Critical pedagogy meets world Englishes: The role of a decolonized curriculum in learner investment over time

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Goal: To examine how invested Hong Kong (HK) English learners are in their ‘present’ (English learner, Cantonese speaker) and imagined (legitimate multilingual and H Kong English (HKE) identities) ([6], [7]; 2015, p. 47).

Main point: A critical, world Englishes-informed pedagogy shapes second language learners’ investment in Hong Kong English and helps decolonize educational practices in the region.

Abstract

This study investigates the role of a critical pedagogy informed by World Englishes (WE) in influencing how multilingual students in Hong Kong invest in the Englishes of their own linguistic repertoire. It specifically focuses on three learning activities in an undergraduate WE course at CUHK: (1) instructor-led discussions supplemented by learner pre-discussion notes, (2) an independent project: learner-led collection of authentic linguistic data involving varieties of English in HK in the form of sociolinguistic interviews, time-aligned transcriptions, and corpus compilation, and (3) a collaborative mini-corpus-based-research project (ICE-HK) between learners that showcases how they connect and apply WE-related concepts to real-life scenarios with empirical evidence.

Procedures

Data sources
Participants’ individual and group project outcome (PowerPoint slides, video-recordings of presentation, WhatsApp messages, interviews, etc.)

Studied verbal responses as reflected in lecture and presentation recordings

Research team computer-mediated conversations

Participants’ tutorial responses, post-course reflective accounts, and interactions with the research team

Post-course, online, follow-up technoreflective narrative interviews (~60 mins) conducted by the first author via ZOOM in English (Zhang, 2023)

Data analysis
Course: 2022R1 World Englishes and Their Cultures (ENGE6200-UGEC2189, lecturer: Prof. Gonzales, teaching assistant: Yue Zhang)

Participants: Cantonese as the first language and English undergraduate students

Coding scheme: model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015)

Analytic method: thematic analysis

Focus of analysis: describing and understanding how learners invest in learning and ‘performing’ world Englishes and how they make sense of such practices

Findings

For learners in this course:

- Reflect upon their own English as a second language (ESL) learning history and HKE practices from authentic daily interactions and texting experiences.
- Engage in agitative discussion on challenging the existing norms, notions, and ideologies related to HKE (‘standard’, ‘legitimacy’, ‘nativeness’, etc.).
- Recognize a shift of HKE from exonormativity to endonormativity in their own linguistic community.
- Reframe the power relationship between the lecturer (non-HKE speaker) and HK students (native HKE speakers as knowledge expert & local as content expert of the sociocultural context)

Discussion

Learners

- Developed a cognitive, critical, and affective awareness of and knowledge and understanding of WE and demonstrated perceptual changes of HKE as resource.
- The ability to invest in their own WE variety as decolonized practices to perform legitimate, multilingual, and competent identities (Darvin & Zhang, in press).
- Autonomy from instructor-led discussions related to WE as much as from self-discovery of the learner-led data collection and collaborative projects

HKE

- Exonormative stabilization (Chan, 2013; Groves, 2011) to endonormative stabilization (Hansens, 2015).
- Long before nativized local forms of English (i.e., 2012) exonormative TEFL practices in local schools (Chan, 2021), especially EMI and international schools
- ‘Linguistic self-hatred/schizophrenia’ (Groves, 2011; Zhang, 2013) still exist among students with both CMI and EMI backgrounds Symbolic value of English in portraying Hong Kong and linguistic identity Chan, 2002; Hansens, 2015; His Mei, 2022)

Conclusion

- Real-time development of learners’ HKE investing trajectories
- Critical space for learners to explore and legitimize authentic sociocultural experiences in their daily lives
- A critical WE-informed pedagogy: underscores respect for multilingualism, cultural diversity, and multi-faceted identities – contributing to the decolonization of educational practices in the region

Implications

- Develop HKE speakers’ healthy self-positioning and dispositions
- Pedagogical and language ideology: WE varieties as resources for learners to deploy and perform legitimate multilingual identities
- Bottom-up and top-down approaches to WE education: from passive knowledge-keepers to invested, self-reflective learners

Selected references