On being heard: English, voice, and linguistic authority[i]

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ABSTRACT

This position paper explores the relationship between voice and different ways of understanding English. By emphasizing that English is dispersed, local, and variable, the World Englishes and English as a lingua franca (ELF) frameworks suggest that locally recognized varieties may be an avenue for diverse voices. This paper argues, however, that recognizing varieties of English does not go far enough (and indeed may be a regressive step) in opening a space to be heard. We need instead to think in terms of translingual practices (or *Bahasa Gado-Gado*) and alternative ways of framing language and voice. Viewing voice as the process of making oneself understood rather than as individual articulation presents a number of challenges for language education. Unless we consider the *entanglements of English* (the ways English is interwoven with the world), *critical English pedagogies* (addressing the inequalities between types of English), *symbolic power* (the challenge of being listened to), *language assemblages* (the dynamic gathering of different resources) and *resourceful speakers* (the capacity to align in language rather than adhere to language), our students may struggle to be heard.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca (ELF); Translingual Practices; World Englishes

INTRODUCTION

If we ask why we are teaching and learning English, a range of possible answers may be presented. For some, there are local and pragmatic goals, from institutional requirements (it is compulsory; needed for work) to economic possibilities (better job chances; higher pay). For others, English presents broader hopes and desires, from social and physical mobility (travel; greater study and employment options) to less tangible ambitions (access to a wider range of ideas and cultures; the pleasure of operating in another language). Such commonly stated aims, articulated in terms of employment, education, material rewards, or access to knowledge, may miss another dimension of language potential: having a voice. Voice is a broad concept, ranging from the physical attributes by which we recognize people, ways of speaking or singing (voice quality) or a particular style in writing (authorial voice) to the ability to make oneself heard (getting a voice). If voice is understood only as the individual capacity to speak, we may miss the wider social concern about what it means not just to be understood, but to be valued, taken seriously, or treated with respect.

This is a question – all too often overlooked in language education and applied linguistics – of more than finding the right words, but of being listened to. Frameworks such as World Englishes present some possibilities for people beyond the inner circle to gain voice, by suggesting that all varieties of English are equally important, that native speakers no longer have ownership of the language, that to use English is to express a local identity as a multilingual speaker. Valuable though such propositions are, difficulties emerge when we think about voice and world Englishes: problems of unequal Englishes, linguistic nationalism and the entanglements of English. By looking at language as an assemblage, as an active process of assembling and enacting meaning from a range of resources, it is possible to think about language and voice as dynamic, constructed, open-ended, and part of the world, an important step forward in our quest to encourage a diversity of voices to be heard.

VOICE, ARTICULATION, BEING HEARD

Voice can refer to voice quality or authorial voice (either the actual sound of a voice and its

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interpretation or the style writers bring to their texts), and in this sense is an individually oriented focus on style in speaking or writing. Voice quality has long been recognized as providing information about the speaker and their identity. The growth of so-called creaky voice or vocal fry (the use of very low register with loose glottal closure) and the various reactions to it (despite a longer history, it has been associated more recently with young North American women and perceived in negative terms) has become a major topic of debate (Cornelius, 2020): Does it have positive or negative effects in professional contexts and how much of this is dependent on the age and gender of the listener? In the context of global English, it is intriguing to look at the ways creaky voice is potentially spreading as part of style associated with being young, female and American.

We should of course be cautious about making assumptions about the ways voice is taken as an inalienable, unitary, or invariant facet of a speaker's identity (Podesva & Callier, 2015). While voice may be an important indicator of gender, age, origin, ethnicity, and possibly sexuality, its interpretation is reliant on many subjective factors, and it is also only ever one aspect of more complex identity markers. Voicing, Gal (2016, p. 118) suggests, is an "action that others interpret through their own perspective, in keeping with their knowledge of the model invoked, the situation of use, and the history of relationships among speakers." The social meaning of voice cannot be understood without consideration of the social and cultural context in which it is used and heard (Bucholtz & Hall, 2016). Voicing, from this perspective, is an active process of aligning with or against interlocutors and is part of the process by which people express, or are perceived to express, certain registers or styles.

