The Coloniality of Linguistic Entrepreneurship

Ruanni Tupas

University College London

Abstract

Neoliberalism as a lens through which language learning – and by extension education in general – is viewed is insufficient in accounting for the transforming nature of education and language learning today. In other words, the neoliberalism of education and language learning – operationalized, for example, through the practices and ideologies of *linguistic entrepreneurship* – is imbricated in historically-mediated sociopolitical relations. This can be exemplified by the case of the Philippines where entrepreneurial discourses and practices – for example, language learning for employment opportunities, pursuit for profit and as a moral obligation to society – are historically traceable to the Philippines' enduring encounters and confrontations with 20th century (neo)colonialism. Linguistic entrepreneurship fittingly describes the dispositions, practices and ideologies of the neoliberal language learner, but as soon as this language learner becomes the neoliberal Filipino speaker, it becomes politically imperative to historically unpack the 'Filipino' in language learning. In this sense education and language learning are characterized primarily by their coloniality, mediated by the logics of neoliberalism; linguistic entrepreneurship is mobilized in conditions of coloniality.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

In *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, Peter De Costa, Joseph Park and Lionel Wee (2016) have published a conceptual paper, 'Language learning as linguistic entrepreneurship: Implications for language education' which has initiated a conversation around the notion of linguistic entrepreneurship as a lens through which we may understand the neoliberal nature of language learning today (De Costa, Park and Wee 2019; Pujular 2019; Rasool and Winke 2019). This paper seeks to join the conversation by conceptually expanding the idea of linguistic entrepreneurship along the lines of the coloniality of neoliberalism. According to de Costa, Park and Wee (2016), and reiterated in de Costa et al. (2021), *linguistic entrepreneurship* refers to the changing nature of language learning today which does not simply take a market-driven perspective but, more crucially, it also frames the need for language learning in moral terms: it "presents the learning of languages as a responsibility of a good citizen and ideal neoliberal worker" (p. 140). That is, one is affectively confronted with a moral desire to learn a language (English, for example) because it is one way to improve oneself and contribute to the nation's development. Success – or failure – in language learning, therefore, is placed squarely on the individual learner, thus removing or obscuring the role of state institutions, hegemonic ideologies and structuring social conditions in configuring one's language learning trajectory. In this paper, the argument pushes the definition further by locating linguistic entrepreneurship *centrally* within conditions of coloniality. The logics of neoliberal language learning demands the deployment of the lens of coloniality, thus complicating the conditions within which we learn language – 'global' English specifically – today.

Thus, this paper – primarily a conceptual one – specifically aims to show the durability of the coloniality of language learning and education today, mediated by what may be referred to as neoliberal practices and ideologies. In particular, it aims to show that linguistic entrepreneurship as referring to 'new' dispositions and practices of language learners today should also be seen in the light of colonialism's "replicants" (Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui 2008) because the coloniality of life remains "the most general form of domi-

nation in the world today" (Quijano 2007: 170). The paper uses the case of the coloniality of English language learning in the Philippines by drawing on the complex and multilayered nature of an English Language Teaching (ELT) project funded by the United States as part of its anti-terrorism campaign in Mindanao where most of the country's Filipino Muslims live. It draws on newspaper articles about the project, resource materials produced by the American company which developed the ELT software used in the teaching in Philippine classrooms, as well as interview data drawn from the work of Tabiola (2015) and (re)examined in Tupas and Tabiola (2017), and Tupas (2020).

2. The neoliberal learner in conditions of coloniality

Neoliberal formations and dispositions should be understood as "*situated neoliberal assemblages*" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2014: 39, italics supplied), that is, within the historical specificities of their emergence, generation and reproduction. In other words, neoliberal education and language learning – operationalized, for example, through the practices and ideologies of linguistic entrepreneurship – is imbricated in historically-mediated sociopolitical relations. In the case of the Philippines, entrepreneurial discourses and practices – for example, language learning for employment opportunities and pursuit for profit (De Costa et. al. 2016: 696) – are historically traceable to the Philippines' enduring encounters and confrontations with 20th century (neo)colonialism. Therefore, there is a need to look at the coloniality of education and language learning, but this time mediated by the ethical logics of neoliberalism.

