in which the appropriation of English in former British colonies is talked about has, as a corollary, the exaggeration of the role that the language itself plays in the complex and tortuous dynamics of decolonization.

4.1.2 *The Place of Language*

The syntactic centrality of English we mentioned earlier often goes beyond the use of the passive voice. English, that is, is not just the subject of clauses but also the doer of actions. Indeed, the primacy of language in World Englishes and, more in general, in much scholarship in sociolinguistics, causes inevitable overreliance on metaphorical representations of English (Saraceni 2015) as an entity capable of performing actions, independently of the people who use it. David Crystal's statement explaining the global expansion of English thanks to its being "a language which has repeatedly found itself in the right place at the right time" (2003: 120) is one of the best-known examples of this particular depiction of English. The *ENGLISH IS A TRAVELLER* metaphor underpins many historical-geographical accounts of English as a global language. The idea of English having "travelled around the world" (Halliday 2016: 115) is often utilized as a convenient shortcut to describe the ways in which British imperialists brought their language with them as they went about seizing land and exploiting local communities, at times imposing their language, at other times deliberately limiting access to it, and the ways in which local communities, on their part, began to use the language for various purposes, such as education, legislation, creative writing, or indeed to affirm anti-colonial stances.

Once again, the economy of syntax and agility of prose may be part of the reason why such expressions are utilized. Still, metaphors like *ENGLISH IS A TRAVELLER* are particularly insidious, especially if they are used repeatedly enough to become sedimented in academic discourse, since they produce a systematic erasure of the actual social actors involved and their actions in the so-called "spread of English" and, consequently, a sanitization of it by removing its imperialistic dimension. In fact, the very phrase "spread of English" is itself problematic for precisely these reasons. In his critique of what he calls the "conspiracy theory," Spolsky (2004: 79) rhetorically asks if the spread of English in the world happened or it was caused, but the point we wish to make here is that the very possibility of that question is given by the de-contextualized nature of the phrase "spread of English."

One of the harshest critics of this type of aseptic descriptions of the history and geography of English in the world has been Robert Phillipson. With the publication of his *Linguistic Imperialism* in 1992, "the discourse on world English(es) changed gear dramatically" (Bolton 2006: 203). More than anyone before him, Phillipson emphasized the importance of structural inequalities between the West—and in particular the Anglophone countries—and developing countries and, in his view, the fundamental role that the English language had in perpetuating the hegemony of the West. His argument was that Anglophone countries, mainly Britain and the USA, had a vested interest in promoting the English language globally and then this created a situation in which "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and

continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (Phillipson 1992: 47). From this perspective, the dominant position of English is a vehicle of the hegemonic position of Anglophone countries in the world in what can be described as neo-colonialism. Yet, even in Phillipson’s analysis, it is language that takes center stage. Linguistic imperialism is, according to him, a form of *linguicism*, which “involves representations of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for purposes of inclusion, and the opposite for dominated languages, for purposes of exclusion” (Phillipson 1992: 55).

Bernard Spolsky, one of Phillipson’s critics, pointed out that

[Phillipson’s] linguicentric approach distracts attention from the central problem. It was not colonial language policy, whether to use the metropolitan or the local vernacular language as a medium in schools, that was the core issue; . . . Rather, it was the colonial situation, whereby one nation came to rule another, that produced the underlying inequality that turned out to be virtually impossible to overcome. In other words, imperialism and not linguistic imperialism is the real issue.

Spolsky 2004: 84–5

Consequently, for Spolsky, “Rather than gross generalizations suggesting that English is always dominant, we need more detailed studies of how it enters into the complex set of language choices made in a specific community” (Spolsky 2004: 86). Similarly, Rubdy (2015: 58) notes how “The real issue for former colonial countries is not of opposing either globalization or English, but rather of bringing about a more equitable distribution of globalization’s benefits.” Taking this point seriously into account, one could question whether language plays any part at all in mechanisms of imperialism and, especially, decolonization. For Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, language and (de-)colonization are inseparable: “In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 9). Ngũgĩ’s statement is part of his discussion about “decolonizing the mind,” which can be much more arduous than the process whereby a country gains its political independence. But, again, the distinction that must be made is between language as code, i.e., its grammar, lexis, phonology, and the ways in which language is part of a wider discourse of systemic inequality: “it is not English—if by that, we mean a certain grammar and lexicon—that is the problem. It is the *discourses* of English that are the problem” (Pennycook 2012: 26, our emphasis).