Voice is also about pleasure, power and emotion, and it is no coincidence that the international TV franchise in which contestants compete against each other to win a recording contract is called *The Voice.* Voice, according to Bucholtz and Hall (2016, p. 178), is "the embodied heart of spoken language: it emerges from the body, and through indexicality it auditorily locates the body in social space as being of a particular kind." In her study of the great African American singer Aretha Franklin, Deumert (2023) shows the importance and power of voice in singing, which is about affect, atmosphere and expression: "Affective atmospheres and the embodied complexities of voice are important concepts for applied linguistics" (Deumert, 2023, p. 926). Such perspectives make it possible to understand voice in far more dynamic terms than the combination of timbre and phonological variation: Voice concerns bodies and emotions, social and spatial positioning, interaction and interpretation.

The concept of voice in this more general sense has a long tradition in the social sciences, where it is often used to suggest agency (individual or collective). Voice from this perspective refers to getting a chance to speak. It is common to talk of *marginalized voices,* that is ideas and opinions that are given little or no social space. People may be marginalized in multiple ways – along lines of class, race, gender and education amongst others – and while one may be marginalized because of one's voice (accent, ability in a second language, for example), people are often already marginalized in ways that mean their voice is not even heard to start with. Voice, for Blommaert (2005, p. 4) refers to the ways in which "people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so." Voice, he continues "defines linguistic inequality (hence many other forms of inequality) in contemporary societies" (p. 5). An analysis of voice is "an analysis of power effects…as well as conditions for power – what it takes to make oneself understood." As these approaches to voice all suggest, it is not so much the voice itself, but the "material conditions from which one speaks" that "have serious consequences for whether one's voice is considered authoritative, and whether it can be implemented in terms of material and structural changes" (Catedral & Djuraeva, 2023, p. 422).

In October 2023, Australians voted in a referendum for a proposal for a "Voice to Parliament," an advisory body to the Australian parliament and government in relation to the social, spiritual, and economic well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Opposition to the proposed amendment to the constitution came in various forms: Some objected that this move was divisive, even racist, in singling out First Nations people for special access to government (an argument blind to its own divisiveness, the history of colonization and the racialization of Indigenous people); others were concerned that there was no need to change a representative democratic system that works well enough (like the earlier failed referendum for Australia to become a republic, conservative positions fear change, while overlooking the many ways in which current practices and arrangements remain discriminatory and inadequate); for others, the proposal did not go far enough (there are calls for a treaty before this process of recognition, concerns that it will not provide the means to address the many forms of disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians, that it places recognition before redistribution). A majority voted 'no' (some on the grounds of ignorance, as suggested by the Liberal opposition: If you don't know, vote no). It was a miserable defeat for many of us: there was to be no "Voice" for Indigenous Australians. Insulted and disillusioned, First Australians are now looking for other ways of finding forms of reconciliation and participation.

The point, however, as far as this paper is concerned, is that "The Voice", as it was commonly known, was a profound political struggle for people to be heard. It was about history, colonization, violence, disadvantage and transformation. If reconciliation and rectification can have any real meaning, it is about setting up a process by which Indigenous people can be heard and non-Indigenous people are obliged to listen (though not necessarily to act, a misguided claim by reactionary opponents, and a concern for those looking for greater change). It is this sense of *voice* that matters for this paper, an understanding that communication is a far more complex political process than models of production and reception, or of giving someone a voice, would have us believe. The notion of voice can be easily misunderstood or co-opted for liberal (and less critical) projects. Voice, in its liberal conception, can be a notion akin to agency, an individual capacity to speak or act, something we can give people or that people can use. The limits on voice – all those ways in which people are silenced, the institutional practices that make it hard, if not impossible, for women, people of colour, people using a second language, deaf people, Indigenous people, and many more, to be heard – may be downplayed by an emphasis on an individual capacity to speak.

