

On Global Englishes, Translanguaging, and the Educational Challenge of Celebrating Students' Capacity for Communication

November 2022 – Volume 26, Number 3

<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.26103a20>

Meng Huat Chau

Universiti Malaya

<chaumenghuat@yahoo.co.uk>

Anita Lie

Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University

<anita@ukwms.ac.id>

Chenghao Zhu

Universiti Malaya

<zhu_cheng_hao@163.com>

George M. Jacobs

Universiti Malaya

<george.jacobs@gmail.com>

Until very recently, much of the educational and applied linguistics discourse about students and their learning was based on a deficit view (e.g., “low proficiency,” “they should know this,” “they need to improve their command of English”). Such a view justifies the traditional role of teachers imparting knowledge and students passively absorbing it. In fact, John Dewey, writing over a century ago, highlighted this sad state of affairs in education:

Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, learning by a passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still so entrenched in practice? That education is not an affair of “telling” and being told but an active and constructive process, is a principle almost as generally violated in practice as conceded in theory. (Dewey, 1916/2001, pp. 43-44)

In this short contribution, we share our views on how inclusive language education may be promoted based on Global Englishes and translanguaging through a reconceptualization of who students really are. But before that, we must emphasize that inclusive education is about valuing all cultures and all languages. It encourages

students and teachers to use all the cultures and languages they can draw upon in order to understand and master their world, and to act upon that world for their own benefit and the benefit of all.

Global Englishes, Translanguaging, and a Community of Communication Partners

In line with this emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion, perspectives based on Global Englishes and translanguaging value all the communicative resources students have at their disposal, rather than privileging only certain language varieties or resources, especially those associated with dominant cultures. Communicative resources include dialects, registers, and idiolects, not to mention the use of visuals from a variety of contexts, as well as online resources. Approaches based on Global Englishes and translanguaging contrast with what has been a long-dominant trend in much of education in many countries: English language learning with a strong priority given to the prestige varieties of the English of native speaker countries, particularly the U.K. and U.S. Similarly, the cultural content (e.g., literature, history, geography, and popular culture) is often from the same countries. In contrast, Global Englishes and translanguaging see multilingualism and multiculturalism as an advantage, not a deficit.

Our concern is especially with the extreme form of a view based on competing varieties or languages which favors subtractive bilingualism, where, in learning a new language, people lose their previous language(s), somewhat similar to cultural assimilation. In that view, privileged people use privileged languages and similarly enjoy privileged access to vaccines, sanitation, clean water, and adequate food (cf. Chau et al., 2022). This is similar to Bourdieu's (1979) work on cultural capital and Sandel's (2020) work on meritocracy. The irony is that in some societies, a negative correlation exists between the income, power, and status people possess, on the one hand, and the number of language varieties in which people possess some proficiency, on the other hand.

We can see real excitement about promoting (versions of) Global Englishes and translanguaging in the professional discourse, as reflected in, for example, the recent three journal special issues on translanguaging of *Applied Linguistics Review*, the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, and the *RELC Journal* (see Fang et al., 2022; Fu & Hadjioannou, 2022; Pontier & Tian, 2022), which were all scheduled to be published around the same time the current special issue was in 2022. The challenge of putting these perspectives into practice in educational contexts is, however, enormous. For one thing, the existing educational practices are hugely driven by political and economic considerations based on individualistic, utilitarian grounds: those who speak “good English” get good jobs, and those who score 7.0 and above in IELTS are admitted to good universities. In most countries in the Global South, the national assessment system for primary and secondary schools is also still almost exclusively based on standard language or monolingual/monoglossic ideologies: bilingual and multilingual students are often perceived as two or more monolinguals in one (Grosjean, 1982) and are expected to demonstrate “equal” proficiency in these languages or “full” proficiency in the target language, which ignores the complex fluid language practices of these students (García & Tupas, 2019). In short, we are facing a labyrinth which, for scholars such as García (this issue) and Pennycook and Makoni (2019), serves the maintenance and reinforcement of a colonial and nation-building history in which many current notions, such as *language speakers*, *languages*, *competence*, and *proficiency*, are embedded.

Our response to this challenge is necessarily a bottom-up one: Start with ourselves as

language educators, challenge and question our (old) beliefs, listen, unlearn, relearn, encourage collective efforts, and repeat the cycle, again and again (Chau & Shunmugam, 2021). Like García, Pennycook, and Makoni, we view Global Englishes and translanguaging as part of a larger decolonizing project. More importantly, we urge a shift in language education from a habitual focus on *English* or *language* to a focus on *person*. That is, it is time we as a profession treat our students not as imperfect speakers of English but celebrate them holistically as people or fellow communication partners with a wealth of embodied life experiences comprising linguistic, cultural, and other resources. Students, we believe, should be encouraged and supported to see themselves as multilingual and multicultural English speakers, rather than as non-native English speakers, thereby emphasizing what they bring to the table, rather than what they come to the table without. When the focus is on students as fellow communicators, we almost instantly come to the realization that their English resources are merely part of their much larger trans-lingual, -cultural, -sensory, and -modal repertoires.