Coloniality differs from colonialism. While colonialism refers to relations between nations or peoples where one's sovereignty depends on the power of another (Maldonado-Torres 2007), coloniality refers to "long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration" (243). In other words, "coloniality survives colonialism" (243). Thus, when one speaks of the neoliberal dimensions of education and language learning, one may have

unwittingly erased coloniality from the equation (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2014). In the same manner, linguistic entrepreneurship fittingly describes the "new" dispositions, practices and ideologies of the neoliberal language learner (e.g., learning English as a form of self-improvement and service to the nation; being a resourceful and risk-taking student in order to prove one's worth as a learner), but as soon as this language learner becomes the neoliberal Filipino speaker, it becomes politically imperative to historically unpack the "Filipino" in language learning who is not a monolithic entity in the first place.

Consequently, if we try to view Filipinos as linguistic entrepreneurs, it is therefore important to ask how their embodied colonial history becomes a defining feature of their learning experience. Linguistic entrepreneurship is mobilized in conditions of coloniality. Premised on the primacy of neoliberalism, linguistic entrepreneurship nuances, even reconfigures, but does not override the coloniality of conditions and experiences of language learning, a point about language learning (especially the learning of English) which has been examined extensively by scholars in the past (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 1994; Canagarajah 1999). According to Hsu (2015), the history of language learning in the Philippines is "an element of overseas colonial rule" (124), thus central to one's interrogation of neoliberal dispositions and practices in education today is the coloniality of these dispositions and practices in the first place. Consequently, curricular revisions along the lines of decolonizing options (Kumaravadivelu 2014) cannot happen if conquest, and the vestiges of colonial content, dispositions and attitudes in teaching materials, methodologies and classroom practices, are 'invisibilized' (Hsu 2015: 125).

3. A brief critical linguistic history of the Philippines

Throughout direct American colonial rule in the Philippines at the start of the 20th century, the English language was imposed as the sole medium of instruction, and this policy continued even after the Philippines was given nominal independence in 1946 because, having been convinced by the altruistic intentions of American colonial rule, "we [Filipinos] believe no education can be true education unless it is based on proficiency in English"

(Constantino 1970/2000: 438). Thus, "the early postwar Filipino educational thinking was almost a carbon copy of the American colonial position on all issues" (Foley 1978: 69).

In 2009, the Philippines began to implement Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) which eventually became one of the core features of the Revised Basic Education Law or popularly called the K-12 law (Nolasco et al. 2010; Tupas 2015). This means that schools around the country are mandated by law to use the mother tongue as the language of instruction from Kindergarten to Primary 3. However, the MTB-MLE Philippine version is by itself, according to one of its main proponents, a "castrated" version (Nolasco 2013). The decision to use the mother tongue until Primary 3 was a bitter political compromise with members of the Philippine Congress who, in fact, rallied to bring back English as the main medium of instruction (Lorente 2013). Around seventy years after Philippine independence from the United States, the Philippines remains, in the words of Lorente (2013), 'in the grip of English'. How it is that we are still in the grip of English will be the subject of the following sections. As will be seen later, the "mad rush to learn English" (Hu 2005: 30) has swept much of the world today because of neoliberal globalization, but being 'in the grip' allows us to see how English remains inextricably linked with colonially-shaped structures of sociopolitical relations (Tollefson 1986). We will find how, through one recent example, the promotion and learning of neoliberal English "evidences coloniality, as it continues a colonial pattern of language and power beyond the period of formal colonial administration" (Hsu 2015: 125).