Lest this all start to seem over-determined – your voice will never be heard unless you have the prior attributes to be listened to – two points are worth noting. First, as Butler (1997) reminds us in relation to notions of performativity, we should be careful not to assume that power in language is only a result of pregiven sociological positions whereby only the powerful can speak powerfully. Language should not be seen as a fixed system, she argues, in which utterances are predetermined solely by the social positions of the speakers. A static vision of the relationship between language and the social, by which power in language is determined only by prior power in the social domain overlooks the power of language itself, confusing being *authorized to speak* with *speaking with authority*. As the discussion about voice and singing above suggests, voices, as well as the ideas they carry, may themselves be powerful. Second, those seeking social change, such as critical educators, have long sought ways to make voice a key educational goal. One part of this educational project is the concern that in educational contexts, the dominant curricula and teaching practices of mainstream schools silence the ideas, cultures, languages, and voices of students from diverse backgrounds. The focus of this approach is on opening up a space for the marginalized to speak, write, or read (*voice* does not refer necessarily to oral language) so that the voicing of their lives may transform both their lives and the social system that excludes them.

As Giroux (1988, p. 199) argues, voice constitutes the focal point for a critical theory of education: "The concept of voice represents the unique instances of self-expression through which students affirm their own class, cultural, racial, and gender identities" (p. 199). Literacy, Hernandez-Zamora, (2010, p. 9) suggests, is a "fundamental practice of voice … for self-authoring one's place in the world… Becoming literate is not a simple but a complex process of the appropriation of the socially available meaning and discourse practices indispensable to understanding and shaping one's place in the world." While this version of voice suggests the opening up of a space to articulate a position based on forms of group identity – based around notions of class, gender or ethnicity – it has also been critiqued as being centrally a pedagogy of inclusion, and, at least in its North American versions, suggesting a form of individual expression (Luke, 1996) that runs counter to more social and community-oriented ways of thinking about voice and education from alternative political and cultural contexts around the world.

Kramsch (2021) points to the central concern here, asking what it takes for language learners and users not just to be understood, but to be valued, taken seriously, treated with respect. This is a question that has received inadequate attention from language educators and applied linguists, a question of *symbolic power*, of being listened to rather than just heard. This is not, therefore, a question just of getting a chance to speak, of speaking one's mind, of self-expression, of finding the right words (or signs), but rather of creating a means to have one's words taken up in more significant ways. As social beings using a social symbolic system, "we are inevitably entangled or implicated in symbolic power struggles to be heard, recognized, respected by others" (Kramsch, 2021, p. 198). This notion of voice as symbolic power has much less to do with the act of speaking than with being understood. Voice from this perspective is not so much about finding the right words or speaking with the right accent but about arriving at an articulation of ideas that are taken up by a listener or reader. The difficulty, from an educational point of view, is that we cannot just give our students a voice (just as we cannot bestow agency on others) but rather need to find a means for them both to author their place in the world and for that authorship to be recognized. What role English and its varieties may play in such a process is the focus of the next section.

WORLD ENGLISHES, ELF, AND BLACKFULLA ENGLISH

It can be easy to assume that because English is a powerful language – a widely spoken language with great reach and influence – using English will bestow power, and therefore voice, on its speakers.

We know, however, that things are far more complex than this: it depends on who you are, how you speak, what variety you use, and what you speak about. English arguably remains a language of the Global North, not so much because its origins lie in geographically northern regions, but rather because it is so embedded in the institutions and injustices that the Global North created, and still endeavours to maintain, that its prevalence and use cannot be separated from the political and economic forces that dominate the world. The world Englishes (WE) and English as lingua franca (ELF) frameworks have both, in their own ways, sought to turn English into a language of the Global South. By insisting that English is the property of all, that ownership of English no longer rests in the hands of its so-called native speakers, that English can be understood as global, variable, and multilingual, proponents of these two related programs have aimed to delink English from its origins and ownership and to shift the centre of English from the Global North. While both have arguably achieved some success in this endeavour – enabling many to see English as locally inflected, as no longer encumbered by conventional decrees, as no longer tied to particular speakers and places – both have also been critiqued for limitations on how they deal with English in the world.

