

## 2 Bridging the Past, Present, and Future

### How Heritage Language Pedagogy Can Create a Global and Sustainable Worldview in the English Classroom

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#### **Introduction**

The English language has a colonial, imperialist, and assimilationist legacy which continues to the present day in our language learning classrooms (Heller, 2010; Macedo, 2019; Pennycook, 2017). As wa Thiong'o (1986) remarks, English has been, and arguably continues to be viewed as “the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom” (p. 115). This Western colonial and imperialist legacy can be traced back to the beginnings of the Industrial era in the mid-18th century and the growth of the British Empire. With this expansion, the governing classes of the empire began to assume that British people, language, and culture had “matchless powers of political supremacy, commerce, wealth and literature ...[which] ... combine to diffuse the language, with all the excellences kindred to it throughout the whole world” (George, 1867, p. 4). Pennycook (2017) underscores that this presumed “cultural superiority was then considered to be reflected in the English language” (p. 99).

#### **The Foundations of Colonial English: Linguistic and Cognitive Imperialism**

Many of our learners, in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, have chosen to learn and use English for the cultural and linguistic capital that the language arguably possesses. Some contend that English is a natural, beneficial, and unifying element, a language of progress, modernity, which has enabled access to more work opportunities and international communication (Crystal, 2003). However, just as many may have freely chosen English as a “magic formula”, many have been forced to learn and use English to communicate and survive in times of increasing globalization

or a “global monoculture” (Shiva, 2000). This lack of choice in order to “succeed” in dominant neoliberal, colonial contexts has also seen a corresponding rise in non-dominant languages becoming minoritized and Indigenous languages becoming extinct at an unprecedented rate (e.g., Harrison, 2007). In this light, it would appear that, as the British author Thomas De Quincey remarked more than 150 years ago, “the English language is travelling fast towards the fulfilment of its destiny ... its ultimate mission of eating up, like Aaron’s rod, all other languages” (De Quincey, 1862, pp. 149–150). Some scholars note that this “eating up of other languages” is a form of linguistic genocide (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018) and an enactment of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992).

While some may argue that learners have agency in choosing to learn or speak English, the reality is that linguistic imperialism privileges those who use the dominant, “standard” form of the English language and disenfranchises those who do not. It is also a form of “linguicism” or a favoring of “one language over others in ways that parallel societal structuring through racism, sexism and class ... [and] privilege[s] users of the standard forms of the dominant language, which represent[s] *convertible linguistic capital*” (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018, pp. 121–122, emphasis mine). Linguistic imperialism normalizes a linguistic hierarchy, positioning English at the top as a useful commodity (Heller, 2010), or as a “passport to success” and prestige for speakers of alternative, non-dominant languages. Learning English is therefore often actively promoted, normalized, and internalized as *the* language to speak, the language of “progress” or “civility”, at the expense of alternative, “lesser” languages (Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018). As President Theodore Roosevelt (1919) stated, “we have room for but one language here, and that is the English language”. Assumed colonial cultural and linguistic superiority has set the foundations for a cognitive imperialism, or “white epistemological supremacy” (Minde, 2003), the goal of which is to “eradicate all vestiges of the subjugated and conquered cultures and their respective languages” (Macedo, 2019, p. 15) through “erase-and-replace” (McCarthy & Nicholas, 2014, p. 107) educational policies (e.g., the Indian residential school system in Canada which engendered genocidal practices; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

### Colonial English in Education and the Classroom

Inequitable and detrimental practices of linguistic imperialism and the colonial English worldview can be facilitated or perpetuated, even unwittingly, in the ESL/EFL classroom. The classroom is a political microcosm that is, in many respects, the mirror of the belief system of the society at large and the nation-state (Laininen, 2019; Pennycook, 2001). The

belief system, or worldview, that English represents has grown from the monolingual, epistemic, and linguistically “superior” ideology imposed through an internal colonialism on the nations and Celtic languages of the British Isles to include a present-day global neoliberal ideology based on economic growth, products, and capitalism (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018). Laininen (2019) argues that:

They [schools] reflect deeply our Western worldview which is the underlying cause for the sustainability crisis ... [and] ... the main goal of education would be to give future generations tools for thinking and seeing the world differently, constructing their own worldviews, and acting to create a sustainable future.