Conclusion

Appreciating and celebrating students as who they communicatively already are and at the same time deconstructing a reduced identity of students as passive learners from a deficit perspective is, for us, a truly empowering student-centered project: it opens up opportunities for reflection and renewal in language education and brings about changes on different levels. It demands a new way of imagining our relationship with our students and requires a different way of doing language education. As we explore more deeply the debates and discussions around Global Englishes and translanguaging, we may all come to realize that we are, after all, not dealing so much with language issues; we are confronting issues of unequal power and privilege (Bourdieu, 1982/1991; Canagarajah, 2021; García, this issue; Kramsch, 2021; Li, 2022; Nieto, 2001; Ortega, 2019; Pennycook & Makoni, 2019; Rose & Galloway, 2019; Smidt et al., 2021). Challenges aside, promoting a paradigm of thinking and action based on Global Englishes and translanguaging, with a focus on students as fellow communication partners, lights the path toward an educationally more just and sustainable world, one which values and nurtures diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as collective human responsibilities.

About the Authors

Meng Huat Chau teaches and mentors students conducting research in applied linguistics and language education at Universiti Malaya. He holds/has held Adjunct and Visiting Scholar or Professorships at Jeonbuk National University in the Republic of Korea, the University of Cambridge in the UK, and Yogyakarta State University in Indonesia. His teaching, research and mentoring on topics in applied corpus linguistics, Global Englishes, language and writing development, multilingualism and language education have been motivated by ecojustice considerations. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2329-5916

Anita Lie is a professor at Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University and a consultant on school improvement in remote regions. Her research interests include teacher development and heritage language learning. In 2011, she was a research fellow at UC Berkeley. Her research on heritage language learning among Indonesian-Americans was funded by AIFIS. She received a 2018 Dedicated Scholar Award from Kompas.id. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4818-2811

Chenghao Zhu is currently pursuing his PhD in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics at Universiti Malaya. He holds a master's degree in Applied Linguistics from Beijing Language and Culture University. Before embarking on his PhD research journey, he was a teacher of Chinese modern and contemporary literature. His research interests include the study of second language development, and corpus and computational linguistics. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0104-8327

George M Jacobs is an adjunct professor at Universiti Malaya. His research interests include student-centered learning, cooperative learning, and humane education. George is an active volunteer with such organizations as Kampung Senang Charity and Education Foundation. He serves on the boards of the Extensive Reading Foundation and the International Ecolinguistics Association. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7640-1842

To Cite this Article

Chau, M. H., Lie, A., Zhu, C., & Jacobs, G. M. (2022). On global Englishes, translanguaging, and the educational challenge of celebrating students' capacity for communication. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 26 (3).
<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.26103a20>

References

- Bourdieu, P. (1979). Symbolic power. *Critique of Anthropology*, 4(13-14), 77-85.
- Bourdieu, P. (1982/1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Polity Press.
- Canagarajah, S. (2021). Diversifying academic communication in anti-racist scholarship: The value of a translingual orientation. *Ethnicities*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968211061586>
- Chau, M. H., & Shunmugam, K. (2021). Every teacher a changemaker: Reflections on teacher agency and empowerment. *The English Teacher (50th Anniversary Issue)*, 50(2), 85-101. <https://doi.org/10.52696/FWYM7144>
- Chau, M. H., Zhu, C., Jacobs, G. M., Delante, N. L., Asmi, A., Ng, S., John, S. S., Guo, Q., & Shunmugam, K. (2022). Ecolinguistics for and beyond the Sustainable Development Goals. *Journal of World Languages*. 8(2), 323-345. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jwl-2021-0027>
- Dewey, J. (1916/2001). *Democracy and education*. The Pennsylvania State University.
- Fang, F., Zhang, L. J., & Sah, P. K. (2022). Translanguaging in language teaching and learning: Current practices and future directions. *RELC Journal*, 53(2), 305-312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003368822211144>
- Fu, D., & Hadjioannou, X. (2022). Translanguaging practice in diverse contexts. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 13(3), 319-325. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2021-0013>
- García, O. (2022). Designing new ownership of English: A commentary. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 26(3).
<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.26103a10>
- García, O., & Tupas, R. (2019). Doing and undoing bilingualism in education. In A. De Houwer & L. Ortega (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of bilingualism* (pp. 390-407). Cambridge University Press.

- Grosjean, F. (1982). *Life with two languages*. Harvard University Press
- Nieto, S. (2001). *Language, culture, and teaching: Critical perspectives*. Routledge.
- Kramsch, C. (2021). *Language as symbolic power*. Cambridge University Press.
- Li, W. (2022). Translanguaging as a political stance: Implications for English language education. *ELT Journal*, 76(2), 172-182.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccab083>
- Ortega, L. (2019). SLA and the study of equitable multilingualism. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103, 23-38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12525>
- Pennycook, A., & Makoni, S. (2019). *Innovations and challenges in applied linguistics from the global south*. Routledge.
- Pontier, R. W., & Tian, Z. (2022). Paradigmatic tensions in translanguaging theory and practice in teacher education: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 21(3), 139-143.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2022.2058857>
- Rose, H., & Galloway, N. (2019). *Global Englishes for language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sandel, M. J. (2020). *The tyranny of merit: What's become of the common good*. Farrer, Straus and Giroux.
- Smidt, E., Chau, M. H., Rinehimer, E., & Leever, P. (2021). Exploring engagement of users of Global Englishes in a community of inquiry. *System*, 98.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102477>

Copyright of articles rests with the authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.