

A Critical Examination of Common Beliefs about Language Teaching: From Research Insights to Professional Engagement

Ryuko Kubota
University of British Columbia
ryuko.kubota@ubc.ca

Language education is situated in a political and ideological space, in which certain beliefs about language, language speakers, cultures, and language teaching and learning are produced and reproduced. These beliefs constitute language ideology. The ideological and political facets of English language teaching have been scrutinized and debated in our field for almost 30 years. However, little has changed toward a more just and equitable direction in policies and practices reflected in curricula, instruction, materials, and teacher education. Focusing on ten common beliefs related to language teaching and learning, I will review insights generated by previous research and discuss how we can think differently and critically for change. Specifically, I will focus on language ideology constituted by beliefs about (1) legitimate varieties of English, (2) native speakerness, (3) whiteness, (4) Euro- and US-centrism, (5) cultural essentialism, (6) English as an international language, (7) English competence for economic success, (8) early learning of English, (9) the monolingual approach to pedagogy, and (10) the ideal learner and learning. Questioning language ideology requires a worldview that is anti-racist, anti-essentialist, anti-Eurocentric, and anti-reductionist as well as a perspective that affirms multiplicity, fluidity, and intellectual ways of understanding. These critical views are developed through constantly questioning assumptions, reflecting on one's own biases, and making informed judgments.

INTRODUCTION

In the last several decades, the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) has witnessed changes in pedagogical beliefs and practices. A previous belief about language pedagogy influenced by behaviorism, for instance, has been replaced by communicative language teaching with a focus on negotiation of meaning. Beliefs about legitimate varieties of English and English speakers are slowly changing as the field has begun to question linguistic normatism. At the same time, other beliefs about language teaching and learning have emerged or become stronger. For instance, increased economic globalization has strengthened the notion of English as a global language and as a promise of economic prosperity, creating a greater urgency to develop competence in English. This has compelled many governments, institutions, and individuals to increase opportunities for English language learning. These conditions and beliefs shape instructional practices and language education policies. Just as some ideologies in our society tend to persist, language ideologies—beliefs about language and language education—continue to influence TEFL. Although not all beliefs about language are harmful, some beliefs, such as the superiority of native speakers, standardized language, and whiteness, need to be scrutinized, since they perpetuate unequal relations of power among diverse users of English.

Language education, which aims to foster competent global citizens, can contribute to achieving greater equality and justice in our society. In order to encourage learners of English to develop skills, awareness, and attitudes necessary to become global citizens, teachers should critically examine existing beliefs about English, English speakers, and English language learning, and understand their ideological nature.

Focusing on ten common beliefs about language teaching and learning, this paper will discuss how these beliefs can be debunked and how alternative knowledge can inform educational practices. Critical examinations of these beliefs will invite teachers to affirm diversity, recognize the contextual nature of language teaching and learning, and seek greater equity and justice.

TEN BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

In TEFL, the following ten topics reflect major beliefs that influence educational practices: (1) legitimate varieties of English, (2) native speakerness, (3) whiteness, (4) Euro- and US-centrism, (5) cultural essentialism, (6) English as an international language, (7) English competence for economic success, (8) early learning of English, (9) the monolingual approach to pedagogy, and (10) the ideal learner and learning. Common beliefs about these topics have been problematized in recent scholarly discussions. As will become evident in the following discussion, these topics and issues are complex, contextual, and interrelated, indicating the need for teachers to be always vigilant about the ideological nature of any perspective—even a tentative solution of a problem.

(1) Legitimate Varieties of English

In TEFL as well as in everyday situations, people typically believe that standardized English is the most acceptable variety for oral and written use. Using the term *myths* in discussing language ideologies of English, Watts (2011) refers to this belief as the *legitimate language myth*. This belief has influenced language pedagogy as reflected in teaching materials (e.g., textbooks, audio recordings) and assessment.

However, the *legitimate language myth* has been challenged by research on world Englishes (WE). Questioning the superior status of standardized English used in inner circle countries (i.e., USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), scholars have shed light on other varieties of English (Bolton & Kachru, 2006; Kachru, Kachru, & Nelson, 2009; Kachru & Smith, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Research on WE regards Englishes used in outer circle countries (former British and American colonies) and expanding circle countries (those where English is mainly taught as a foreign language) as legitimate means of communication. EFL learners, who will be interacting with users of English from various parts of the world, must affirm linguistic diversity.