The place of English in the colonial and neo-colonial word order is described particularly compellingly by Kabel (forthcoming): “English is encrusted in the coloniality of knowledge” and “[t]his lodges knowledge and English at the center of a new planetary cartography of accumulation by dispossession wherein the Global South is locked into a lopsided post-Fordist architecture resolutely beholden to the interests of the North.” What all of this means is that a narrow and superficial linguistic focus is clearly not sufficient if we want to engage with and begin to understand how English is “encrusted” in persistent forms of colonialism and what parts it may play in the decolonization of the mind as well as of the world economy. To return to the idea

that the nativization and appropriation of English have taken place and are instruments of decolonization, it is fair to say that it is a rather optimistic or perhaps even naive concept. Nativization

is a relatively simple process of indiginizing the phonological, syntactic and pragmatic aspects of the linguistic system of the English language—a target that has been largely achieved. Decolonization is a fairly complex process of taking control of the principles and practices of planning, learning, and teaching English—a task that has not been fully accomplished.

Kumaravadivelu 2003: 540

So, even if the nativization of the English code has taken place and even if we accept that this may mean decolonizing the language, we must not lose sight of the fact that “Having colonized the English language . . . does not mean its speakers have been freed from conditions of coloniality.” (Tupas 2019: 7) We must not forget that coloniality

can be read as a matrix of power . . . resulting in, allowing for and sustaining a triple system of violence and destruction: (1) *genocide* as in the physical killing, destruction and disposability of certain peoples . . . (2) *epistemicide* as in the destruction of certain (peoples’) knowledges and ways of knowing . . . (3) *ecocide* as in the destruction of life environments and ecosystems.

Rutazibwa 2020: 224

Decolonizing therefore cannot only be about recognizing that “English” is not the “property” of the Inner Circle, or that it has been appropriated, nativized in postcolonial contexts, but rather must take into account the matrix of power and the very real system of violence and destruction on which the learning, teaching and using of this language is based and within which they are still taking place. The question of who benefits from the promotion of pluralist perspectives of English remains unspoken, especially in terms of career gains for researchers themselves as well as for the wider ELT industry (Kubota 2015: 36). In practice, this means that appropriated forms of Englishes are extolled in academic spaces where Inner Circle norms are firmly policed (Rambukwella 2019: 129).

Finally, Tuck and Yang draw our attention to the pitfalls of the use of the word “decolonizing” as a generic referent to social justice or an empty signifier of any attempts at “inclusivity” (Tuck and Yang 2012). They underline the situatedness of the colonial experience and the coloniality of power relations: in settler states such as the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, decolonizing cannot just mean a change in the curriculum, but entails a fundamental unsettling of wealth, land, and ownership. “Decolonizing” Englishes in India therefore means something different than decolonizing Englishes in South Africa, where settlers continue to own the majority of the land and wealth, and English-speakers have reinvented / re-labelled the language as “neutral,” “innocent” of the continued damages of colonization and apartheid, and supposedly allowing for greater political, economic and social participation.

5. What does Decolonizing World Englishes Mean?

5.1 De-mythologize

In World Englishes we need to be more humble and recognize the limitations imposed by disciplinary boundaries that are like fortified walls encircling academic citadels, unwillingly but nearly inevitably erected and reinforced by university courses, academic publications (including this one), conferences, seminars etc. We need to be more humble about the subject of our enquiry and, as Tupas (2019: 1) says, “in our desire to study language in society, we must not assume that language is central to speakers’ lives as is usually the case when we study the role of language in society.” In fact, Braj Kachru himself noted how “questions about language and power need not necessarily involve linguistic issues. The issues go beyond linguistics into the realms of history, sociology, attitude studies, politics, and into very mundane economic considerations” (Kachru 1986: 122). The problem, Tupas continues, is that “studies on World Englishes have broadly been about the ‘Englishes’ and much less about the ‘world’” (2019: 2), and so we need to “make as our central object of investigation the cultural, economic and sociopolitical constitution of ‘the world’ in which the Englishes are produced and embedded” (2019: 3–4). And, once again, we need to abandon the familiar and protective comfort produced by self-reference, and we need to transcend disciplinary boundaries and establish meaningful dialogues with historians, political scientists, sociologists, and scholars in international relations, development studies, etc.