4. The coloniality of language learning: an example

Between 2007-2012, a two-year intensive English programme was implemented in at least 26 universities in Mindanao, Philippines, in order to improve students' chances in the job market. Called the *Job Enabling English Proficiency* (or JEEP) Project, the initiative targeted communities effected by decades-old Muslim and communist insurgencies. The two-year programme consisted of two main parts. The first year (JEEP-Start) was focused on

developing students' General English skills, while the second year (JEEP-Accelerate) was meant to capitalize on gains from the first year by focusing on English for Specific Purposes (GEM Completion Report 2013: 33). This would purportedly prepare students for specific industry English language needs and requirements (e.g., business process outsourcing (BPO), tourism, nursing, allied health services and maritime services). JEEP itself did not come up with its own curriculum document but in deploying the use of a particular computer-based English language learning programme (to be discussed below), JEEP's curricular philosophy and objectives were thus articulated through the winning language learning software company's teaching and learning objectives, as well as learning theories.

JEEP was part of the Growth with Equity in Mindanao (or GEM) Program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) purportedly in support of the Philippine government's efforts to promote and bring back peace and development in Mindanao. USAID is essentially a US government agency which is tasked to provide foreign aid to any country in the world which requires assistance to reduce poverty, provide healthcare, improve political governance, and develop self-sufficiency among people (see https://www.usaid.gov/). The region has been the traditional homeland of Muslim Filipinos since the 14[h] century or before the onset of Spanish colonization in the 16th century (Milligan 2005; Hawkins 2008). From being the majority population of the region, Muslim Filipinos through various mechanisms of disempowerment which intensified during the time of American colonization through forcible dispossession of land, are now a minority population in the region. However, an Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was created in 1989 during the term of President Corazon Aquino, with the aim of addressing years of neglect of and historical injustices suffered by Muslim Filipinos by providing them with some autonomy over their political and cultural affairs. Currently, five provinces are part of the ARMM, namely Lanao del Sur (except Marawi City), Maguindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan. The total population of the ARMM is 3,781,387 or 3.7% of the entire population of the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Office 2016). Although GEM covered all of Mindanao,

it concentrated its efforts on ARMM and conflict areas where the government has been fighting organized Muslim resistance forces for around five decades now.

4.1 JEEP and the (continuing) military presence in Mindanao

JEEP was implemented at the time the United States was highly involved in what is referred to as "the US-initiated Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)" (Feickert 2005). The program was officially discontinued (although its sustainability is such that it is still being implemented by individual universities, the program having been incorporated into the schools' courses) because of controversy back in the United States when several American legislators complained that the program was helping Filipinos take jobs (especially in call centers) away from Americans by teaching the former how to speak English more proficiently (May 2012). As mentioned above, the explicit motivation for JEEP was the need to help university students improve their proficiency in English with the hope that they would become competitive in the job market, find good-paying jobs, help uplift the economic conditions of Mindanao, and thus help solve the socioeconomic roots of armed conflict and Muslim disenchantment in the region. What is less explicit about the program is its role in sustaining and legitimizing American presence in the region through a more recent form of benevolent assimilationist strategy, where a development aid project such as JEEP is funded for its role in arresting the rising danger of terrorism in the region. The US military presence in the country, largely concentrated in the Mindanao region, intensified again after the 9/11 attack when it provided high-technology intelligence and expertise support to the Philippine government as it pursued insurgent forces in the area. According to Michaels (2011), "an important precept of the US military's counterinsurgency doctrine" (para. 27) is its emphasis on development projects such as education, road infrastructures and sustainable livelihood programs because of the belief that socioeconomic and cultural marginalization is one of the major root causes of terrorism and rebellion. USAID spent around $100 million for these development projects largely found in Mindanao. Over-all, the most recent US counter-insurgency

mission in Mindanao "is a rarity in the U.S. war on terror: a largely successful counterinsurgency at minimal cost in lives and dollars" (para 7).

