Ruanni Tupas* and Veronico N. Tarrayo

The violence of literature review and the imperative to ask new questions

Abstract: Writing the literature review is not a neutral act. In fact, the key central aim of consolidating work in a particular research area is to demonstrate one's knowledge of this area; that is, one must know the 'conversations' concerning the research topic. Literature review becomes violent in the Bourdieusian sense because it imposes particular configurations of privileged knowledge on researchers. Thus, in this paper, we argue that literature review is an enactment of symbolic violence and, in the process, epistemic theft, and central to this practice is the construction of research questions. Literature review, as a site of scholarly conversations, dictates the kinds of questions we ask, thus unwittingly framing our research according to the epistemic demands of past and recent studies. By asking a different set of questions, 'new' or different understandings about certain social phenomena may emerge.

Keywords: literature review; symbolic violence; epistemic theft; world Englishes; Philippine English; politics of citation

1 Introduction

When it comes to the dominant practice of literature review, it is unlikely that 'autonomous knowledge' (Alatas 1979, 2022) is achieved. According to Guillermo (2023), for example, "[s]ocial scientists in the dependent centres of academic production are obliged to acquaint themselves, if not master, both the classics and the latest theoretical trends emanating from the dominant centres" (p. 4), and this can concretely be observed in literature review.

A researcher, according to Boote and Beile (2005) "cannot perform significant research without first understanding the literature in the field" (p. 3). What this means is that a literature review which is essentially mapping the field of research in order to identify key topics, scholars and controversies, is a prerequisite for producing

*Corresponding author: Ruanni Tupas**, Institute of Education, University College London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL, UK, E-mail: r.tupas@ucl.ac.uk
Veronico N. Tarrayo, English, University of Santo Tomas, España Boulevard, Sampaloc, Manila 1008, Metro Manila, Philippines

'significant' research. Literature review in this sense is the demonstration of knowledge of the field. What we want to problematize in this paper is what constitutes knowledge of the field and how the process of consolidating privileged knowledge is a violent process.

Thus, in this paper we argue that literature review as described above is an enactment of symbolic violence and, in the process, epistemic theft, and central to this practice is the construction of research questions. We show this through the design of a research project on attitudes of Filipino professional writers of English towards a named variety of English called 'Philippine English'. By asking a different set of questions, we discovered that the writers conceptualize their own use of English in ways which radically depart from mainstream conceptualization of 'Philippine English'. Literature review, as a site of scholarly conversations, dictates the kinds of questions we ask, thus unwittingly framing our research according to the epistemic demands of past and recent studies. By asking a different set of questions, 'new' or different understandings about certain social phenomena may emerge.

When we (the authors) conceptualized the research, we thought we had a pretty straightforward project. Based on the recent literature that we explored both on 'Philippine English' and, more broadly, on world Englishes, much work centred on investigating people's attitudes towards these localized varieties of English (e.g., Alieto and Rillo 2018; Ambele and Boonsuk 2021; Gustilo and Dimaculangan 2018). We claimed that there has been substantial work describing the structural features of these varieties, unpacking the political dynamics of their uses and their users, as well as exploring the attitudes of different stakeholders towards these varieties. However less work has been done on professional writers themselves, even with a few scholars enquiring into the same topic (Buripakdi 2012; Gritsenko and Laletina 2016).

As we constructed our research design, however, especially with our main research questions, we slowly developed a discomfort over what we aimed to do. Study after study, investigations into language attitudes towards varieties of English not only generate broadly predictable results but, more importantly, there emerged a particular configuration of knowledge circulation which essentially reproduces itself, thus also serving as an ideological anchor point to affirm/confirm researchers' stand on indigenized Englishes. 'Predictable results' here do not point to an objective reality called Philippine English, but a discursive reality described as 'Philippine English' but is uninterrogated as such. Attitudes towards localized Englishes are generally conflicted or ambivalent (Bae 2015; Dimaculangan 2022; Jeong et al. 2022), showing positive attitudes towards them as indexes of local identities and inter-personal relations, but increasingly more negative, unaccepting or even hostile in the formal contexts of teaching and learning, as well as if viewed through the lens of 'global' communication (Jindapitak and Teo 2012; Tan and Tan 2008). In other words, compared with standard English(es) – it does not matter if they are vaguely defined phenomena – localized varieties of English are generally less favoured by speakers, especially teachers, students and educational policy makers.