Despite its many benefits – particularly, for example, enabling speakers of Indonesian English to feel a sense of legitimacy about their version of English – the World Englishes framework has a number of limitations. One concern has been the ways in which, in its attempts to describe varieties of English, it has done so along national lines. As Krishnaswamy and Burde (1998) have observed, to assume the existence of something called 'Indian English' is to suppose unlikely degrees of commonality for the notion of India itself. By assuming a relatively homogenous regional variety, "a monolithic Indian English" (Parakramah, 1995, p. 26) has been constructed without sufficient attention to the many diversities within. The notion of world Englishes leaves out all those Other Englishes which do not fit the paradigm of an emergent national standard, and in doing so, fall into the trap of mapping Northern linguists' images of language and the world onto the Global South. As Parakrama (1995, p. 17) argues, the World Englishes approach to diversity of English "cannot do justice to those Other Englishes as long as they remain within the over-arching structures that these Englishes bring to crisis." To take English variety seriously would require a major revaluation of linguistic paradigms. The "attempt to systematize the periphery variants" inevitably leads to a process of standardisation, "leaving out many eccentric, hybrid forms of local Englishes as too unsystematic" (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 180).

This *methodological nationalism* defines the "speech of a small, Western-oriented elite as representative for all members of a particular society" (Schneider, 2018, p. 9). The same point might be made about Indonesia: Given the complexity and diversity of Indonesia – its geographical spread, different languages and ethnicities, and disparities in wealth and access to education – a notion of Indonesian English can only describe a particular subsection of Indonesian Englishes. More broadly, to base an understanding of global diversity around national entities (Singaporean, Nigerian, Philippine English) is to look at diversity through a constricted national lens. The relation between traditional White varieties of English and the many kinds of English used elsewhere "cannot be grasped in models that reproduce the nation-state level as the only social sphere worthy of consideration" (Schneider, 2018 p. 8). Reinscribing Englishes along national lines avoids the very sociolinguistic challenges the global spread of English brings to the fore. While appearing, therefore, to work from an inclusionary political agenda that attempts to have the new Englishes acknowledged as varieties of English, this approach to language is also exclusionary.

The concentric circle model cannot adequately capture the complexity of Englishes, failing, as Holborow (1999, pp. 59-60) points out, "to take adequate account of social factors and social differences *within* the circles." If the notion of concentric circles of English is to carry any weight, it needs, as Martin (2014, p. 53) observes in the context of the Philippines, to encompass circles within circles. We have to distinguish between an inner circle "of educated, elite Filipinos who have embraced the English language," an outer circle who may be aware of Philippine English as a variety but are "either powerless to support it and/or ambivalent about its promotion" and an expanding circle for whom the language is "largely inaccessible". The issue, therefore, is not centrally about how Philippine English differs from American English but how English resources are spread, used, and become available or inaccessible to people of different classes and ethnicities across these islands, how English resources are used as part of complex multilingual repertoires. A similar case can surely be made about Indonesia, with an educated urban elite comfortable with uses of English, and interested in naming their own variety, while others across the region have a very different experience in relation to their linguistic resources.

The World Englishes framework has also been critiqued for its failure to develop adequate ways of dealing with political economy and inequality (O'Regan, 2016). While the World Englishes framework and the liberal notions of equality to which it is tied – all languages and varieties are equal – may make sense from a linguistic point of

view, it "loses traction the moment we zoom out from the language domain and consider the societal issues with which language interacts" (Saraceni, 2024, p. 186) A focus on *unequal Englishes* attempts to address this by drawing attention to the unequal ways and situations in which Englishes are arranged, configured, and contested (Rubdy, 2015). Can all English users, Kubota (2015, p. 33) asks, "regardless of their racial, gender, socioeconomic, and other background equally transgress linguistic boundaries, and engage in hybrid and fluid linguistic practices?" In summary, as Bruthiaux (2003, p. 161) suggests, the problems with the concentric circles, the national labels, the failure to account for internal diversity and social inequalities renders the World Englishes framework "a 20th century construct that has outlived its usefulness."

