



Introduction to the Theme Section: Language, Identity, and the Legacy of Colonialism

Colonialism imposes “distinction” as an ideological yardstick against which all other cultural values are measured, including language. (Macedo, 2017 [this issue], p. 93)

The previous spring theme section tackled issues of second language acquisition and pedagogy while highlighting learner aspirations and identity dynamics at the micro level of learning. As a choice of focus for this theme section, we continue with the same topic of language and identity but from a macro perspective. This means that authors in this issue continue to explore concepts related to identity in language-learning contexts and in light of the dominance of English, but they do so by zooming outward to take account of larger forces that have informed an enduring ideology around the position of English as the *only* language (i.e., the legacy of the English-only movement) and its superior status (i.e., the legacy of colonialism). Topic discussions around colonialism and identity in this theme section are especially timely given the toxic environment created for many immigrants and immigrant communities in the US postelection period.

Much has been written about the persistent and widespread impact of colonialism and its contemporary offspring, imperialism, on the teaching and learning of the English language (Canagarajah, 1999; Motha, 2014; Pennycook, 2001; Phillipson, 1992). Historically, the spread of English accompanied colonial endeavors when the conquerors acquired lands and sought to control the people who lived on that land. The imposition of English on the minds and hearts of the native population was often an inherent part of the project, although it represented itself as the project of discovery, exploration, and civilization (Motha, 2014). Given this history, Motha observes that a colonial imprint is stamped into our profession as English language profes-

sionals. She relies on Maldonado-Torres (2007), who argues that the end of colonialism does not necessarily mean the end of coloniality: “Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns. ... In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday” (p. 243).

With respect to the learning of the English language, coloniality is woven throughout schooling policy and procedures as well as within the language-teaching processes with which TESOL professionals are involved. It is in line with this pattern that, in the theme section’s leading article, Donaldo Macedo, a professor of sociolinguistics and the longtime collaborator of the late Paulo Freire, calls the larger forces of coloniality by their tendencies as “imperialistic desires” in English-only language policies. Macedo argues that the “superiority complex of viewing English as the international language, the language of commerce, the language of technology that everyone wants or needs to learn, is part and parcel of the imperialist desire” (p. 82). By pointing to the facile dismissal of the failure of foreign language education in the US as well as the presumption of a correlation between majoring in Latin (an imperial language) and the superior intelligence of the learner, he draws attention to the contemporary reigning ideological yardsticks. Such yardsticks, he observes, generate and sustain linguistic, cultural, and racial discrimination, resulting in the imposition of a “distinction” against other languages and their speakers as a vestige of the colonial legacy in our democracy.

When it comes to the work of educators and practitioners of TESOL, Macedo’s article serves several important purposes. First, it offers the perspective and benefit of knowing and thinking about our present period as a moment in long historical time. This view helps us develop a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the superior status that is granted to English. As practitioners, we take our job of teaching the language with the utmost seriousness it deserves, but when Macedo claims that “language is never considered as a major factor to be taken seriously in educational policy making” (p. 82), he intends to raise awareness about the “superiority complex” inherent in the policies prescribing the parameters around which our practice operates. Therefore, the effectiveness of methods for educating non-English-speaking students comes under question when, because of ideological elements, they serve to produce and maintain linguistic, cultural, and racial discrimination. Just as teachers need to understand something of their students’ personal history and current environments to teach them effectively, they also need to understand

something of English's history and current environment to teach *it* effectively (Motha, 2014).

Second, the leading article expands on the notion of the “fractured identities” that leave an indelible psychological scar experienced by linguistic-minority students. Macedo's discussion of the ideological components of the English-only approach and identity formation takes place at the intersection of language, power, and race and prompts us as language professionals to think about ways that our profession might mimic patterns of colonization. This can happen through the promotion of assimilationist ideas, such as by encouraging students to take up American-like speech patterns, native-speaker accent, or even in some cases consumerist practices. It reminds us, instead, to work toward a culturally relevant pedagogy that offers the capacity to heal the fractures. The acquisition of English seems to be more of an unquestionable necessity but as research has shown, appreciation of students' cultural resources and the nurturing of their linguistic knowledge and skills are effective measures to facilitate their learning of English in a critical manner that will in turn enrich not only the individual but our collective, the nation.

The reminder that teachers play a crucial part in creatively structuring English language instruction highlights the third point that Macedo's article illuminates. Building on the theme of heightened awareness of the history and questioning the assumptions behind the policies that are implemented through practice, his point centers on the important role of teachers as agents of change. By stating that “teachers need to be able to teach more than the correct English grammatical constructions” (p. 89), he underscores their transformative power in engaging with and developing learners' critical skill of self-reflexivity. In this sense, teachers' responsibility moves beyond the technical teaching of grammar to encompass facilitating instruction such that learners perceive the consequences of using incorrect grammatical constructions in terms of linguistic markers of “otherness” in a context in which “other” is both demonized and dehumanized. The resulting awareness can be called an awareness of a colonial discourse, with the potential to equip the learners to critically assess their place within the larger structures of power.

Additionally, given the present xenophobic social-cultural environment in which many immigrant learners of English, specifically the Latino population, live, Macedo provides a concrete example of coalition building on the part of TESOL professionals with other stakeholders to protect these learners from discriminatory practices to ensure their safety, rights, and self-esteem. This instance serves to

underscore another aspect of teachers' role—this time outside the classroom—as agents of change in the ever-changing sociocultural landscape of the US, where the *majority-minority* marker defines the status of many schools within which English language practitioners serve.

Following the leading article, Funie Hsu's piece continues on the theme of colonialism by providing a brief overview of the different proposed strategies for addressing its enduring influence in English language teaching. She presents a broad research review of the various methods and pedagogical applications that can aid practitioners in working reflectively with the continuing effects of colonial English and in moving toward liberatory practices as instances of “decolonial” options. In doing so, she expands on three fluid categories as conceptual frames: theoretical conceptualizations, methods and curriculum, and professional development. Within each category, Hsu discusses examples of trends and approaches that provide a general sense of how the research can be applied in specific situations.

Concluding this theme section, Sera Hernandez explores the connections between a dominant discourse around the supremacy of English and language-testing practices within a dual immersion program in a California middle school. The findings of her empirical study illuminate aspects of the colonial legacy of English that have seeped into an unsuspecting context in which the learning of Spanish and English is taking place on a seemingly level playing field. Drawing on Bourdieu (1982) and through a discussion of the perceived “market value” of languages, Hernandez refers us back to the power of ideology in reproducing the selective legitimation of English when other languages become stigmatized. While acknowledging the recent passage of Proposition 58 in California as a positive and promising development, Hernandez reiterates the key role of careful planning and implementation as well as the recruitment of highly qualified teachers and parent engagement, among other variables that need to be considered.

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