Consequently, many studies confirm what we already know: that standard English(es) are preferred in the classroom and other formal workplaces and contexts. Research into language attitudes and ideologies confirms as legitimate the same attitudes and ideologies which circulate in the epistemic community. In short, research reproduces what we already know or what people hold to be true and accurate and validates recommendations based on such research in educational policy and practice. To put it in another way, research in general (see Ahl 2004; Herndl 1993; Potts and Brown 2015) acts as a social practice of legitimizing knowledge which society has also – in fact, *already* – validated as legitimate. However, the case of 'local' scholars investigating their own indigenized language practices complicates the dynamics of knowledge production even more: the 'field' that they legitimize through the practice of literature review becomes complicit with stealing away the complexities of their own indigenous language practices. This is because while we already know what we know, the 'object' of such knowledge – 'Philippine English' – is explored through the lens of literature review which presupposes and legitimizes its so-called objective reality and, in the process, obscures its discursive constructedness. This explains why in this paper named varieties of English such as 'Philippine English' and 'Thai English', among many others, are placed in single quotation marks to point to an understanding of these named varieties as epistemic constructs rather than, as mentioned, objective facts generated through 'scientific' investigations.

Therefore, we sought to re-view our research questions in the light of their socially legitimizing function. In the same literature we consulted (e.g., Borlongan 2009; Tan 2019), the approaches to language attitudes towards 'Philippine English', or other localized Englishes for that matter, have been through particular direct and indirect enquiries. On the one hand, respondents are usually asked directly what they think of 'Philippine English', or 'Thai English', or 'Malaysian English'. On the other hand, matched-guise tests have been used as well, thus indirectly asking respondents about their views of certain varieties of English. In both types of investigation, however, the assumption remains the same: these nationally named Englishes exist. But after completing 12 online interviews with Filipino professionals, we discovered one very important point: they did not refer to their own English as 'Philippine English', and in cases where they described their own use of the language in relation to their career trajectories, they defined their own use in ways that were not 'national' in nature such as what is assumed by 'national' Englishes. We were able to characterize elite use of English in the country in terms of the mobilization of flexible language resources along the lines of formality/informality, access to quality education and cultural capital, by the professional writers to keep themselves useful and marketable within their professional world. Indeed, we were able to put forward the view that 'Philippine English' – and 'world Englishes' in general – is an academic

construction. Varieties of English may exist culturally and linguistically, but they are apprehended differently by people who are positioned differently in society.

Thus, when asking people what they think of 'Philippine English', we/researchers as in-group members assume that 'Philippine English' is an objective fact, and that it is understood in exactly the same way by everybody. In this way, legitimate knowledge is reproduced and imposed on how we should work with it in the practice of our professional, family, and everyday lives. This is how academic writing – reviewing the literature and constructing research questions – becomes a practice of symbolic violence and epistemic theft. Epistemic practices "are the socially organized and interactionally accomplished ways that members of a group propose, communicate, evaluate, and legitimize knowledge claims" (Kelly and Licona 2018, p. 140). Thus, through the mechanism of symbolic violence, they impose worldviews and ways of doing things which make us scholars as members of a social group both instruments and agents in the making of legitimatized but constructed knowledge(s). On the other hand, the mobilization of 'Philippine English' constitutes epistemic theft as it becomes complicit with epistemic practices of scholars who take away nuances and diversities of experiences of English language use of Filipino speakers, and then establish such 'Philippine English' as legitimate knowledge about all speakers. This does not in any way invalidate the usefulness of literature review, only that we need to be critically aware of what it does to us as we practice it. We must constantly question 'knowledge' that we recognize and erase, resist the temptation of yielding to dominant frames of understanding our 'field', and (re) imagine alternative tracks in pursuing what constitutes legitimate knowledge in our own research areas. We must engage in what Guillermo (2023) describes in Filipino as 'pagsasariling-atin', or engaging in the "process of immersion within a living and evolving dialogical space, what used to belong to only a part of the community can become 'ours' in the same way that something which used to be external to the community can also become 'ours'. But in such a process, the self *itself* is transformed" (p. 14, italics as original). We take this to mean not only as taking ownership over the content of our research but, more importantly, over the process of producing knowledge itself, including the choice of questions we want to ask. We remain committed to engaging in dialogue with all knowledge sources available.

2 Literature review, symbolic violence, and epistemic theft

Literature review as symbolic violence and academic theft is the main argument of this paper. Literature review and symbolic violence are research topics which have

been explored extensively by scholars in a wide range of fields, from the health and medical sciences (de Caux 2021; Kovacs 2017) to the social sciences (Roumbanis 2019; Yin and Mu 2022), to make sense of the interweaving of academic writing practices and the lives of the academics themselves. Much less extensively but no less importantly, epistemic theft has been discussed in several studies as well (Steers-McCrum 2020). However, these topics have not been explored together yet.