(pp. 186–187)

Moreover, educational institutions and classroom courses are increasingly packaged and presented as economic products (e.g., “academic capitalism”; Baltodano, 2012), the purpose of which is to develop shared “mental models ... [such as] a good citizen is a good consumer and GDP growth equals increased national wellbeing” (Laininen, 2019, p. 166). This neoliberal economic package can also be seen in English being promoted as a *lingua franca* or global language and the upsurge in ESL/EFL schools worldwide. According to Orbis Research (2019), “in 2018, the global English Language Learning market size was 9990 million US\$ and it is expected to reach 29700 million US\$ by the end of 2025” (para. 3). In addition, another report by Technavio expects that the global digital (or online) English language learning market will “grow by USD 14.69 billion during 2020-2024” through the “adoption of English as a global language to boost the *market growth*” (emphasis mine, Business Wire, 2020, para. 1).

The monolingual, as opposed to multilingual, ideology underpinning the expansion of colonial English continues to benefit the elite governing forces of an international political economy. Some may stress that learning English as a global language enables better job opportunities or economic prospects (e.g., Crystal, 2003). While this may hold true for some learners, neoliberal, monolingual ideologies can minoritize speakers of alternative languages and essentialize them as subjects groomed for work with “basic”, “functional”, or acritical transactional English skills (Kubota, 2020; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018; Shin & Park, 2015). Neoliberal, colonial English does not always lead to transformative social change for those who acquire ESL/EFL due to “epistemological racisms” (Kubota, 2020) and the privileging of Western, white Euro-American knowledge systems. Kubota (2020) remarks:

The field of teaching English as a foreign language is a case in point. Japanese curricula and instruction, for example, emphasize standardized English and overrepresent inner circle countries, especially

the USA, as well as whiteness ... This is reflected in Japanese students' preference for white native English-speaking teachers over black or Asian ones.

(p. 718)

The focus on neoliberal ideologies worldwide and the commodification of language also means we become increasingly disconnected from our environment, the world, and nature. From a neoliberal and colonial perspective, the English language is viewed as a decontextualized communicative “code” or product that can bring about economic profit and easily meet the transactional demands of capitalist work (Shin & Park, 2015). In the ESL/EFL classroom, as Modiano (2001) puts it, “the learner’s mind is colonized through the acquisition of a foreign tongue” (p. 164). The decontextualization and commodification of language (Heller, 2010) in the dominant Western worldview could arguably be considered an “epistemological error” (Bateson, 1972). For example, according to Sterling (2003), there is a disconnect between the mainstream dominant Western, binary, mechanistic worldview (or “Decontextual Separation”) and the alternative holistic worldview (or “Co-creation in Context”). Sterling suggests an ecological worldview as a way forward for a new sustainable paradigm. Sterling (2010) elaborates, “not only do current ways of thinking, perceiving and doing need to change in response to critical systemic conditions of uncertainty, complexity and unsustainability, but old paradigms are the root of these conditions” (p. 19).

This change could involve epistemic (transformative) learning which involves “unlearning” to transform “understanding and conceptions about the interdependence of humans and nature, the essence of humanity, fundamentals of wellbeing, and the role of economy in our world ... education for a sustainable future must have a strong reflective value dimension added” (Laininen, 2019, p. 180). We should look at alternative and empowering ways to overcome “monocultural approaches to knowledges” (Icaza & Vazquez, 2018, p. 117), look toward a different, more equitable world and future, and “decolonize the mind” (wa Thiong’o, 1986, p. 4). One way in which we could do this is through a heritage language pedagogy which enables us (learners and educators) to share knowledge in the classroom in a culturally and environmentally responsive way while learning about new ways of seeing and protecting the world.

### **Looking toward the “Future”: The Role of Heritage Language Pedagogy in Creating a More Holistic, Global Sustainable Worldview**

A heritage language pedagogy is a method through which all multicultural and multilingual learners, not only speakers or learners of dominant, non-endangered languages, can feel fully empowered and validated

in an alternative holistic, earth-centered (as opposed to human-centered) learning process. A heritage language is “any language which has to some extent been diminished or disenfranchised as a result of another” and a heritage language speaker is “anyone who speaks, or is in the process of reclaiming, an ancestral language which has emotive and cultural significance” (Meighan, 2019, p. 2).

Heritage languages and their speakers have been disenfranchised, minoritized, and/or even forcefully eradicated in the name of linguistic imperialism and white epistemological supremacy with the advance of dominant colonial languages, such as English (Meighan, 2019; Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018). This minoritization and linguisticide, or “conscious acts of language liquidation” (wa Thiong’o, 2009, p. 17), has been compounded by neoliberal educational practices such as high-stakes standardized testing, colonial teaching methods which privilege the print canon and “standard” forms of language (as opposed to “vernacular” forms and visual/aural literacies), and English-only monolingual learning environments (Cummins, 2005; García, 2009).