Paralleling WE's attention to linguistic diversity, research on English as a lingua franca (ELF) has examined nonnative features of English used by people from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Jenkins, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2011). Focusing on communication exclusively between nonnative users of English, ELF scholars have been investigating how these users negotiate meaning and what linguistic forms are essential for such negotiation. Research offers several pedagogical implications: First, strict adherence to the inner circle norm is unnecessary in communicating in ELF. Second, effective communication is enabled by not so much linguistic accuracy as it is by intelligibility, which is supported by communicative strategies. Third, learners of English should be provided with opportunities to practice interacting with diverse speakers of ELF. ELF invites teachers and administrators to reconsider their instructional and curricular foci.

Although WE and ELF offer alternative views, the conventional idea about legitimate varieties of English persists due to constraints imposed by language assessment, fixed conventions for formal writing, and media influence. First, as

Brown (2014) summarizes, incorporating WE, for instance, in large-scale tests will pose a challenge of establishing construct validity and fairness. In other words, if a particular variety of English is to be used in a test, a thorough description of the variety needs to exist, and all test takers should be familiar with that variety. Even for locally-developed achievement tests, all stakeholders, including parents, would need to buy into the underlying concept of WE.

Second, similar to the issue of language assessment, learners' writing performance is usually judged against established expectations especially for high-stakes academic writing (Heng Hartse & Kubota, 2014). To transgress such fixed conventions and express oneself more creatively and flexibly, translingual practices using multilingual repertoires has been advocated (Canagarajah, 2013; Horner, Lu, Royster & Trimbur, 2011). However, such translingual approaches tend to sidetrack real-world demands imposed by institutional expectations (Heng Hartse & Kubota, 2014). In general, currently popular pluralistic approaches (e.g., multilingualism, plurilingualism, translingualism) are conceptually parallel to the multiplicity and flexibility valorized by neoliberalism, which supports free market economy on the one hand and widens economic and educational gaps on the other (Flores, 2013; Kubota, 2016). It is necessary to understand this ideological tension and contradiction between fixed conventions and pluralistic approaches.

Third, the media also perpetuate linguistic norms. Despite vast linguistic diversity, news anchors on TV tend to speak in a standardized variety of English rather than a locally dominant variety. This further reinforces the idea of legitimate English.

These realities indicate that transforming the *legitimate English myth* is not simply a matter of changing classroom practices; rather, it involves a transformation of beliefs and institutional practices in the broader society.

(2) Native Speakerness

The belief about legitimate varieties of English is closely associated with the legitimacy attached to the native speaker of English. Native speakers are often viewed as ideal teachers equipped with complete knowledge and skills of the language to provide best instructions. Phillipson (1992) calls this belief the *native speaker fallacy* and Holliday (2006, 2008) calls it *native speakerism*. The persistence of this ideology is reflected in the continued preference of native English-speaking teachers for employment.

However, many scholars have challenged this assumption since the 1990s, as seen in the growing popularity of research on issues of nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) (e.g., Braine, 1999, 2010; Kamhi-Stein, 2004; Mahboob, 2010). Research on NNESTs have illuminated the positive traits of NNESTs, including being able to serve as a good L2 user model, providing learners with effective instruction on grammar and learning strategies, and empathizing with them (Moussu & Llorca, 2008). The advocacy role of the NNESTs movement is represented in TESOL's 2006 "Position statement against discrimination of nonnative speakers of English in the field of TESOL."¹

Despite active scholarly discussions on NNESTs, the status of NNESTs has not drastically improved. Kumaravadivelu (2016) argues that the problem is partly due to NNESTs' complicity with the West-based knowledge system. Specifically, NNESTs and researchers tend to support the existing West-based framework for pedagogy and research, rather than challenging the status quo. To break the dependency on the center-based framework of knowing and doing, Kumaravadivelu

(2016, p. 81) urges nonnative teachers and scholars to engage in “result-oriented strategic action” to transform the existing colonial relations of power.

Another issue to consider in understanding nonnative speakerness is diversity within the category. NNESTs do not form a homogenous group; rather, they come from diverse backgrounds with regard to gender, race, nationality, age, sexual identity, and so on, all of which impact individual teachers’ experiences. Of these social categories, race is closely linked to the belief about native speakers and legitimate speakers of English. Issues of race will be discussed below.

(3) Whiteness

There is an implicit assumption in TEFL that equates *native speakers* and *standardized English speakers* with *white people* (Kubota & Lin, 2009). This ideological formula tends to position non-white teachers of English—native or nonnative—as inferior. For instance, native English-speaking American teachers of Japanese descent working in Japan have experienced alienation, marginalization, and discrimination (Kubota & Fujimoto, 2013). According to an experimental study on the effects of teacher attributes on Japanese university students’ preferences of English language teachers (Rivers & Ross, 2013), the white race was significantly preferred.