Much of research on reviewing literature is centred on clarifying its role in the whole gamut of academic writing and practice, usually as the practice of demonstrating one's knowledge of the relevant field of study, being able to make generalizations and articulating future directions of the field, for example through narrating past studies and doing meta-analysis (Baumeister 2013; Paul and Criado 2020; Webster and Watson 2002). Critical approaches across different disciplines typically discuss literature review in the broader politics of citation practices, and understandably so because the former is deeply embedded in broader mechanisms of power and disempowerment which can be traced to structures of colonialism and neoliberal globalization (Jackson 2020; Smith 1999). Aside from the much-studied genres of academic writing (Hyland 2008), scholars have also explored how we as academics have all been socialized into particular practices of writing and thinking collectively described as 'academic'. Thus, academic writing is a process of *becoming* a particular kind of person and, more specifically, a particular kind of scholar or academic (French 2020; Hyland 2002); the other, but also complementing, side of *becoming* as taking on privileged identities in the academic world is the unlearning of some scholars' indigenous or local ways of talking, writing, reading, listening and knowing in order to join the transnational knowledge work of academics (Jackson 2020; Smith 1999).

As social practice, academic writing has been characterized as engaged in privileged conversations shaped by unequal power relations, necessitating the learning of new vocabularies and polite/objective/neutral language, and practising particular ways of citing/acknowledging sources in order to be admitted into the inner circles of "knowledge-producing communities" (Abasi and Graves 2008; Kelly and Licona 2018, p. 161; Lillis 2019). Through the lens of geopolitics, academic writing is also framed in terms of unequal exchange of knowledge between so-called theory-builders who are typically sited in Northern centres of knowledge production, and theory consumers who are deemed sited in Southern contexts of research and teaching (Canagarajah 2002; Tupas 2020).

However, these socialization processes, identity formation practices and geopolitically shaped knowledge exchanges have rarely been framed or studied in terms of enactments of *symbolic violence* through the practice of reviewing related literature and formulating research questions. More broadly as 'English academic discourse', Bennett (2007) has done so through the lens of epistemicide or "the

systematic destruction of rival forms of knowledge" (p. 154). While we take the position that literature review is embedded in broader structures and mechanisms of power, we also acknowledge that there are specific practices associated with the writing of the literature review – for example, constructing research questions and citing so-called classic texts – from which emerge particular configurations of symbolic violence which shape but at the same time "violate[s]" (Dlamini et al. 2018, p. 3) scholars' professional being (Scanlon 2011).

Bourdieu (1991) is typically associated with the notion of symbolic violence which has been deployed in innumerable studies across probably all disciplines in academia. The term refers to "violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, p. 167). Such violence is symbolic because it is inflicted on the mind and the body through means other than the use of brute and physical force. The receiver of such violence, precisely because it is not perceived or recognized as violence, acts as an agent of complicity or consent, thus enacting symbolic violence as if it is something that benefits them (or at least does not affect them). Symbolic violence, thus, thrives on what Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002) also refers to as 'misrecognition'. Academics in general, for example, misrecognize particular institutional demands such as publishing as part of "playing the game" (Bennett 2007; Gordon and Zainuddin 2020; Guillermo 2023; Kalfa et al. 2018), taking it seriously and reorienting their lives towards it. Such demands, in fact, have the "intent to enforce and sustain managerialist practices" (Kalfa et al. 2018, p. 276) which, among many things, force staff to compete "against each other" (p. 286). Symbolic violence has been used substantively to make sense of academics' troubled relationship with the neoliberal infrastructures of their professional workplaces. The aim is generally to show how market-driven agendas of universities in the form of ideologies and practices oriented towards profit-making, resilience and individual responsibilisation enact symbolic violence upon academics as "knowledge workers in the neoliberal university" (Yin and Mu 2022, p. 2) who misrecognize such demands and conditions as part of their life as academics (Gordon and Zainuddin 2020; Roumbanis 2019).

Our paper follows Dlamini et al.'s (2018) mobilization of symbolic violence specifically as central to understanding the logics of academic research, although we unpack it further in the more specific context of formulating research questions and reviewing related studies through Jackson (2020) and Smith and Smith's (2018) view of citational practice as one concrete site for the suppression, erasure and/or devaluing of Indigenous, non-western and other local knowledges. Academic writing as embodied in the practice of literature review is participating in a "conversation" which requires knowledge of (White, Northern based) scholars, their work and the important issues which constitute such a conversation (Guillermo 2023). This is akin

to what Dlamini et al. (2018) describe as "participating in institutional rituals or 'behaving' in accordance with racialised, classed or gendered expectations" (p. 2–3).