Heritage language speakers represent a rich tapestry of ancestries and cultures, very distinct languages, and a multitude of traditions across the world that have survived colonial “erase and replace” educational policies (McCarthy & Nicholas, 2014, p. 107). Subtractive “English only” monolingual ESL/EFL classroom environments can, even unknowingly, perpetuate detrimental colonial narratives of cognitive and linguistic superiority and further marginalize heritage and Indigenous language speakers. For example, the neoliberal commodification of English as a “passport to success” in a capitalist belief system has negatively impacted the formation of heritage language speakers’ identities and self-esteem. Heritage language speakers and families desire to assimilate into the dominant mainstream culture as they believe the neoliberal agenda will give them better opportunities in life (Shin & Park, 2015; Tse, 1998). The issue with this “ethnic ambivalence or evasion” (Tse, 1998) is that languages are marketed or assumed to be mere commodities to be bartered in exchange for social status, mobility, or economic gain. The commodification of language serves to promote the interests of capitalist regimes where, more often than not, ESL/EFL learners across diverse contexts and cultures are groomed to be good or ideal neoliberal subjects (e.g., Shin and Park’s 2015 case studies in Europe, North America, and East Asia). Linguistic commodification also ignores the social, cultural, historical, and ecological grounding of language and the profound impact language has on positive identity formation (Hallett et al., 2007). As Nash (2018) remarks, “language and ideas of self and environment are amalgamated in complex relationships” (p. 359).

With the “multilingual turn” in second language acquisition, some may argue that there have already been movements toward more culturally and emotionally responsive curricula in the English learning

classroom (i.e., translanguaging and plurilingual practices; García & Otheguy, 2019). However, the languages which are acknowledged and/or implemented in the classroom still tend to be colonial, “official” nation-state, and/or non-endangered languages (e.g., Spanish or French) (Ball & McIvor, 2013; Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). One of the major problems with the continued emphasis on learning and validating only non-endangered languages with a colonial legacy is that they can transmit the neoliberal, individualistic worldview (with the above mentioned detrimental and inequitable impacts) which is in stark contrast with more eco-centric, earth-centered, and sustainable ways of knowing and being (e.g., heritage/ancestral and Indigenous worldviews; Macedo, 2019; McGregor, 2004; Meighan, 2020). Indigenous worldviews across the globe, for example, view language, culture, and the land as inseparable (McGregor, 2004) and view nature as a living being. The understanding that nature is animate and living dissolves the human-nature dichotomy and human (cognitive) exceptionalism/superiority characteristic of the hegemonic Western worldview (Battiste, 2013; Plumwood, 2002; Rose, 2005).

In essence, there is a need to bridge the “past”, “present”, and “future” for a more culturally and environmentally responsive pedagogy that respects all humans, more than humans, and all languages. This chapter contends that a heritage, decolonizing language pedagogy could be one way in which we start doing this in the English language learning classroom. In a decolonial classroom, heritage language speakers can feel safe to decolonize the mind and connect with their ancestral knowledge/language and nondominant worldviews in an era of “Trumpism” and “under siege bilingualism” (Macedo, 2019). The inclusion of a heritage language pedagogy in the English learning classroom can help counteract the “heritage language deficit” (Little, 2017), negative identity formations, and address the harmful impacts of marginalizing and inequitable educational practice. Inside the classroom, studies have shown the culturally and emotionally responsive benefits of learners having a minimum proficiency in their heritage or Indigenous language, such as lesser drop-out rates, improved self-esteem, mental health and wellbeing, and a decrease in suicide rates (e.g., Kirmayer et al., 2016; Statistics Canada, 2019). Outside of the classroom, scholars, researchers, and scientists, for instance, contend that the hegemonic colonial, Eurocentric, human-centered worldview has been the primary contributor to the human-caused climate crisis (Plumwood, 2002; Rose, 2005; Whyte, 2018). Incorporating a more environmentally responsive pedagogy, such as a heritage language pedagogy that validates alternative ways of knowing and being and earth-centered relationships, could assist in the creation of a more holistic and sustainable classroom environment. For example, learners can feel enabled and empowered to share insights and stories from their ancestries and heritages about local environmental practices and community ecological know-how which could lead to more climate crisis solutions through cross-cultural, “trans-systemic” knowledge exchanges (Battiste, 2013; see also the forthcoming

section, “Being a *Worldviewer*”). Heritage language pedagogy also addresses five of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Good Health and Well-Being; Quality Education; Reduced Inequalities; Climate Action; and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, n.d.).