Similar to the first two beliefs discussed thus far, the ideology that assigns superiority to whiteness is deeply ingrained in everyday life, yet it is rarely noticed or discussed. For example, we typically do not notice the predominance of the images of white teachers in English language textbooks or advertisements for English language institutes (see Takahashi, 2013; Yamada, 2015). This type of racial bias reflects *institutional racism*, as opposed to *individual racism* experienced by individuals.

Individual racism constitutes a large part of *racial micro-aggressions*, defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). For example, an Asian female native English-speaking teacher working at a private language institute in Canada may be frequently asked, “Where are you *really* from?”, be mistaken for a student, or have her photo placed on the student photo page rather than on the instructor page (Lee & Simon-Maeda, 2006). Such racial micro-aggressions as a covert form of individual racism are as damaging and injurious as overt racism.

Another category of racism is *epistemological racism* (Scheurich, 1997). Epistemological racism is seen in superior values assigned to a certain racial group in our knowledge system. For example, in Western societies, white European cultural perspectives tend to predominate in school curricula and textbooks over non-white histories or ways of knowing. This leads to the next topic.

(4) Euro- and US-Centrism

White-dominant epistemological racism parallels the Euro- and US-centric beliefs observed in TEFL. Related to the previous three topics, Euro- and US-centrism is manifested in the predominance of Western culture in the curricular content and programmatic foci. The belief that the legitimate English is British or American standardized English and that the legitimate English language teacher is a white native speaker of English privileges Western culture.

We can see how this belief is reflected in EFL textbooks by analyzing whose culture (e.g., European, American, Asian, African, Indigenous) is represented in the

lesson topics and human characters (Yamada, 2015). It is also reflected in the destinations of study abroad. Inner circle countries are predominantly chosen as locations for intensive language study. Some students certainly seek unique opportunities to learn English in outer circle countries such as Singapore and the Philippines. However, a study by Kobayashi (2011) revealed that Japanese student sojourners in Singapore still preferred white native speakers and standardized English.

Euro- and US-centric beliefs are also reflected in broader political interests, as seen in overseas professional development programs for English language teachers sponsored by central or local governments in Japan. One program implemented from 2011 to 2013 was called “Japan-U.S. Training and Exchange Program for English Language Teachers (JUSTE).”² The aim was for the participating teachers to understand the United States better through person-to-person exchange and homestay. Although engaging in professional development in the United States does not necessarily reinforce Euro- and US-centric ideas, the location is likely to impact participants’ worldview.

Euro- and US-centrism in TEFL also diverts teachers’ and students’ attention from diversity and socioeconomic disparity within a country or region where English is predominantly used. Euro- and US-centric knowledge associated with the superiority of white native speakers of standardized English evokes the economic wealth attached to certain types of English and English speakers. In fact, ideas about English and socioeconomic conditions are interrelated. For instance, educated English speakers in outer circle countries typically manipulate an inner circle variety of English, and they are economic elites who embrace a Euro- or US-centric worldview. This is contrasted with under-educated users of English in the same country (see Tupas, 2004 for the case of the Philippines). Critical teachers must recognize political, economic, linguistic, and cultural relations of power that produce and legitimate unequal Englishes and unequal human relations (Tupas, 2015).

(5) Cultural Essentialism

Culture has multiple dimensions and manifestations, reflecting and producing certain beliefs in TEFL. One challenge for teachers is how to conceptualize culture. A common belief is that each culture—often understood as a national or ethnic culture—is distinct with a unique history and characteristics, and thus homogenous and resistant to change. However, postmodern and postcolonial conceptualizations of culture underscore its diverse, dynamic, and hybrid nature (Kubota, 2014). For example, great cultural diversity exists within a nation in terms of geographical, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, generational differences, among others. Furthermore, cultural traditions that are commonly regarded as century old are often recent inventions (Hobsbawm, 1983).

Nonetheless, the fixed, static, and homogenous understanding of culture persists. This is partly due to the political nature of culture. In discussing the historical processes of establishing modern nation states, Anderson (1983) introduced the notion of *imagined communities* to explain the forces of nationalism (e.g., standardization of the national language), through which a sense of a shared community was established for people who previously belonged to culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It is necessary for teachers to critically examine the political and ideological meanings behind taken-for-granted representations of a certain culture.