The idea of English as a lingua franca (ELF) likewise has considerable appeal as a means to move away from supposed Native English speaker norms. While it has proved difficult to translate ELF into a pedagogical orientation, ELF makes it possible to rethink norms for English language education. The field has gone through several stages, from its early focus (ELF1) on trying to determine features and possibly a core of ELF, its second phase (ELF2) acknowledging the fluidity of ELF and the impossibility of describing it in terms of a variety, and later (ELF3) developments recognizing the multilingual contexts of ELF and "English as a Multilingua Franca" (Jenkins, 2015, p. 73). ELF proponents, particularly in later iterations of the project, have vehemently rejected suggestions that ELF is a monolithic variety or that it may be a new form of prescriptivism, arguing that it "is not a variety of English but a variable way of using it" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 77). As ELF researchers have moved away from any notion of a variety or a speech community, however, it has become difficult to grasp quite what ELF ultimately includes (particularly when it includes other languages) so that "many scholars still wonder about who is included and excluded from the label 'ELF' and what constitutes a context of ELF interaction" (Holmes & Darvin, 2016, p. 5).

ELF has also been critiqued for failing to engage with the larger politics of English and for assuming an equal playing field where people of equal status negotiate their use of English (O'Regan, 2016). Perhaps the most obvious critique, and one that applies equally to the designations of 'outer' or 'expanding' circles in the World Englishes framework, is the division between those who, however proficient, are always speakers of English as a lingua franca and those who speak 'real', 'inner circle', 'native speaker' non-lingua-franca English (Guilherme, 2019, p. 45). As long as some speakers are seen as speaking something that isn't ELF, or others are assumed to speak an inner circle variety, these paradigms reproduce the linguistic inequalities

they aim to critique. As Mufwene, (2001, p. 107) observes, "the naming practices of new Englishes has to do more with the racial identity of those who speak them than with how these varieties developed and the extent of their structural deviations." Rudwick (2021) makes a similar point about the inability of ELF studies to deal with questions of race.

Neither approach has been able to shed much light on how to classify varieties such as Aboriginal Australian Englishes, for example. To assume they are sub-types of inner circle Australian English is evidently inadequate (both their origins and contemporary use suggest a different relation), but to place them in outer or expanding circles is equally or more inappropriate. To classify them as forms of ELF is also unhelpful (they may be the speakers' first and only language). It can be more useful, instead, to talk in terms of "Blackfulla English": "With our ancestral languages stolen and being the adaptive people us blackfullas are, we took the way the colonizer talked, and forced us to talk, and decolonized it to suit our needs" (Sharon Davis, Bardi and Gija educator, cited in Tudor-Smith et al. 2024, p. 153). Thus, while we can identify common Indigenous English terms across Australia – the use of "deadly" to mean "good", for example, as in the anti-smoking slogan "Quitting is a deadly choice" – Blackfulla English is a decolonial move to claim a space to be heard.

These critiques of World Englishes or ELF do not suggest by any means that we shouldn't acknowledge different ways of speaking; the point is that in the same way that "The Voice" in Australia was about a struggle for First Australians to be heard, so a voice in English is about gaining recognition for what one is saying. It is evident that there is immense variety in how English is used but the World Englishes framework, with its idealistic hopes for language equality (it is more popular among academics than other language users) assumes that a strategy of pluralization – reinscribing variety into new national norms – can solve problems of linguistic inequality. ELF holds out other possibilities but as it has moved through its various stages of development, it has become clear that it replaces the national Englishes model with an implausible universalism (all English use is ELF) that seeks to incorporate impossible diversity into one framework. Neither has been able to respond to the challenges posed by Global South or decolonial scholarship and the call to rethink language from the bottom up. Neither takes us far enough in a search for voice.