Canagarajah (2002) early in his career as a scholar from an academic periphery (Sri Lanka) narrates a personal experience of getting an academic paper published in a top tier journal when an original manuscript written in a personalized way and with "no literature review or explicit creation of a disciplinary niche" (p. 22), was rejected but ultimately accepted when he responded to reviewers' feedback asking him to acknowledge past work on the topic he was exploring. A comparison between the two versions of the paper did not reveal any substantial change in his argument. However, in the revision, he needed to locate such an argument within recognizable/ recognized areas of research in the West (such as contrastive rhetoric) with a pre-determined citation line of studies which demonstrates his 'knowledge' of work in these areas. The revised paper also had to be written in an academic language that dispossesses him of ownership over his argument derived from the lived experiences of people in his community. In the most literal sense, the revised paper endeavoured "to begin with a citation" (p. 25) and then "go on a bit of disciplinary niche creation by invoking the field of contrastive rhetoric".

Notice our reference to 'force' and 'dispossession' because more than simply a change of identity and joining a conversation, we highlight the symbolic violence wrought upon scholars when they engage in the practice of literature review and formulating research questions. There is no one body of knowledge which applies to all cultures and communities in the world. However, because of the unequal ways the production of knowledge is configured, some ways of knowing and doing, including ways of writing, have been delegitimized and destroyed – Bennett (2007) refers to this process as epistemicide or symbolic genocide – by the combined forces of technologies of power and control linked with colonialism, coloniality and neoliberal capitalism. "The academia that we know today", remarks Reyes Cruz (2008, p. 653), "continues to be a site where that knowledge is produced and legiti-mated, a place where those with access to it can insert themselves in the repro-duction of the kind of capital that allows a few to say what counts as valid for the rest of us". To decolonize ourselves and our work, according to Smith (1999), does not mean total rejection of Western theories and practices but "it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (p. 39). However, in the case of Canagarajah (2002) concerning that particular manuscript at the begin-ning of his scholarly career, and the case of many of us who attempt to 'insert' ourselves in the reproduction of knowledge and capital in order to gain entry into the inner circle of academic publishing, de-centring our own concerns and theorizing and researching through the lens of our own experiences and worldviews is only one part of the story. The other part is that we "consent" (Dlamini et al. 2018, p. 3) to being

forced to use language and cite studies which silence or delegitimize our own arguments and voices. This is the logic of symbolic violence: it "violates how we think" (p. 2) and how we do things in everyday life because when we are forced to think in particular ways, we are also forced to change how we do things. Ironically, for our writing to be legitimized it "has to be inserted in colonial traditions, one has to identify, claim, locate oneself within legitimized intellectual production or at least, speak like one knows the West and so has the right to challenge it" (Reyes Cruz 2008, pp. 655–656).

This is where the notion of epistemic theft complicates the whole dynamics of knowledge (re)production when applied to the complicit work of 'local' scholars whose own language practices, cultures and communities are the subject of their own investigation. For Steers-McCrum (2020, p. 242), epistemic theft refers to the phenomenon of 'self-appointed speaking for' which essentially means, in our case, scholars who assign themselves, wittingly or unwittingly, the role of speaking for the causes and agendas of other communities. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) refers to 'theft of history' as part of the logics of epistemicides which are operations of refusal and denial of multiple ways people make sense of their own realities, and these are accomplished in sites of theft and destruction such as schools, universities and churches. In the case of our paper, however, we see the blurring of distinction between dominant and dominated communities, or the mobilizers and the receivers of violence. Because literature review commits us politically and ideologically to particular practices of consolidating knowledge in order produce what was earlier referred to as 'significant' research (Boote and Beile 2005, p. 3), there is always the possibility that we as scholars of our own communities participate in stealing away nuances and diversities of our own cultures, identities and knowledges. We participate in the mobilization of violence inflicted upon us.

3 Literature review as symbolic violence: an example

In this section, we elaborate on our argument that literature review, which includes the formulation of research questions, exacts symbolic violence on the lives of scholars and their communities and, in the process, make some of these scholars complicit with epistemic theft. This happens when scholars – as consenting and (sub) consciously complicit academics – engage in practices of thinking, writing and navigating the academic professional landscape which, on the one hand, they misrecognize as a means of scaffolding their participation in the privileged world of scholarly practice but, on the other hand, are actually hurting or damaging their

sense of self, their world and their knowledge of the world. We track instantiations of "the formation and procedure of symbolic violence" (Nas 2015; p. 38) as we engage in some introspective reflection spawned by our collective thinking *with* and *through* the process of research design, data collection and data analysis. To put it in another way, the operations of symbolic violence and epistemic theft in our research are slowly exposed throughout the research process as we begin to 'recognize' the destructive mechanisms of reviewing related studies.