We must be more alert to how we talk about English, too. Conceptual shortcuts afforded by the use of metaphors that represent English as an autonomous being, capable of performing actions such as travelling, spreading, bringing riches, adapting, influencing, dominating and so on have the detrimental effects of erasing human agency and magnifying the role of language per se, as if it could be separated from the linguists and researchers who played a role in elaborating “English” as a subject of study. We have to be prepared to talk about people and society far more than we currently do. De-mythologizing English is thus a first step towards de-silencing, the second principle of decolonizing World Englishes.

5.2 De-silence

In trying to understand what “English” is and how it is used, we must contend with the contradictions and complexities of people’s responses rather than simply stake out our beliefs in transformative conceptual frameworks such as World Englishes or translanguaging. Therefore decolonizing World Englishes might mean decolonizing its speakers, but most importantly also entails decolonizing the practices (including research practices) of its proponents. While other disciplines have reckoned with their role as “handmaiden of colonialism” (Gough 1968), debates over the historical development of sociolinguistics in conjunction with the colonial project have remained largely contained within studies of African languages (Irvine and Gal 2000; Lüpke 2017; van den Avenne 2017).

In addition, social sciences and humanities disciplines as a whole have so far engaged with their participants largely as sources of evidence and anecdotes, despite attempts to move away from seeing them as data-producing machines (Oakley 1981: 36–40). Within this approach to research, the capacity of participants (informants, interviewees, respondents . . .) to theorize and make sense of their own societies are sidelined, erased or discounted, to make more space for the researcher's voice. As Yarimar Bonilla argues,

ethnographers rarely demonstrate their interlocutors' ability to speak with analytic value about their own society—much less the society of others. The voices of informants might be rallied as evidence within a scholar's argument, but the position of those informants within that argument—and their assessment of its stakes—are rarely explored.

Bonilla 2015: xv

Although World Englishes research relies heavily on qualitative or even ethnographic approaches, methodological and ethical questions of the hierarchical relations between the researcher and the subject-turned-object of study have not been prevalent, and in practice, “scholars rarely engage the objects of their research as full citizens of the world capable of thinking, writing, and answering back” (Muppidi 2013: 300). This is particularly problematic within the context of wanting to conduct research *and* write about research findings while challenging the supremacy of Inner Circle norms. It tends to reproduce not only knowledge production mechanisms inherited from the colonial era, but also monolithic views of language and languaging, by seeking a “truer” narrative and single explanatory framework to account for the contradictions and messiness of participants' voices. In contrast, Bonilla proposes to take participants' explanatory frameworks seriously, rather than relegating them to “naive informants” status. As she explains in the preface to *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment*:

I purposefully engage with my informants as theorists—that is, as reflective actors who seek to make sense of their experiences in relation to the ideas and experiences of others. In deciding when to cite, quote, or paraphrase, I treat their reflections and arguments as I do those of other theorists: I cite when I wish to rally their authority; I quote when I think they have found *le mot juste* to describe a particular phenomena [*sic*], and I paraphrase when I feel like I can articulate their vision more succinctly, or more accessibly, to my presumed audience. Moreover, I engage with my informants as a literary critic might engage with an author's reflections about their oeuvre: that is, I grant them analytic competency over their own acts and forms of cultural production.