One topic discussed often in TEFL is cultural difference in writing practices. It is commonly believed that writers of English generally state the main idea in the

beginning and organize the subsequent supporting arguments in a logical and clear manner. Students are often told that writing in their native language is the opposite of this deductive style of English texts and that the reason their L2 texts written in English often sounds awkward is because they apply their L1 conventions to L2 writing. This understanding used to correspond to findings of contrastive rhetoric (CR) research. However, many studies have critiqued this conceptual framework of CR (Atkinson, 2012; Kubota, 2010). Specifically, research indicates that the perceived quality of L2 texts is affected by students' L1 writing expertise, L2 proficiency, and writer identity, and that cultural differences in textual features are difficult to establish. Furthermore, conventions for certain genres (e.g., academic, journalistic) are being merged across cultures due to global influences. Critics also argue that the previous CR framework ideologically parallels the colonial dichotomy of cultural images between the colonizer and the colonized (Kubota & Lehner, 2004).

It is necessary for teachers and learners to approach cultural difference critically so that they will not fall easily into cultural essentialism, which can lead to cultural stereotyping and racial micro-aggressions. However, not all discourses on cultural uniqueness and homogeneity are problematic. To treat culture as a stable and bounded category can help marginalized groups preserve their cultures. Such strategic essentialism can support counter-hegemonic resistance. It is thus important to recognize the situated meanings of culture.

(6) English as an International Language

In many parts of the world, learning English is increasingly stressed in formal and non-formal education. This trend stems from the belief that English functions everywhere in the world as a universal language for international communication. Together with the next belief on the perceived economic benefit of English competence, the belief about English as an international lingua franca has become a strong motivation to develop English language skills as an integral part of neoliberal *human capital* (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012; Flores, 2013; Kubota, 2011a). The concept of *human capital* is defined as people's knowledge and ability required for success in the new economy (Keeley, 2007). Enhancing students' skills in English through quality instruction and assessment has indeed become an educational priority for many governments and educational institutions.

English is no doubt useful. According to Graddol (2006), one fourth of the world population is English speakers. However, this also means that three quarters of world population are non-English-speaking. Even within inner circle countries, the language used in workplaces is not necessarily English (Block, 2007; Duff, Wong & Early, 2000; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007, 2008). In expanding circle countries, multiple languages are used for intercultural communication. For instance, in a qualitative study on Japanese transnational corporate workers' communication in workplaces abroad (Kubota, 2013, 2015), the language they reported to have used in China, Thailand, and South Korea was not always English. Interviews revealed that the Japanese workers' linguistic choice was influenced by various factors, including the work type, the availability of local workers with Japanese proficiency, the linguistic distance between the local language and Japanese, and individual differences. These workers also underscored the *ability to communicate* rather than linguistic skills per se. They placed an importance on non-linguistic dimensions, such as communicative strategies, willingness to communicate, mutual accommodation, and communicative dispositions (e.g., respect for difference; nondiscriminatory attitudes; cultural, political, and historical knowledge).

Both the myth of the absolute universality of English and the significance of non-linguistic competence for cross-cultural communication provide several pedagogical implications. First, teachers and learners of English need to acknowledge multilingualism in society and become willing to learn and use languages other than English. Second, learners should be encouraged to develop plurilingual competence or the ability to mobilize their available multiple linguistic and nonlinguistic resources as repertoires in order to accomplish communicative tasks. This departs from a previous understanding of language use, which presumes complete knowledge of a language system that is distinct from another language (Marshall & Moore, 2013). Third, more pedagogical attention should be paid to the strategic and dispositional aspects of communication, including a variety of communicative strategies, willingness to communicate, affirmation of all kinds of diversity, and support for social justice.

(7) English Competence for Economic Success

It is believed that acquiring English language proficiency is essential for individual and national economic success. This belief, which is referred to as the *economic benefit myth* (Watts, 2011), has become a strong justification for promoting English language teaching and learning (Kubota, 2011a; Park, 2011). Yet, this myth can be scrutinized by examining empirical research and socioeconomic issues.

According to a synthesis of empirical studies in Québec and Switzerland on the effects of language proficiency on individual incomes (Grin, Sfreddo, & Vaillancourt, 2010), individuals' language proficiency generally correlated with higher earnings, even when the level of education and experience was statistically controlled. Yet, the data indicated that the economic value attached to a particular language varied according to geographical regions and types of industrial sectors. Conversely, an analysis of Japanese public survey data demonstrated no statistically significant correlation between self-reported English language skills and income, when taking into consideration the actual need to use English for work (Terasawa, 2015). Due to a large number of variables and contextual issues to consider, it seems difficult to come to a universal conclusion regarding the individual economic benefit of English language skills.

The very fact that the statistical analysis described in Grin, Sfreddo, and Vaillancourt (2010) had to control the level of education to see the correlation between language skills and income indicates that those who have a higher level of education are more likely to be proficient in an additional language and have better paying jobs. This raises a question of who has access to education (Lorente & Tupas, 2013). The promotion of TEFL driven by the *economic benefit myth* is predicated on neoliberal ideology, as seen in increased competition and reduced social safety nets, which have created larger economic gaps almost everywhere in the world. English language teachers must recognize how TEFL, which is purported to bring people from diverse linguistic backgrounds together, may actually be separating people along socioeconomic lines.