Let us begin with our interview below with Dennis (not his real name), one of the 12 Filipino professional writers of English we interviewed for our research project on 'Philippine English' described earlier in the paper. In all the interviews, we began by asking the interviewees to describe the nature of their work and then pick up cues from their answers to ask about challenges at work which may have to do with their roles as writers in English. As we shared earlier in the paper, the questions we asked aimed at moving away from the kind of questioning that typically appears in the language attitudinal literature on 'World Englishes', and specifically 'Philippine English'. 'Symbolic violence' was furthest from our minds, but we knew we needed to steer the interviews towards questions and answers which might generate new information or knowledge about 'Philippine English' beyond the predictable ones – that people at best have ambivalent attitudes towards it (Bautista 2000; 2001; Martin 2014; Tupas 2006). Alieto and Rillo (2018) report positive attitudes but a different data set from Torres and Alieto (2019) reports limited acceptance. We knew, also based on our conventional literature review, that views of elite professional writers in English were less studied than other speakers such as teachers, pupils and parents, but we feared that we would simply generate similar patterns of attitudes towards the unexamined 'Philippine English'. However, as we re-visited our data, especially in relation to the manner by which we generated them, we found that changing the kinds of questions we asked led us to deconstructing our own understanding of the literature review process. We were aware of citational politics and inequities in knowledge production (Santos 2014; Smith 1999), but, interestingly, not the specific configurations of the central of role of literature review itself in the enablement of legitimized knowledges and, in the process, in the (self)erasure of other forms of knowledge, especially the ones not accessible to and devalued by Western scholarship.

Before the exchange below, Dennis introduces himself as a digital content creator and director for a well-known fashion magazine brand in the Philippines – Magazine Fashionista (MF, not the real name of the magazine) – who believes that his climb to the top of the corporate ladder was due to his 'flexible' way of communicating. The magazine produces different versions or editions which cater to different types of readers from the 'masa' crowd (the masses) to the elite crowd, thus requiring different styles of writing. Consequently, when asked to describe his kind of English,

he repeatedly describes it as flexible (six times throughout the interview) as he says he is able to switch between different styles when communicating fashion to different communities of readers. There is no reference to his use of English as a Filipino, or English as shaped by Philippine culture(s). Without our prodding, he describes his English when writing for the elite as 'Westernized', thus we dig deeper into this point to possibly draw up connections between being flexible, being fluent in English and being westernized. This could also potentially lead us to getting him to talk about 'Philippine English' which, of course, did not happen. In the exchange below,[1] one of us, Ruanni, asks if being flexible and westernized had something to do with the quality of English.

> R: [with your director or senior], was there a discussion about the quality of English that you have to produce? Like, should it be westernized? For the kind of flexibility that you mentioned, do you have to write in most instances in the westernized way, or Americanized way?

> D: There was a specific instruction to be like westernized or American. But this specific instruction was really more on we have to communicate to the elite. So, I guess in a way I assumed it as it should be westernized. Because when we're talking to the elite, we're speaking of them getting education abroad. So, in a way din siguro [perhaps], it can be assumed as a westernized way, and somehow, yes, we, actually ano, ah oo nga no parang [we uhm ah it seems like you're right], our standard or siguro my [perhaps my] standard through writing for MF because I used some words or writing from like, for example elite international magazine like Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, British Vogue or British GQ. So, it's kind of like more on yeah, more on westernized. Yeah. Sorry, I just realized that now that you mentioned.

Three related things, to be elaborated on below, can be said about this exchange which we also argue are discernible patterns from our other interviews. The first is the academic construction of an idea referred to as 'localized' English, and in the case of our study, 'Philippine English'. Dennis defies a static view of language in general as can be gleaned through his point that the instruction to be more 'westernized' 'was really more on we have to communicate to the elite'. It must be recalled that MF caters to different sectors of readers so Dennis' point in the exchange, and in fact the rest of our interview with him, is that his English cannot be boxed into one variety or type of English; it is dynamic because it is deployed flexibly depending on the readers being addressed. Without direct questioning about people's views of 'Philippine English', and instead asking about the nature of interviewees' work, including key challenges they face in the workplace, and then "follow" (Spinney 2015, p. 232) their answers instead of directing them, these less obtrusive questions open up the conceptualization of localization of English in terms which do not align with our

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1 When content is most important, we edited the quotes for brevity. However, there are parts – for example, when Dennis pauses to reflect on a particular idea or opinion – which we kept as original, including switches between English and Tagalog.

academic understanding of it such as use of English mediated by a national culture. Moreover, localized uses tend to respond to contextualized demands of communication, rather than represent internalized cultural identities which then are assumed to dictate the shape of the language variety such as 'Philippine English'.

