



Onto-epistemological justice and language across the life-course: Transitioning through the Australian education system

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Symposium format:

- **Multimodal symposium**

Symposium mode:

- **Hybrid**

Sub-themes:

- **LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING:** teacher education, curricula and education, classrooms, instruction, task-based learning, EAP, study abroad, (virtual) exchanges, materials and methods
- **LINGUISTIC SOCIAL ISSUES:** linguistic (in)justice, power, advocacy, attitude & bias, diversity emancipation, discriminations, ethnicity and gender, ideology, language & social justice

Short Abstract:

For over 65,000 years, Australia has been home to linguistically and culturally diverse communities, hosting among the oldest continuing languages of anywhere in the world. With one in five Australian residents using a language other than English at home, students in Australian classrooms come from varied language ecologies, reflecting the country's rich linguistic plurality. Yet despite the multilingual makeup of Australian society, recognition for language diversity in education has largely been ignored amid monolingualising policy and discourse.

Positioned amid the critical, multilingual and decolonial turns in applied linguistics, the symposium seeks to confront representations of language in education from early childhood into adulthood. Grounded in epistemic (in)justice, we will deconstruct the myths of modernity and monolingualism, and address how coloniality influences current language policies and practices in Australia. The panellists will map transitions across primary, secondary, tertiary and migrant education highlighting the critical role of language across the life-course.

Argument:

For over 65,000 years, Australia has been home to linguistically and culturally diverse communities, hosting among the oldest continuing languages of anywhere in the world. With one in five Australian residents using a language other than English at home, students in



Australian classrooms come from a range of language ecologies, reflecting the country's rich linguistic plurality. Yet despite the multilingual makeup of Australian society, recognition for language diversity in education has largely been ignored amid monolingualising policy and discourse (Schalley et al, 2015).

Four new research perspectives, all positioned amid the critical, multilingual and decolonial turns in applied linguistics, seek to confront this situation and transform representations of language in education from early childhood into adulthood. This symposium, grounded in epistemic (in)justice, will deconstruct the myths of modernity and monolingualism and address how coloniality influences current language policy and practice in Australia. The four panellists, each from different standpoints and disciplines, will map transitions (Escobar, 2020) across primary, secondary, tertiary and migrant education, highlighting the critical role of language across the life-course. In doing so, presenters will argue for the urgent need to think 'otherwise' (Mignolo, 2007) and to imagine a heteroglossic education system where the linguistic and cultural strengths of students are valued and sustained.

From early childhood, epistemic injustice and coloniality already work to exclude multilingual students. While all children entering early education settings bring an abundance of linguistic and cultural knowledge, educational policies designed from a monoglossic, Eurocentric mindset fail to take this knowledge into account and instead position multilingual children and their languages in deficit from their first interactions with the education system. The first presentation in this symposium will unpack the language ideologies present in early education policy documents to explore how language is constructed as a problem. Using a critical poststructural framing, this presentation will show the ways that language ideologies embedded in policy work to naturalise hegemonic beliefs about language, undermining linguistically diverse students from their earliest encounters with formal schooling.

The monolingual ideologies present in early education in Australia continue to permeate the secondary schooling context. This is attributed to limited opportunities for world language educators to engage in critical studies of language in their undergraduate degrees (Heinrichs, 2021). As such, the language practices of world language educators in Australia remain (mis)understood as grammatically correct, politically neutral, and unaffected (Heinrichs, 2022). Thus, there is a need to transition towards a more onto-epistemologically (Escobar, 2020) informed understanding of how world language educators perform their language practices in their everyday lives to counter the coloniality of languaging. This second presentation will explore digitally-entangled examples of Spanish as a world language educators languaging via social media.

Next, the third presentation of this symposium will discuss the onto-epistemic injustices faced by culturally and linguistically diverse university students. Despite the (mostly rhetorical) efforts to improve epistemic inclusivity in Australian higher education, the university is still heavily influenced by Eurocentrism, as the curriculum is rarely ontologically or epistemologically questioned (Ocriciano, 2021). Knowledge production is limited to the privileged few, while culturally and linguistically diverse students are excluded as their own ways of knowing and being are invalidated. Mignolo (2008) shows how the epistemic advantage of modernity establishes and perpetuates the colonialism of knowledge. The third presentation will conceptually discuss the ways multilingual students in Australian higher education are dismissed and unheard as a form of epistemic injustice.

Finally, remote learning in migrant language education programs during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted epistemic injustices for adult students with limited or interrupted formal education. The crisis-prompted online educational experiences of these students



underscore the urgent need to address the vulnerability of low literate adult students in migrant language programs. The final presentation will argue that reimagining education for these students must extend beyond socioeconomic integration to challenge assimilationist, monolingual policies and practices.

References

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- Ocriciano, M. (2021). Translanguaging in University Direct-Entry Pathway English Courses: An Australian Case. In *Teaching English Language Variation in the Global Classroom* (pp. 142-151). Routledge.
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