(8) Early Learning of English

The neoliberal impetus for English language learning is linked to the *more and earlier* premise, reflecting the belief that English opens doors to future opportunities, as discussed above (Sayer, 2015). Phillipson (1992) calls this premise the *early-start fallacy*. Indeed, people tend to believe that the earlier children start learning a language, the better results they obtain. This belief partly stems from the

critical period hypothesis, which posits that people lose their natural ability to acquire native-like proficiency after puberty. However, second language acquisition (SLA) research has shown that, in naturalistic settings such as immigrants' L2 acquisition, older children or adolescents are more efficient learners than younger children due to their cognitive maturity. Today, scholars generally support the tenet, *the older the faster, the younger the better* or the difference between *rate of acquisition vs. ultimate attainment* (see Muñoz 2008, 2014).

In contrast, research focused on *foreign language* instructional settings has yielded slightly different results. While older learners still outperform younger learners with regard to the rate of learning, younger starters' advantage for ultimate attainment have not been found; instead, older starters generally outperform younger starters given the same number of instructional hours in schools over the years (García Mayo & García Lecumberri, 2003; Muñoz, 2006). According to Muñoz (2011, 2014), what matters is not so much the starting age as the cumulative amount of exposure (e.g., watching films and TV, writing emails, extensive reading) and the quality of input (e.g., studying abroad and interacting with speakers of the target language).

The research indicates that lowering the starting age of foreign language learning does not necessarily yield higher attainment; rather, providing a large amount of quality input leads to the development of proficiency. This means that the validity of the current language education policy, which promotes early learning of English for only a couple of hours per week in the classroom, is questionable, if the purpose is to enhance language proficiency. Although teachers may not be able to change the policy, they can inform parents by sharing scholarly knowledge to adjust their expectations for their children.

(9) The Monolingual Approach to Pedagogy

The *more and earlier* approach (Sayer, 2015) also relates to what Phillipson (1992) calls the *monolingual fallacy*, which posits that English is best taught solely in English. The assumption is that the goal of language learning is to be able to use the language like a monolingual native speaker and that the monolingual approach will boost the exposure to and the use of the target language. However, research in both second and foreign language contexts rejects this premise.

In second language learning settings, the positive role of L1 is empirically supported by the effectiveness of maintenance bilingual education (e.g., dual language programs, in which immigrant students learn both the heritage language and the L2 to become bilingual and biliterate) compared to the monolingual teaching of L2 (e.g., ESL pullout program, which views students' L1 as a barrier in L2 learning) (Cummins, 2000, 2007; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Thomas & Collier, 2002). The advantage of maintenance bilingual instruction is theoretically explained by the linguistic interdependence principle. Cummins (2000) explains that proficiencies in two or more languages are operated by a common underlying proficiency, rather than separate language-specific competencies that function in a zero-sum manner. This corroborates the concept of multicompetence—L2 users' knowledge of two or more languages in the same mind (Cook, 2005). According to this theory, maintaining and developing L1 does not impede L2 learning but rather promotes it via cross-linguistic transfer. Pedagogically, Cummins (2007) supports the important role of L1 in L2 learning even in immersion education, which has traditionally shunned translation and code switching/mixing. Overall, scholars advocate replacing monolingual teaching with approaches that promote

bi/multilingual practices, including code-switching, as seen in translanguaging (e.g., García & Li, 2014) and translanguaging approaches (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013, Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011).³

In foreign language teaching, research has also raised skepticism about the effectiveness of monolingual teaching (Hall & Cook, 2012). It has been found that L1 use serves important pedagogical functions, including teaching grammar, classroom management, and meeting the social and affective needs of learners (e.g., communicating empathy, reducing anxiety, respecting learner identity). The social and affective function is significant especially in contexts where English language learning is mandatory for all learners. Although the superior learning outcome of L1 use over monolingual approaches still needs to be substantiated, Lee and Macaro (2013) found that L1 use was more effective than a monolingual approach in vocabulary learning among young and older Korean learners, with a greater benefit found in the younger group. Zhao and Macaro (2014) found a similar result among Chinese adult learners of English. However, further empirical evidence needs to be sought beyond vocabulary learning.

With regard to implications for pedagogy, scholars propose several strategies, such as the judicious and purposeful use of L1 (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009), using translation for developing language awareness and responding to learner needs (Cook, 2010, Witte, Harden, & Harden, 2009), and fostering multilingual awareness beyond L1/L2 use (Levine, 2013).