Secondly, it reminds us to be sceptical about centring knowledge through our own research practices. Our questions about 'quality of English', 'westernized' or 'Americanized' writing, and 'flexibility' emerged from Dennis' own reflection on his communicative experiences and challenges in the workplace and are not imposed terms or categories from us. Thirdly, it consequently reminds us that the questions we ask generate particular forms and kinds of knowledge, thus we see a case of research where existing knowledge, produced and constrained by literature review, is perpetuated and legitimized. A possible way out of this epistemic trap is to ask a different set of questions, especially ones which allow people as much as possible to talk freely about themselves and their experiences, rather than through the lens of pre-determined (read: constructed) linguistic and social phenomena. This has led Dennis to newer realizations such as when he surmises that quality of English might indeed be linked to his own deep-rooted assumptions about communicating with the elite as communicating in a westernized or Americanized way: "Sorry, I just realized that now that you mentioned." In our discussion below, we describe these three overlaying ideological knowledge-perpetuating mechanisms of reviewing related studies as instantiations of symbolic violence and, consequently, implicating epistemic theft.

3.1 The violence of an academically constructed phenomenon

One of the most, if not the first, uses of writing a literature review is to carve out a space for one's own research, but in order to do this one must demonstrate 'knowledge of the field' and acknowledge the scholars and their work associated with the particular topic being explored. In the case of our research project, we acknowledged substantive work on attitudes in the area of 'World Englishes' (Boonsuk et al. 2023; Lee and Green 2016; Rezaei et al. 2019; Tan and Tan 2008) and, specifically, 'Philippine English' (references cited earlier), thus our research emerged from these studies. In fact, in recent years there has been "a concentration of work on languages attitudes" (Tan 2019, p. 70), necessitating asking a different set of questions from research in the 1980s until early 2000s during which the main agenda among scholars was to show evidence of the existence of the different national Englishes. Since then, "[r]esearchers have begun to look away from the English varieties, but have started to ask questions about how English speakers view and use the different varieties of English" (p. 70). This could be mainly due to the fact that the desired

legitimacy of 'non-native' varieties of English remains contested and questioned. Our research thus aimed to ask the same questions in exploring the attitudes of elite Filipino writers of English towards 'Philippine English'. These questions emerged from our broad and historical understanding of work on the pluralization and globalization of English, associated mainly with the Kachruvian paradigm (Kachru 1986; 1992; Smith 1991) which takes on a postcolonial perspective on 'non-native' speakers' cultural and political intervention in the global spread of the language through both structural/linguistic and political research. Therefore, in our attempt to demonstrate our deep knowledge of the field through the exercise of literature review, we have been framed to ask the same questions as the recent studies, taking on two related epistemic stances: an epistemic stance affirming the existence of Philippine English, and an epistemic stance legitimizing the centrality of Philippine English in the lives of the speakers. In the process, these stances cancel out all possibilities of complexity and nuance in the nature of English language use as it is localised and pluralized, and gets entangled with the everyday lives of speakers.

For the first stance, it may sound counter-intuitive, but this is what the literature review does – to provide us with pre-set assumptions about the field(s) upon which our research rests (Denney and Tewksbury 2013; Wolgemuth et al. 2017). These assumptions are rarely questioned. Sociolinguistically and structurally speaking, many studies have produced empirical evidence and well-reasoned arguments pointing to the existence of localized varieties of English shaped culturally and ideologically by their speakers. However, in what form does 'Philippine English' exist? Do 'Philippine English' speakers believe 'Philippine English' exists? Academic studies give us structural descriptions of the variety, as well as pragmatic functions which are purportedly culturally unique to Filipino speakers of English, which then collectively construct our notion of 'Philippine English'. More than an objective reality, in other words, a constructed notion of 'Philippine English' serves as the epistemic anchor of work on 'Philippine English' which, through its 'data', provides evidence that 'it' exists in some particular shape.

For a number of decades now critical language and discourse scholars have also reminded us that descriptive work is never neutral; it is, in fact, normative and ideological through and through. Our descriptions (and of course, especially our interpretations of language use) are choices we make and are, thus, exclusionary in nature. For our descriptive work to be 'accurate', we decide which patterns of language use are legitimate or not, and exclude those which we deem unimportant or insignificant (Beal et al. 2023; Fairclough 1989; Ottenhoff 1996). Related to this point, our data also limit the things we can say or not about our research topic. For the past few years, a few Filipino scholars have begun to question 'Philippine English' as it has been constructed academically through the years, for example by alerting us to the pluralized variety of 'Philippine English' – thus, Philippine Englishes (Berowa and