FROM *BAHASA GADO-GADO* TO TRANSLINGUAL PRACTICES

None of this suggests a return to central norms – the mistaken belief that some form of so-called standard

English holds the secret to success – or a downplaying of the variability of language. Quite the opposite: common thinking about language variety has generally constrained how we can think about what is at stake; it is important instead to push questions of language variability further. Although the idea of *Bahasa Gado-Gado* is often used negatively to describe what is seen as inappropriate mixing of English, Javanese, Sundanese, Bahasa Indonesia or other languages, the term also presents two interesting possibilities. The first is to explore what is meant by *bahasa* and to suggest that it is not, or rather was not, synonymous with 'language.' As Heryanto (2007, p. 43) argues, it was through the introduction via European colonialism of "the idea of 'language'" that "the old word *bahasa* came to articulate this newly-acquired concept." This introduced concept did not accord with local understandings of language, for "there was neither a way nor a need to express its idea until the latter part of the 19th century" (2007, p. 43). This newly introduced concept of language entered "a world with no language", replacing local views of language and what it meant. In speaking of "a world with no language'" the point is not of course that these contexts involved any less language use, but rather that language meant something different. Perhaps, if we can revive earlier views of what *bahasa* entailed, we can open up possibilities for thinking about language in ways that differ from European nationalism.

The contemporary understanding and use of Bahasa Indonesia also open up some useful avenues of thought. Bahasa Indonesia is one of the major lingua francas of East Asia, but unlike English and Putonghua (despite claims that Chinese is the mother tongue of the population of China, it makes more sense to see Putonghua as a Chinese lingua franca) it is arguably no one's native language. In Errington's (2022) terms it is an *unnative* language, and this absence of native speakers makes it possible to have a national language that is itself diverse. Although one might argue that this is equally true of Putonghua in China or English in India, or that indeed "a native speaker of Standard English is logically impossible" (Piller, 2001, p. 112) (a standard language is acquired through schooling), this diversity occurs in the absence of a more regulated standard, thus rendering *alignment* (diversity, adaptation, belonging and connection) central to the communication process (Errington, 2022). This understanding of alignment, already present in daily interactions in Indonesia, sheds light more generally on processes of communication, not by people speaking the same way but by forms of accommodation as we adapt and change.

This runs contrary to the expectations of language educators brought up in a tradition that assumes that communication is achieved by adhering to standardized norms of language. Many

language educators, Kramsch (2021, p. 12) contends, are "primarily focused on how linguistic signs make conventional meanings, not how speakers and writers get into power struggles over their interpretation." When we talk of being intelligible, we have to ask for whom? As Rajagopalan (2010) notes, much of the discussion of intelligibility in the context of the global spread of English still posits some undisclosed central norm as the hidden standard by which we judge intelligibility. The question, instead, is for whom is something intelligible? The intelligibility of a Thai businesswoman speaking in English to a Vietnamese small business owner will be different from the intelligibility of a Japanese designer talking to a Colombian clothes manufacturer, or an Indonesian dive instructor explaining safety procedures to a multilingual group of divers. The effectiveness of their communication will depend less on their adherence to an international model of English and more on their capacity to use a range of linguistic and nonlinguistic resources, and to accommodate to each other.

The notion of *Gado-gado* also suggests some alternative ways forward for thinking about what communication entails, following work that has expanded the scope of language studies from a narrower conception of language as system to a broader vision of sociomaterial assemblages. There are several steps to consider here. It is useful to move away from a focus on English and its varieties towards an understanding of *translinguistic practices*, suggesting not only that "communication transcends individual languages," (we use repertoires of linguistic resources without necessary recourse to the notions of languages) but also that "communication transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 6) (we draw on a wide set of possible resources to achieve communication). This suggests on the one hand that our focus on English should be embedded within a wider translingual ecology of other languages. Speakers of English as a second language are always engaged with at least one other and often several other languages in their lives, families, communities and workplaces. On the other hand, the translingual entanglements of language suggest that our communication is always bound up with a wide array of semiotic processes that involve space, place, sounds, smells, images and artefacts.

This is not the pluralism of a World Englishes focus, with its established norms of regional varieties of English, but a focus on the complex repertoires of multilingual and multimodal resources (Pennycook, 2014). This can help us get beyond a focus on pluralized languages or hoping that Indonesian English can be recognized as a variety alongside its regional cousins (Singaporean, Malaysian, Philippine Englishes). Such recognition

reinscribes diverse voices into nationalized standards and cannot capture the "multilingual repertoire of speakers" or the "complex semiotic webs within and across which speakers move, comprising not just languages as we know them, but bits of language such as registers, accents, words, and assemblages of form-meaning elements" (Williams, 2017, p. 4). This brings together an understanding of language, space and place, linking current views on translanguaging with an understanding of the semiotic landscape (Pennycook, 2017). Looking at this broader approach to translinguistic practices, we can focus not just on the translingual relations among English and other languages but also among English and other entanglements. The idea of *language assemblages* (Pennycook, 2024) suggests some useful ways forward here.