(10) The Ideal Learner and Learning

Many language teachers teach in schools, universities, or private language institutes. A common image or schema of foreign language learning in the classroom includes physical objects such as textbooks, dictionaries, and worksheets, and activities such as memorization, pair/group practice, and language tests. In these contexts, ideal learners are seen to have integrative motivation and, under neoliberal ideology, invest in learning in order to gain cultural capital, which is convertible into economic capital (e.g., higher earnings) or social capital (e.g., higher social status).

However, many alternative learning opportunities and purposes exist both inside and outside of the classroom. For instance, adults of all ages learn English and other languages at community centers or in private spaces (Kubota, 2011b; Kubota & McKay, 2009). These learners do not necessarily wish to obtain cultural capital through language learning, but rather they often learn a language as a leisure activity or as a hobby (Kubota, 2011b). Furthermore, learning a language with peers often becomes a social activity for enjoyment to consume. Learning in these instances can be more aptly described by *consumption* of pleasure generated by socializing and escaping everyday routine. Although learning English in this way often reinforces the superiority of whiteness (Appleby, 2013; Kubota, 2011b; Takahashi, 2013), diverse meanings and desires attached to learning a foreign language need to be recognized (Motha & Lin, 2013).

Learning for consumption of pleasure also implies that learners in traditional classrooms are likely to have diverse desires. For instance, a survey with students learning Japanese as a foreign language in Australian universities revealed that many of them began enrolling in a Japanese language course because they were drawn by J-pop culture (e.g., anime, manga, music). This sometimes created a gap between the students' interest and traditional curriculum and instruction (Northwood & Thomson, 2012). Another example is an anecdote told by a friend of mine, who was teaching students with special needs at a Japanese junior high school. One girl with Asperger

Syndrome was an avid learner of English grammar. In fact, her favorite subject was English. However, her disability caused panic reactions when she encountered irregular English structures and her teacher struggled to deal with the tension between her desire to learn English and ideal learning strategies.

It is often challenging for teachers to fill a gap between learner desires and curriculum mandates. However, recognizing multiple desires and simultaneously negotiating contextual demands will bring about wellbeing for the learners.

CONCLUSION

Multiple beliefs about TEFL are under scholarly scrutiny. Some of the beliefs are part of contested broader ideologies, while others are empirically unsupported by SLA research. The beliefs about legitimate varieties of English and native speakersness are rooted in language ideology mobilized to establish modern nation states. The beliefs about Euro- and US-centrism, cultural essentialism, and whiteness are related to the ideology of colonialism. The more recent ideology of neoliberalism reflects and constitutes beliefs about English as an international language, English competence for economic success, early learning of English, and the monolingual approach to pedagogy. Beliefs about early learning of English and the monolingual approach to pedagogy have been empirically challenged by SLA research. Furthermore, a critical examination of the belief about the ideal learner and learning encourages us to affirm learners' diverse desires and reconsider taken-for-granted approaches to teaching.

Multiple beliefs and assumptions held by teachers, learners, parents, and institutions ultimately influence the ways our learners interact with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Critical appraisals of these beliefs will engender an anti-racist, anti-essentialist, anti-Euro- and US-centric, and anti-reductionist worldview. It will also foster attitudes to affirm diversity and value empirical knowledge. Teachers are encouraged to make informed judgments by constantly questioning assumptions, understanding contextual meanings, and reflecting on their own biases.

Notes:

¹ <http://www.tesol.org/docs/pdf/5889.pdf>

² See

http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kokusai/culcon/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2015/03/05/1355548_02.pdf and http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/haken/index.htm

³ It is necessary to recognize the complicity of translanguaging approaches with neoliberal ideology, as discussed earlier.

References:

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London, UK: Verso.
- Appleby, R. (2013). Desire in translation: White masculinity and TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47, 122-147.
- Atkinson, D. (2012). Intercultural rhetoric and intercultural communication. J. Jackson (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication* (pp. 116-129). London & New York: Routledge.
- Block, D. (2007). Niche linguistic francas: An ignored phenomenon. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41, 561-566.