Scrutinizing the rhetoric surrounding the justification for JEEP, what we see is an interesting overlaying of entrepreneurial and explicitly market-driven agenda. On the one hand, the moral (entrepreneurial) imperative to improve oneself through the English language through hard work and self-reliance may be seen through the following excerpt from the speech of then US Ambassador to the Philippines, Kristie Kenny, during the inauguration of the project in Western Mindanao State University.

> This is a project of the United States to help you get jobs by learning English. We are investing in you, so it's up to you to use that investment. Never ever settle to being less than by your best…(Learn English) so (when) people hire you for job they can pick you because you are the best that you can be ("US Ambassador Kenney inaugurates" (2009).

The market or business view is a different view because the focus is not on the moral imperative for individual young Filipinos to improve themselves through the learning of English, but rather on the potential of the project to contribute to the growth of certain industries. Several business leaders supported the project for its contribution to the development of Mindanao but it is anchored in the belief that the project would directly impact the positive growth of different industries in the country, as well as sustain Filipinos' niched leadership in particular jobs in the global market, for example the maritime field where "Filipinos are leaders…so it's important to build up our ability to communicate" ("Davao region maritime colleges turn" 2011: para. 2). This makes Filipino seafarers "more marketable after graduation" (para. 5). In the inauguration of the JEEP project in another partner school, the President of the Philippine Call Center Alliance expressed elation over such a project which offered students opportunity to train for future work in the Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) Industry: "BPO companies are encouraged by how the *community* is helping to develop the industry by looking for ways to improve the manpower tool" ("JEEP project in Zambo 2009: para 11, italics supplied).

What we see in the framing of JEEP is a disarticulation of its broader role as a development project in support of a counter-insurgency agenda through the interlacing of entrepreneurial and instrumentalist discourses. This is what is meant by the coloniality of English language learning today which is realized through linguistic entrepreneurship which implicates both market and self-improvement arguments, discourses and practices. From helping develop Mindanao through job placements and, thus, financial security of its people, JEEP is now a project initiated by the 'community'. The onus is on the individual students themselves if they would exploit the resources around them in order to improve their chances in the job market and help (re)build Mindanao. JEEP is framed as an essentially neoliberal linguistic entrepreneurial enterprise, thus masking the broader historical and political conditions which produce it. This is unsurprising given that similar rhetoric of the importance and instrumental value of "colonial English" (Hsu 2015) articulated in the beginning of American direct rule in the Philippines "naturalized and neutralized the process of imperial conquest" (138). Such an instrumentalist view, in fact, coalesced with the veneration of capital early on among American colonialists in order to produce the belief that the "'greatest portion of unrest' among Moros spawned directly from a 'lack of commercial relations', and that 'employment, with the opportunity to accumulate property' would 'be the great civilizer' in Mindanao and Sulu" (Hawkins 2008: 424).

4.2 JEEP and the coloniality of classroom practices and ideologies

The JEEP classroom is referred to as the "JEEP Laboratory". In one classroom (see Tupas and Tabiola 2017), a signage ENGLISH ONLY can be seen inside the laboratory. Students are assigned individual cubicles with computers, and thus are expected to work alone most of the time. The center of work in the JEEP classroom is the use of a language learning software manufactured and designed in the United States. Students log on to their computer, put on their headsets and then work on exercises which demand a lot of repetition and automaticity. Students are expected to master American English and work towards American native speaker-level proficiency. They

only listen to American English speakers. Before students are able to move to the next level of exercises or lessons, the software tests them using an assessment rubric which aims towards the American native speaker ideal. The "educated native speaker" (DynEd International, Inc. 2006), according to the software course developer, is the highest level of proficiency toward which the Filipino students must aim. Referring to speaking exercises, one teacher explains that the typical aim of the learning is "to copy the virtual native speaker" (in Tupas and Tabiola 2017: 5). Here is one description of another teacher in what happens when students engage in incessant repetition in order to achieve automaticity in English language learning (in Tupas and Tabiola 2017: 5):