### **Being a *Worldviewer*: An Example of Heritage Language Pedagogy in the English Classroom**

Heritage language pedagogy enables all learners, and educators, to engage in a decolonial exchange of knowledge (emphasizing the plurality of knowledge, not only one, universal Western privileged system) where we can (1) decolonize the mind by questioning existing mental models and assumptions, (2) problematize the inequities of the status quo, and (3) pose solutions to major and urgent real-life issues, such as the climate crisis, by incorporating existing ancestral lifeways and teachings that have existed since time immemorial.

In my English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and ESL classrooms at post-secondary institutions in Toronto, Canada, I have sought to incorporate a culturally and environmentally responsive heritage language pedagogy that addressed our complex, diverse, and shared learning needs. In a metropolis like Toronto, one shared characteristic of the classrooms in which I taught was that learners came from varied multicultural and -lingual backgrounds with rich ancestries and insights. Another shared characteristic of the classrooms was that the curricula and materials came from the lens of the hegemonic Western worldview. For instance, the materials were largely written from a Western perspective and something that stood out to me was that non-Western views were not as commonly incorporated and/or acknowledged.

I began to think about ways in which we could explore alternative ways of knowing and being while appreciating the rich ancestries and heritages of my learners in a safe way where their own knowledge and belief systems, Western or not, could be validated. I decided to include more oral and written texts (e.g., TED talks and recent online/print newspaper articles) created by authors with nondominant, alternative, and earth-centered worldviews in addition to those written from a Western perspective. Educators and learners, as part of culturally and environmentally responsive heritage language pedagogy, are able to explore non-Western, beyond neoliberal texts which may not be part of the “standard” EFL/ESL curriculum (e.g., texts written by authors with a nondominant, alternative/ecocentric worldview) as they acquire English. By way of example, for our assigned readings on the topic of the environment, I included a climate crisis newspaper article published in the online version of *The Guardian*, “Indigenous knowledge systems can help solve the problems of climate change” (Watson, 2017).

Over a five-lesson mini-unit, we analyzed rhetorical, grammatical, lexical, and cultural aspects of the text and produced an interactive video response and comment blog which documented our communal language and knowledge learning journey. I named this multimodal online classroom blog and trans-systemic exchange of worldviews a *Worldviewer* (Table 2.1).

In the *Worldviewer* mini-unit and blog, we focused on developing not only English writing and reading skills but also oral and listening skills where learners could work in small groups to share their perspectives. We also developed “present”-day and “future” 21st-century skills, such as visual, digital, and print literacies (e.g., multiliteracies; Cope &

Table 2.1 *Worldviewer*. Text: Indigenous knowledge systems can help solve the problem of climate change (Watson, 2017)

Lesson	Text focus (Classroom)	<i>Worldviewer</i> blog (Homework)
1	<p><u>Rhetorical</u> Task: Research the background of the author and the publisher Lines of exploration: Identification of bias; reasons why text was written</p>	<p><u>Group Video Reflection Log</u> (Appendix A): In small groups (3 or 4), learners record their answers to Video Reflection questions and reflect together on how the lessons have impacted on their worldview</p>
2	<p><u>Grammatical</u> Task: Take an excerpt of the text and analyze the use of grammar and style Lines of exploration: Use of commas; use of simple vs. compound tenses to explain concepts (i.e., Could message be simplified?)</p>	
3	<p><u>Lexical</u> Task: Focus on the vocabulary used by author Lines of exploration: Use of positive or negative words; overall balance of positive vs. negative words, and what impact this has on reader</p>	
4	<p><u>Cultural</u> Task: Focus on cultural or field-specific terms used by author; re-create an excerpt with learners' own terms Lines of exploration: Access to different worldviews, experiences; impact of these views upon the planet (i.e., climate crisis issues)</p>	
5	<p><i>Worldviewer</i> Blog <u>Final Video Response and Interaction</u> (Appendix B) Task: (1) In class, learners discuss and reflect on how their interactions with the text has changed their understanding/ experience of the theme in class and then via comment function on each other's blog videos entries (2) At home, learners record an individual final video response to answer questions and reflect on learning over the whole mini-unit Lines of exploration: Reflection and evaluation of how the text has impacted upon their worldview</p>	



Kalantzis, 2015). In addition, the *Worldviewer*, being at its core a heritage language pedagogical tool, activated higher order epistemic learning by challenging hegemonic Western mental models and assumptions (e.g., cognitive/linguistic imperialism and human exceptionalism) and enabled learners to share alternative worldviews with each other through the lens of heritage languages while learning English.