- Block, D., Gray, J., & Holborow, M. (2012). *Neoliberalism and applied linguistics*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Bolton, K., & Kachru, B. B. (2006). *World Englishes: Critical concepts in linguistics*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Braine, G. (Ed.). (1999). *Non-native educators in English language teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Braine, G. (2010). *Nonnative speaker English teachers: Research, pedagogy, and professional growth*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Brown, J. D. (2014). The future of world Englishes in language testing. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 11, 5-26.
- Butzkamm, W., & Caldwell, J. (2009). *The bilingual reform: A paradigm shift in foreign language teaching*. Tübingen, Germany: Narr Studienbücher.
- Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Cook, G. (2010). *Translation in language teaching: An argument for reassessment*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Cook, V. (2005). Basing teaching on the L2 user. In E. Llurda, (Ed.), *Non-native language teachers: Perceptions, challenges and contribution to the profession* (pp. 47-61). New York, NY: Springer.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (2007). Rethinking monolingual instructional strategies in multilingual classrooms. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10, 221-240.
- Duff, P., Wong, P., & Early, M. (2000). Learning language for work and life: The linguistic socialization of immigrant Canadians seeking careers in health care. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 57, 9-57.
- Flores, N. (2013). The unexamined relationship between neoliberalism and plurilingualism: A cautionary tale. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47, 500-520.
- García, O., & Li, W. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- García Mayo, M. del P., & García Lecumberri, M. L. (Eds.). (2003). *Age and the acquisition of English as a foreign language*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W., & Christian, D. (Eds.) (2006). *Educating English language learners: A synthesis of empirical evidence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next: Why global English may mean the end of 'English as a Foreign Language.'* London, UK: British Council.
- Grin, F., Sfreddo, C., Vaillancourt, F. (2010). *The economics of the multilingual workplace*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hall, G., & Cook, G. (2012). Own-language use in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching*, 45, 271-308.
- Heng Hartse, J., & Kubota, R. (2014). Pluralizing English? Variation in high-stakes academic writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 24, 71-82.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1983). Introduction: Invention of tradition. In E. J. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Eds.), *The invention of tradition* (1-14). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Holliday, A. (2006). Native-speakerism. *ELT Journal*, 60, 385-387.
- Holliday, A. (2008). Standards of English and politics of inclusion. *Language Teaching*, 41, 119-130.

- Horner, B., Lu, M., Royster, J., & Trimbur, J. (2011) Language difference in writing: Toward a translingual approach. *College English* 73, 303-321.
- Jenkins, J. (2014). *English as a lingua franca in the international university: The politics of academic English language policy*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Kachru, B. B., Kachru, Y., & Nelson, C. (2009). *The Handbook of world Englishes*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kachru, Y., & Smith, L. (2008). *Cultures, contexts and world Englishes*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kamhi-Stein, L. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning and teaching from experience: Perspectives on non-native English-speaking professionals*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Keeley, B. (2007). *Human capital: How what you know shapes your life*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). *World Englishes: Implications for international communication and English language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kobayashi, Y. (2011). Expanding-circle students learning “standard English” in the outer-circle Asia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 32, 235-248.
- Kramsch, C., & Whiteside, A. (2007). Three fundamental concepts in second language acquisition and their relevance in multilingual contexts. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91, 907-922.
- Kramsch, C., & Whiteside, A. (2008). Language ecology in multilingual settings. Towards a theory of symbolic competence. *Applied Linguistics*, 29, 645-671.
- Kubota, R. (2010). Cross-cultural perspectives on writing: Contrastive rhetoric. In N. H. Hornberger & S. L. McKay (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language education* (pp. 265-289). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Kubota, R. (2011a). Questioning linguistic instrumentalism: English, neoliberalism, and language tests in Japan. *Linguistics and Education*, 22, 248-260.
- Kubota, R. (2011b). Learning a foreign language as leisure and consumption: Enjoyment, desire, and the business of *eikaiwa*. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14, 473-488.
- Kubota, R. (2013). “Language is only a tool”: Japanese expatriates working in China and implications for language teaching. *Multilingual Education*. DOI:10.1186/2191-5059-3-4 Available from <http://www.multilingual-education.com/content/3/1/4>.
- Kubota, R. (2014). Standardization of language and culture. In S. Sato & N. Doerr (Ed.), *Rethinking language and culture in Japanese education: Beyond the standard*. (pp. 19-34). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Kubota, R. (2015). Questioning language myths in English language teaching: Toward border-crossing communication. *Selected papers from the twenty-fourth international symposium on English teaching* (pp. 44-57). Taipei, Taiwan: English Teachers’ Association-Republic of China (ETA-ROC).
- Kubota, R. (2016). The multi/plural turn, postcolonial theory, and neoliberal multiculturalism: Complicities and implications for applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 37, 474-494.
- Kubota, R., & Fujimoto, D. (2013). Racialized native-speakers: Voices of Japanese American English language professionals. In S. A. Houghton & D. J. Rivers (Eds.), *Native-speakerism in Japan: Intergroup dynamics in foreign language education* (pp. 196-206). Multilingual Matters.