> Try to repeat again and then listen to your own recording and then record it again because it is through speaking that you get that knowledge that the knowledge retains more. Yeah. I think that's the reason why there's you know repeating. And although there's repeating because we cannot be good communicators at one instance. Like this speaking this sentence. So you need to you know repeat this sentence again and again. That is for you to be also a practice of your speaking skills. Speaking skills you need to you're able to listen to your own speech so can assess "ay kapangit diay nako paminawon or kabati" [ah I sound awful] so the good thing with that is that before you speak to a group of people you have already heard yourself speaking. So you record it until it becomes pleasing to hear or to listen so "yun" [that's it]. That's the reason why we have recording we have repeating basically for speaking purposes and for the retain [sic] of information.

Let us note in the quote above how repetition and automaticity implicate the effective and moral dimension of entrepreneurship because the expectation is that one must in the end avoid sounding awful in order not to be embarrassed when speaking to others. Moreover, by listening to oneself in order to sound like a 'native' speaker, the language learning practice in fact highlights the unsoundness of the pedagogy employed. It does not promote intercultural communication which has in recent years been one the major objectives of research on the pluralities of English (Galloway and Rose 2014; Kubota 2001).

According to the software developer's manual, the enabling language learning theory that frames the mode of English language learning in the JEEP classrooms is what is referred to as *Recursive Hierarchical Recognition* (RHR) which is described as "cognitive, brain-based approach to English language learning [which] resonates with how the human brain has evolved to search for, recognize and employ language patterns for efficient language processing" (DynEd's Blended Approach 2014). It is meant to trigger and deploy "procedural memory" which facilitates learning even without conscious understanding. Language learning, thus, is like learning how to ride a bicycle or playing an instrument because the emphasis is on skill development (see DeKeyser and Criado 2013). Over-all, the mode of learning that students are engaged in is one that is centrally focused on learning how to speak like an "educated native American English speaker" through repetitive learning to achieve automaticity in the use of English.

"The embodied nature of linguistic skills," according to De Costa et al. (2016), "means that it is simply not possible to evaluate learned language abilities, while bracketing out the speaker and her sociolinguistic histories" (701). Thus, framed in this manner, the learners in the JEEP project embody linguistic skills which are imbricated in conditions of coloniality even if they are also shaped by linguistic entrepreneurial neoliberal rhetoric. To put it in another way, linguistic entrepreneurial and instrumentalist rhetoric together works as a newer discursive medium of neocolonialism; it adds and nuances, but not replaces, the coloniality of language learning and education as contextualized in the Philippines. While the moral imperative to engage in language learning is present in the rhetoric – e.g., the students' individual responsibility to make English language learning work through JEEP; the need to listen carefully to one's speech in order not to sound awful and thus avoid being embarrassed – enactments of such an imperative occur in conditions and structures of coloniality. The point here is that the JEEP project cannot be divorced from the grander agenda of legitimizing the continuing US military presence in Mindanao in order to push back the growing power of terrorism in the area. US military presence (and in fact, dominance) in the region which goes back to when direct US colonial governance was estab-

lished at the turn of the 20th century (Hawkins 2008; Milligan 2005), has consistently been criticized by certain sectors in society, but projects such as JEEP obscure the political and ideological motivations of such a presence.