Regala-Flores 2020; Gonzales 2017; Martin 2014; Tupas 2006). Much of 'Philippine English' has been produced through research sited either in Manila, where most of the elite universities are, or specific communities of speakers whose linguistic repertoire is constituted by Tagalog and English, rather than constituted by multiple languages/language practices which are more common among speakers outside the political and educational centre, Manila. In the words of Gonzales (2017), "by generalizing findings based on an unrepresented 'Philippine English,' we could be ignoring other minorities and groups affected by other social factors, indirectly advocating elitism" (p. 82). Berowa and Regala-Flores (2020) also highlight that the 'Philippine English' mobilized in the literature is "elitist-Manila-centric" (p. 214) which reminds us that our conceptualization of what constitutes the variety is incomplete at best. Many of these studies propagate the same view of description as neutral – "purely descriptive" (p. 214) – but the point here is that 'Philippine English' which circulates in the literature and is circulated by scholars themselves is assumed to have an objective existence and the role of scholars is to account for it through research. Therefore, working within the framework of literature review as a demonstration of knowledge of the field and, consequently, as an act of identifying a gap in the studies, scholars take on a particular stance as a starting point of their research – that 'Philippine English' exists, and it exists in the manner by which scholars have described it. Thus, working within the same logic of literature review, many of us participate in acts of stealing away crucial knowledges about our own communities and the various ways we envision and shape our language practices.

3.2 The violence of centred knowledge

As a consequence of imposing a particular view of language use through the academic literature which legitimizes its existence, a second epistemic stance in our research which generally remains undetected is the imposition of an assumption which puts the centrality of our topic of choice at the centre of people's lives. A narrated experience of Tupas (2014), for example, maps out a particular Indonesian seaside community's rhythm of everyday life through one of the English teachers he worked with for a Southeast Asian project in curriculum development. On the motorcycle to a seaside school where the English teacher was working part-time, they had a conversation about 'World Englishes'. According to his Indonesian colleague who, along many others in institutions of higher learning in their region, were attending an academic workshop on curriculum development, he was well aware of 'World Englishes' and the phenomenon of English as increasingly being localized, nativized or indigenized. As English teachers, he said, they must be sensitive to such sociolinguistically differentiated use(s) of English both inside and

outside the classroom. As they continued to motor to the seaside school, however, it was beginning to be clear what the Indonesian teacher's argument was about: in a community where the symbolic power of English was tied to pupils being seen and viewed as learning English, not necessarily being fluent in the language, an English teacher's concern would be to get the pupils to experience learning the language, perhaps construct basic English sentences and listen to its sounds. More than that, what immediate use would fluency of English be for if everyday life draws on survivability which requires literacy in the community language? In other words, there is an *a priori* assumption in our research as sociolinguists and applied linguists that language, English and, most specifically, a localized English, is central to the speakers' daily lives (also Tupas 2022). In the case of our interview with Dennis and, again, with other interviewees, we also sought to decenter language, specifically 'Philippine English', and map out the role of localized English(es) as they emerge from the interviewees' narration of their own professional working conditions and experiences. In the end, the nature of localized English(es) which emerges from the interviewees' stories is different from the typically nationally and culturally defined varieties as conceptualized in the dominant literature review.

Indeed, this is what literature review also does: it centres particular kinds and forms of knowledge which scholars then assume to be true when they design their own research. In the case of our research project, we find that the academic construction of 'Philippine English' intersects with the legitimizing practice of constructing 'Philippine English' as central to people's (Filipinos') lives, that as academics we unknowingly submit to this epistemic bias in our work. We argue that this is symbolic violence because it forces us to create knowledge about the rhythm of people's lives at the centre of which is language or, more specifically in our case, their localized use of English. In the process of creating such knowledge, we take away people's lived experiences and render them invisible in our writing. We note that this is not a peculiar observation; in fact, much of sociolinguistics, precisely because it foregrounds language in society, also begins with the same apriori assumption about the centrality of language. This is seen, for example, through the kinds of questions we ask, such as 'How does language mobilize the lives of speakers of (name of a community)?' which automatically directs us to language as our object of analysis because it is central to the speakers' lives (Tupas 2022). Our entry into our research sites, in other words, already imposes a particular of view of community life at the centre of which is language. The same critical comment has been put forward by Pennycook (2008) in the area of the sociolinguistics of linguistic landscape where much of the focus, he says, is on what analysts see as important, rather than what is in fact "salient" to ordinary people who walk around the linguistic landscape. In community-driven participatory research, Canieso-Doronila (1996; 2001) also shows how a focus on the over-all welfare of the community, identifying people's everyday

social problems, clarifies the role of language – and literacy – within the intricate political and cultural matrix of the community. We centre language and literacy in community life, thus teaching people how to read and write. However, one respondent in the Canieso-Doronila (2001) study encapsulates what we hope to argue in this section: "It is not easy to say, 'This is our land' when one has no land" (p. 271). Communities have been dispossessed of land and other indigenous resources, and these would seem to take precedence over questions of language and literacy, even if they are in the end also imbedded in people's daily material struggles.