- Kubota, R., & Lehner, A. (2004). Toward critical contrastive rhetoric. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 13*, 7-27.
- Kubota, R., & Lin, A. (Eds.) (2009). *Race, culture, and identity in second language education: Exploring critically engaged practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kubota, R., & McKay, S. (2009). Globalization and language learning in rural Japan: The role of English in the local linguistic ecology. *TESOL Quarterly, 43*, 593-619.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2016). The decolonial option in English teaching: Can the subaltern act? *TESOL Quarterly, 50*, 66-85.
- Lee, E., & Simon-Maeda, A. (2006). Racialized research identities in ESL/EFL research. *TESOL Quarterly, 40*, 573-594.
- Lee, J. H., & Macaro, E. (2013). Investigating age in the use of L1 or English-only instruction: Vocabulary acquisition by Korean EFL learners. *The Modern Language Journal, 97*, 887-901.
- Levine, G. S. (2013). The case for a multilingual approach to language classroom communication. *Language and Linguistics Compass, 7/8*, 423-436.
- Lorente, B. P., & Tupas, T. R. F. (2013). (Un)emancipatory hybridity: Selling English in an unequal world. In R. Rubdy & L. Alsagoff (Eds.), *The global-local interface and hybridity: Exploring language and identity* (pp. 66-82). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Mahboob, A. (Ed.) (2010). *The NNEST lens: Non Native English Speakers in TESOL*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Marshall, S., & Moore, D. (2013). 2B or not 2B plurilingual? Navigating languages literacies, and plurilingual competence in postsecondary education in Canada. *TESOL Quarterly, 47*, 472-499.
- Motha, S., & Lin, A. (2013). "Non-coercive rearrangements": Theorizing desire in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly, 48*, 331-359.
- Moussu, L., & Llorca, E. (2008). Non-native English-speaking English language teachers: History and research. *Language Teaching, 41*, 315-348.
- Muñoz, C. (2006). The effects of age on foreign language learning. In C. Muñoz (Ed.), *Age and the rate of foreign language learning* (pp. 1-40). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Muñoz, C. (2008). Symmetries and asymmetries of age effects in naturalist and instructed L2 learning. *Applied Linguistics, 29*, 578-596.
- Muñoz, C. (2011). Input and long-term effects of starting age in foreign language learning. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 49*, 113-133.
- Muñoz, C. (2014). Starting age and other influential factors: Insights from learner interviews. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*, 465-484.
- Northwood, B., & Thomson, C. K. (2012). What keeps them going? Investigating ongoing learners of Japanese in Australian Universities. *Japanese Studies, 32*, 335-355.
- Park, J.S.-Y. (2011). The promise of English: Linguistic capital and the neoliberal worker in the South Korean job market. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 14*, 443-455.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rivers, D. J., & Ross, A. S. (2013). Idealized English teachers: The implicit influence of race in Japan. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 12*, 321-339.
- Sayer, P. (2015). "More & Earlier": Neoliberalism and primary English education in Mexican public schools. *L2 Journal, 7*, 40-56.

- Scheurich, J. J. (1997). *Research method in the postmodern*. London, UK: Falmer Press.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life. *American Psychologist*, 62 (4), 271-286.
- Takahashi, K. (2013). *Language learning, gender and desire: Japanese women on the move*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Terasawa, T. (2015). "Nihonjin to eigo" no shakai gaku: Naze eigo kyōiku wa gokai darake nano ka [Sociology of English for the Japanese: Fallacies of the discourses of English language teaching]. Tokyo, Japan: Kenkyūsha.
- Thomas, W., & Collier, V. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence.
- Tupas, R. (2004). The politics of Philippine English: Neocolonialism, global politics, and the problem of postcolonialism. *World Englishes*, 23, 47-58.
- Tupas, R. (Ed.) (2015). *Unequal Englishes: The politics of Englishes today*. Basingstokes, UK: Palgrave.
- Watts, R. J. (2011). *Language myths and the history of English*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Witte, A., Harden, T., & Harden, A. R. O. (Eds.). (2009). *Translation in second language learning and teaching*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Yamada, M. (2015). *The role of English teaching in Modern Japan: Diversity and multiculturalism through English language education in a globalized era*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Zhao, T., & Macaro, E. (2014). What works better for the learning of concrete and abstract words: Teachers' use of L2-only explanations? *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. doi: 10.1111/ijal.12080.

Bio data:

Ryuko Kubota is a professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. Her research is explores critical approaches to applied linguistics and second/foreign language teaching, focusing on issues of race, language ideologies, and critical pedagogies.

Key words:

critical pedagogy, cultural essentialism, early learning of English, Eurocentrism, language ideology, linguistic legitimacy, monolingual approach, native speakerness, neoliberalism, whiteness