Consequently, the infrastructures of teaching and learning which are privileged in JEEP classrooms operate under similar conditions as well: the use of computer, self-study, repetition and automaticity as modes of language learning, the imposition of an English-Only policy in the classroom, and the compulsory use of a software which privileges the norms of the "educated American native speaker". They are continuities of ideologies and practices (Maca 2017) which can be traced back to American colonial education characterized by, among many things, "the use of imported American-authored, US-centric textbooks which helped sow the seeds of the 'American Dream' in Filipino consciousness" (311), as well as the use of "mechanical methods of teaching the language [English] " (Martin 2014: 476). In and of themselves, of course, mechanical methods do not make them automatically colonial in nature and their continuing use today an indication of their coloniality. Rather, the imperialist structures within which such mechanical methods – promoting decontextualized learning among individual students – extend to the present through a complex configuration of contemporary geopolitics and neoliberal linguistic entrepreneurial discourses and structures discussed above. The privileging of 'native speaker' norms, the use of monolingualist methods of teaching, their accompanying disavowal of the usefulness of multilingualism in the teaching and learning of English, and the harnessing of individualist dispositions and skilled bodies in language learning and education in general (Martin 2002; 2014; Maca 2017; Tupas 2019), are trajectories of coloniality in the Philippines. There are changing trends in language teaching, Pennycook (1989) asserts, but "these tend to be a reordering of the same basic options, and to reflect the social, cultural, political, and philosophical environment" (600). This is because "ELT theories and practices that emanate from the former colonial powers still carry traces of those colonial histories" (Pennycook 1998: 19).

5. Conclusion

Based on the discussion in the preceding sections of the paper, linguistic entrepreneurship as a moral imperative to learn a language and an economic investment (De Costa et al. 2016) is pursued from a position of relative privilege. For example, the experience of *jogi yuhak* or early study abroad among (mostly middle class) young Koreans to "get ahead" not only to be competent in English but, more importantly to speak like a 'native speaker', is language learning as a moral imperative to improve oneself and maximize one's value as human capital in the service of the national economy and the global market. Similarly, elite foreign students who study in Singapore schools as scholars of the Singapore government aim to align themselves with the host country's ideology of meritocracy by becoming resourceful, adaptable and self-reliant students. They align themselves "with the moral imperative to *strategically exploit* language-related resources for enhancing…[their] worth in the world" (696, italics supplied; see also Starr & Kapoor 2021).

On the other hand, Filipino English language learners are somehow positioned differently, as exemplified by discourses emanating from the JEEP project and the practices associated with it. They are not mainly positioned as global citizens. The "value of [their] human capital in the global stage" (p. 697) is measured against their potential of becoming what Lorente (2012) refers to as "workers of the world", or, what Parreñas (2001) calls "servants of globalization". In this sense, the underlying ideologies of JEEP are not unique to English language ecologies of Mindanao but, in fact, resonate with past (Constantino, 1970/2000) and recent (Lorente 2012; 2013) justifications for the primacy of English language competency in other parts of the Philippines as well. Surely, Filipinos engage in English language learning in order to harness their linguistic skills and use them to be globally competitive, but their participation in the new economy is largely pursued from a position of relative weakness (for example, in relation to Korean learners in *jogi yuhak* or Chinese elite scholars in Singapore). Their English language experience is conditioned by colonially-shaped structures and conditions of relations between the United States and the Philippines, described above in terms of the continuing presence of the former through its military inter-

ventions in its global anti-terrorism campaign, and the imbricatedness of classroom practices and ideologies with coloniality. The neoliberal character of education and language learning is one of the latter's defining characteristics, sustaining and nuancing – not erasing – the enduring legacies of colonialism.

Nevertheless, while the paper has mapped out the specific configurations of the coloniality of neoliberal linguistic entrepreneurship in the Philippines, as a contemporary sociopolitical and economic condition as mentioned early on in the paper, coloniality remains a pervasive form of domination in the rest of the world as well (Quijano 2000: 170). Thus, linguistic entrepreneurship or neoliberal language education in other sociocultural contexts is embedded in conditions of neocoloniality too (for example, see Park 2015, for Korea; Tupas, 2016, for Singapore; and Sharma and Phyak 2017, for Nepal).

For Filipinos learning English, or at least for those who belong to Sibayan and Gonzalez's (1996) great majority of Filipino learners who are unable to speak the desired "Standard" English necessary to access most highly paid jobs in the market, it is not so much their rush towards learning it (because they have been doing it for more than a century already), but rather their being 'in the grip' of English (Lorente 2013) that defines their current relationship with the English language. Disentangling the structures of coloniality in linguistic entrepreneurship will go a long way in understanding – and transform – language learning today.

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