Thinking of language as an assemblage, Wee (2021, p. 16) argues, "affords significant advantages over the view of language as an autonomous bounded system. It provides a coherent account of regularities and fluidities in language while also being open to the idea of what actually constitutes 'the linguistic'". This is to consider local uses of English in terms of assemblages of features. Rather than viewing language "as an entity with clear boundaries" or as having "an autonomous structure," rather than listing varieties of English (Singaporean English, Thai English and so on), it is more useful, Wee (2021, p. 42) argues, to think in terms of the "multiple enactments and assemblages of speakers, language resources and technologies." This can account for how languages are assembled through varied experiences with language in the world. Looking at language in terms of assemblages emphasizes the processes of communication as people draw on their prior linguistic encounters to create meaning. The notion of semiotic assemblages opens up ways of thinking that focus not so much on language use in particular contexts – as if languages preexist their instantiation in particular places – but rather on the ways in which particular assemblages of objects, linguistic materials and places come together

We make sense of our world and construct truths about ourselves and our society, Hamid (2022, p. 428) contends, "using the knowledge, experiences, and tools that we have access to. In other words, our use of English is reflective of our linguistic repertoires and life circumstances." Hamid is making a case here for understanding English as a language of the Global South. This does not, from his perspective, require a list of varieties of English in particular regions but rather an acknowledgment of the lived realities of people in the South. "Should people construct truths using the language that is part of their life (real language, from their point of view), or should they do so using an abstract code which is not part of their life and linguistic

repertoire?" (Hamid, 2022, p. 428). This brings us back to questions of voice, since it suggests that if people are to articulate their own experiences through language, this ought to be done using tools drawn from their own contexts, language that is not encoded as a local variety but is assembled in ongoing interactions.

CONCLUSION: FIVE WAYS FORWARD

From the point of view of language education, we often see our work as centrally to do with providing our students with the best possible English – even if this may be understood as a variety of English or English for a specific purpose – and then hoping this will serve them well in whatever encounters they have that involve English. We can take responsibility for their education and its content by teaching them English but not for what they will encounter in the world beyond. If we take the idea of voice seriously, however, and accept that it may be equally about being heard, then we have to consider more broadly what is at stake. If voice is understood as the ways people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so – the possibility of generating "an uptake of one's words" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 68) – then we are obliged to understand voice within a much wider sociomaterial context. It also becomes apparent that "language is just one aspect of how inequality manifests itself and affects people's lives" (Saraceni, 2024, p. 185). Language, Saraceni continues, "is intertwined with unequal distribution of wealth, power imbalance, racism, gender discrimination, and the demarcation lines between social classes. Looking at language only may be seriously reductive" (Saraceni, 2024, p. 185).

To conclude, let me suggest five considerations for considering such an educational project. First, we need to think through the implications of the *entanglements of English* (Pennycook, 2020). Rather than viewing English either as detached from social, cultural and economic relations, or as merely reflective of the global neoliberal order, this draws our attention to the multiple levels and ways in which English is part of social and political relations, from the inequalities of North/South political economies to the ways it is connected to discourses and ideologies of change, modernization, access, and desire. "Any discussion of English as a global language and its socioeducational implications," Rubdy (2015, p. 43) reminds us, "cannot ignore the fact that far from being a solution to the dismantling of 'unequal power' relations in the world, English is in fact often part of the problem" (p. 43). A focus on English entanglements sheds light on how being "part of the problem" is about the interconnectedness between language, place, power, objects, class, race, gender, and more. English is

enmeshed within local modes of distribution, and all the inclusions, exclusions, opportunities and inequalities this may entail. It is bound up with changing modes of communication and forms of popular culture. It is entrenched in educational systems, bringing to the fore many concerns about knowledge, pedagogy, and the curriculum. It is these "entanglements that we need to understand and take into account every time we discuss English(es) in the world in relation to (in-) equality" (Saraceni, 2024, p. 187)