The *Worldviewer* enabled us to learn English through an alternative, decolonial lens. For example, in their videos, learners contrasted and compared the definition of water in the English dictionary as “odorless” or “tasteless” with the understanding that “water is life” in Indigenous worldviews and languages (e.g., Chiblow, 2019). We also reflected on “past” experiences from our families’ heritage languages and cultures and shared these insights in our *Worldviewer* group/individual video responses and on the comment function of the *Worldviewer* class blog. Learners talked about traditional place names, what they meant, and compared sustainable agricultural practices in their heritage languages and cultures which shared ecological insights about the land. We also discussed phrases and the framing of the environment in dominant neoliberal Western English discourse, such as “the degradation of the environment”. We evaluated the impact of the nominalization of the English noun in this case (e.g., Who is degrading the environment? Why is the agent missing? What effect does this have on the meaning?). We also shared ways in which we could make more earth-centered language (Rosenfeld, 2019; Stibbe, 2018) and metaphors to talk about the environment (e.g., Why do certain people call areas of land “wasteland”, “desert”, or “dirt”? How do you relate to these words and treat this land? What would be another way of naming this land which is more respectful of all its inhabitants, including humans, animals, and more than human entities?).

In sum, in my *Worldviewer* EAP classroom, learners shared the perspectives and worldviews of their own languages (heritage-, Indigenous-, or “Western”-based) and reflected on potential “present”-day decolonial solutions which inspired collective action and “future” earth-centered climate crisis responses (Meighan, 2020). We learned English through a decolonial lens by searching for more earth-centered metaphors and new “stories to live by” (Stibbe, 2018) through our interactive *Worldviewer* video responses and online blog comments.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter proposes that a heritage language pedagogy, which validates *all* learner cultures and *all* languages, can help correct the “epistemological error” on which mainstream educational practice and language acquisition is constructed.

As exemplified through the *Worldviewer* blog, heritage language pedagogy can (1) bridge the “past”, “present”, and “future” of our learners while they learn English, (2) assist in validating and acknowledging a more global, culturally, and environmentally responsive worldview which respects all ways of knowing and being, (3) highlight the importance of heritage knowledge and languages in positive identity formation, (4) stress the importance of maintaining heritage/ancestral knowledge and languages to promote bio- and linguistic diversity, and (5) assist in addressing the marginalization of nondominant cultures and languages in the ESL/EFL classroom.

Together, learners and educators, by informing and educating ourselves on all of the past, present, and future influences that shape us, can start on the process of creating a more equitable, sustainable, and globally representative way of learning English in the classroom.

### Appendix A: Group Worldviewer Video Reflection Log

In small groups (three or four), please video record your responses to the questions below (Table 2.2).

*Note: Some questions are focused on specific lessons. In these cases, the lessons are greyed out.*

Table 2.2 Group worldviewer video reflection log

	<i>Lesson 1</i>	<i>Lesson 2</i>	<i>Lesson 3</i>	<i>Lesson 4</i>
Did researching the author help you in identifying potential bias in the article?				
Do you think certain word choices contribute to the emotion of a text? Why?				
Does the author’s language differ from other texts on the environment? Why?				
Do you think that one knowledge system has more advantages over the other? Why?				
Do you think the text had an overall negative or positive tone? Why?				
Have your opinions about the text changed? Why?				
How do your experiences compare with the experiences of the author? With your classmates in class?				
Is there anything you will share with others outside the classroom? Why?				

## Appendix B: Final Individual Video Response

- 1 Please video record your responses. If you wish, you can also use visuals or images, instead of words, to express how you feel.
  - i What are the key themes for you in the article?
  - ii How does the language in this article make you feel?
  - iii How does the article relate to your experience of climate crisis in Canada?
  - iv How does this article relate to your experience of climate crisis in different countries or cultures?
  - v Do you think that the differences between Western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge are important?
  - vi Has the article changed your mind about how we can address the climate crisis?
- 2 Upload your video to the class *Worldviewer* blog.
- 3 Please view at least three of your classmates' videos and add a comment on how their experience with the text related to yours.

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