2015: xvi

The questions raised by the ethical and methodological issues related to languages other than English can be helpful here. For instance, in relying on “native speakers” with no linguistics credentials to ascertain the applicant's region of origin from a brief

interview (Patrick 2019), current asylum procedures of the British Home Office reproduce colonial relations of the “native informant,” allowed to speak only within a narrow remit. The way recognition of and knowledge about natural language variation is used is not inherently transformative. In this scenario, the recognition of expertise is embedded within deeply unequal structures of power which pre-determine the questions and the answers. The question of finding categories and discourses relevant to participants rather than the researcher have given rise to “folk linguistics” approaches, which have been held as an important element of critical sociolinguistics (Albury 2017). However, in the literature these are often used to show “uninformed” locals unaware of more transformative frameworks of understanding language, holding on to beliefs in “proper” language vs. slang, and in the existence of language as a “thing.” The discussion is one between the expert and laypeople who have to be corrected, rather than between different analytical interpretations. An alternative approach towards de-silencing voices (and bodies) historically marginalised by research on Englishes has included citizen sociolinguistics (Rymes and Leone 2014, see also the Citizen Sociolinguistics blog), taking its cues from citizen science (Irwin 1995) in order to foreground non-academic expertise.

Scholars have also pointed to many academic practices which lead to silencing, from disqualifying local voices (Trouillot 2003: 132) and strategic appropriation (Cusicanqui 2012) to the erasure of issues of race and the upholding of whiteness as the “neutral” standard, whether in TESOL (Flores and Rosa 2015) or in World Englishes more specifically (Kubota 2018). All are mechanisms which maintain practitioners and researchers of colour and/or based in the Global South as “subaltern intellectuals” (Kumaravadivelu 2016: 76), as well as hide hierarchies of power and the violence of colonial legacies through “the power to define what is and what is not a serious object of research and, therefore, of mention” (Fernando 2014: 99). De-silencing Englishes users within World Englishes thus requires the rethinking of research, collaboration and dissemination practices through a profound unsettling of existing norms and hierarchies at the local and global levels.

5.3 De-colonize

In Section 3, we pointed out to the gap between the promotion of equal varieties within a World Englishes framework at the academic level and the reinforcement of Inner Circle norms in practice. Suggestions on how to de-center English and re-center Englishes abound, from reforming teacher training to creating new textbooks. Already in 2002, Lin et al. had suggested a glocalised form of learning, “where the global and the local dissolve in the situated appropriation of a global means by local social actors for local purposes” (Lin et al. 2002: 313) alongside a de-centering of authority in the production of pedagogical knowledge. Changes in the classroom cannot occur without wider social changes and therefore “collectively disclose and act upon the core of social inequality produced through language” (Martín Rojo 2020: 154).

Unsettling authority is a necessary step in decolonizing World Englishes as a discipline and as a set of language practices. Who gets to be heard, who acts as gatekeeper, who is recognized as an expert, who is rewarded for praising decolonized Englishes, and

who is rewarded for continuing to use Inner Circle norms? This unsettling must take several forms, as decolonizing entails adapting to the local conditions of coloniality. Moving from knowledge production (an accumulation of knowledge for knowledge's sake) to knowledge cultivation ("to till, to turn matter around and fold back on itself so as to encourage growth," Shilliam 2013) would enable the inclusion of local histories and knowledge to more effectively question power hierarchies. De-silencing and de-centering are therefore key in this process. De-centering analytical authority (Higgins 2009: 17) is well developed in feminist methodologies and further emphasized in Yarimar Bonilla's approach to recognizing the knowledge, experience and expertise of participants/respondents/interviewees beyond falling into "folk" conceptions of research. In addition, paraphrasing Chakrabarty, we need to provincialize Inner Circle Englishes, in other words, cut them down to size by acknowledging our use of particular varieties rather than a neutral standard. Decolonizing World Englishes cannot happen without Inner Circle speakers decolonizing themselves and recognizing their variety as just one variety amongst others.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed the principle of decolonization as it applies to discourses about English with specific references to World Englishes as a research area. As we have shown, the focus on the nativization and appropriation within World Englishes does not question and sometimes may even encourage the sanitizing of history and the erasure of social actors, for example through the employment of insidious metaphors such as *ENGLISH IS A TRAVELLER* or the "spread" of English. We made the point that colonialism, empire, inequality and power should be brought firmly to the fore when discussing the roles of English(es) in the world and avoid superficial and casual references to notions such as the "neutrality" or "ownership" of the language. Finally, borrowing Rutazibwa's paradigm, we have drawn out a blueprint for a bolder approach to producing alternative ways in which we discuss and research the roles of English(es) in the world.

Notes

- 1 Kachru, however, made rare explicit references to this specific term.

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