Second, we need ways of challenging unequal Englishes. Wahyudi (2024) explains how he unpacks and problematizes with his students dominant knowledge about Standard Englishes. His students suggest different ways of addressing the problem of unequal Englishes through questions, collaborations and activism. As one student puts it, "English varieties itu justru menjadi kekayaan [even become rich]. . . so varieties as a field are a place where all humans from different backgrounds, multicultural and multilingual, come together and share more . . . if compared to what is considered as standard English. This means we can respect and tolerate each other, Li ta'arofu (to know each other) through the existence of varieties." (p. 98). The multilingual and multicultural nature of Indonesia make a critical pedagogical approach to ELT inevitable: "Without critical pedagogy, Indonesian ELT will not only become the source of reconstruction of inequality within the country but also the domination of the 'center'" (Safriyani et al., 2025, p. 85). Critical pedagogy, developed and attuned to Indonesian norms, places language politics at the centre. By taking the entanglements of English seriously, it can start to open a space for voices to be taken seriously, to create new possibilities rather than reproduce what is already there.

Third, by taking up questions of symbolic power, "the focus will no longer be exclusively on the individual learner, striving to get his/her message across in a manner conforming to normative grammar of the target language and to the predictable social conventions of the target culture" (Kramsch, 2021, p. 203). Thus, our focus moves away from an emphasis on learners as isolated individuals trying to master a predefined set of cultural and linguistic norms, towards a focus on "making the learners aware of the *effects* of their utterances, speech acts, and politeness strategies on others" (Kramsch, 2021, p. 203). This is a real challenge for ELT, a move away from correct production to effective communication, defined in terms of symbolic power rather than communicative competence. This will "require developing learners' interpretive abilities, sensitivity to context and appreciation of symbolic complexity" (Kramsch, 2021, p. 203). If we want to take voice seriously, if we want our students to be listened to rather than

just heard, we need to find ways to consider the effects of what they say.

Fourth, it is important to think in terms of language assemblages (Pennycook, 2024). By understanding that "speakers assemble language in ways that reflect their own encounters with and understandings of particular constructions." (Wee, 2021, p. 21), we can understand language as "an ongoing project, with different bits added and others removed at various times" (p. 22). From this perspective, what we think of as language is being constantly assembled and reassembled from our past experiences, and a range of semiotic sand socio-material resources in the present. An assemblage approach to language broadens the scope of what we consider language to be, drawing in a wider set of semiotic and material possibilities. It shifts the focus from using predefined language-objects towards a vision of the processes of communication that involve much more than words and sounds. We can imagine "new subjectivities that operate increasingly according to a logic of assemblage" (Hardt & Negri, 2017, p. 295), defined in terms of connections and relations rather than capacities and competences.

This brings us, finally, to the idea of developing *resourceful speakers* (Pennycook, 2014) in language education. This means both having available linguistic and other resources and being good at shifting between styles, discourses, registers and genres. This brings a flexible notion of language assemblages together with an understanding of negotiation, accommodation or alignment. This is less about being proficient in one variety of English, and more about finding means of alignment, which, as discussed earlier is already part of daily communication in Indonesia. So an emerging goal of education may be neither proficient native-speaker-like speakers (which has always been a confused and misguided goal), nor proficient speakers of a regional variety (which may be preferable but is still a constraining idea). Thinking in terms of *resourceful speakers* focuses on multiple linguistic and semiotic resources, and the ways we accommodate and negotiate our meanings. As language educators this means focusing not only on our students having a good command of English (of whatever variety) but rather in terms of being able to make themselves heard. This is to see how English is entangled in everyday, simultaneous activities and material encounters, and how a project to reclaim linguistic authority concerns assemblages of linguistic resources, identifications, artefacts and places. Thinking in terms of entanglements, critical pedagogy, symbolic power, assemblages and resourceful speakers gives us ways of thinking about how our students can author their own worlds and have that authorship listened to.

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