3.3 The violence of literature review-driven research questions

This brings us to another and related form of violence enacted through the process of reviewing the literature from a modern, Western-Eurocentric perspective. Typically, research questions are processed or generated through our appraisal of the literature. We can call these questions our research interventions in the sense that they are justified in relation to the kinds of questions which have been asked – and have not been asked – thus far. The logic behind this is simple – the significance of our research is drawn from the way we position our research vis-a-vis all other similar research conducted (Jesson et al. 2011; Walker 2015). If our questions are not anchored in our understanding of related studies, our research might be viewed with suspicion because it does not participate in established conversations in the field. Indeed, our research will not be deemed 'significant'. Thus, specifically in relation now to our research project on attitudes of Filipino professional writers of English, the kinds of research questions we initially formulated followed conversations in the area of 'World Englishes' and related fields. That is, in investigating language attitudes towards 'Philippine English', our primary question was explicitly to ask about the writers' views of 'Philippine English'.

We mention earlier in the paper that this takes on two related stances, one legitimizing the existence of Philippine English (or a particular form of it), and another legitimizing its centrality in the speakers' lives. Other than these two, however, formulating research questions as constitutive of symbolic violence highlights the privileged status of academic knowledge as the generator of legitimate/legitimized questions of inquiry rather than, for example, everyday ground realities as the entry point for scholarly inquiry. Our research questions, in other words, do not typically draw upon "local cultures as *sources* (not *targets*) of knowledge which can only be understood in its own terms" (Arinto 1996, p. 13, emphasis as original). In the process, we see how seemingly harmless research questions produce knowledge which invalidates the complex and unique social life of particular groups or communities of speakers. This is referred to as epistemicide

(Bennett 2007; Santos 2014) or the violent, albeit symbolic, destruction or erasure of local knowledges and experiences because of research questions which mispresent the speakers' everyday lives and worldviews (Phyak 2021).

As has been argued earlier, a substantial amount of scholarly work on attitudes of 'Philippine English' has been overwhelmingly conducted through direct questioning (Alieto and Rillo 2018; Borlongan 2009; Gustillo and Dimaculangan 2018; Hernandez 2020a; 2020b; Torres and Alieto 2019). That is, whether through questionnaire surveys or interviews, respondents were asked to rate their attitudes towards 'Philippine English'. This would be represented by a survey item asking respondents (e.g., parents, teachers, students) to rate their attitudes towards 'Philippine English', usually along the clines of favorability and acceptability. Studies then report varied results, from positive to negative attitudes, or from acceptable to unacceptable, especially in relation to teaching and using them in the classroom. Many studies also use indirect elicitation mainly through the matched-guise test which explicitly names to respondents the variety of English being investigated (Cavallaro et al. 2014; Jindapitak and Teo 2012; Tan 2019). However, while this is indeed 'indirect', the assumption is that the variety in question exists, and that it exists in a particular form as evidenced by the kind of language items being tested for acceptability or awareness. In almost all of these direct or indirect studies, the existence of 'Philippine English' is assumed, that it is a notable issue that everyone should be concerned with, and that respondents agree to what 'Philippine English' is. In many of these studies, in fact, authors either provide or assume their own definition of 'Philippine English' as they use it in their work, without alerting the readers to the possibility that the scholars' definition may not necessarily be what the respondents have in mind (Borlongan 2009; Mendoza 2020).

Thus, central to the reformulation of our research questions was not only to avoid asking respondents directly about their views on 'Philippine English', but to also avoid making *a priori* understanding of what constitutes it. Instead, we asked them to narrate their communication experiences in their respective workplaces (including any communication challenges), then planned to "follow" (Spinney 2015, p. 232) their answers and stories. It turned out that in asking the writers to narrate their communication and language challenges, 'Philippine English' was rarely invoked, and in those times it was mentioned by three interviewees, it was because they encountered the term in graduate school, and they mentioned it in the context of their justification for not subscribing to it in their respective workplaces.

We cannot underestimate the importance of asking new questions in our research to replace those which have been responsible for constructing prevalent and dominant knowledge in the field, but which destroys – or devalues at least – all other possible ways about knowing 'our world'. Phyak (2021) urges the formulation of new questions to be asked of multilingual communities in the context of

policymaking because the usual questions not only violently destroy community experiences and knowledges, but also make scholars complicit in epistemic thief within their own local communities. In the context of multilingual Nepali communities, for example, local populations are asked to choose which among particular languages they want to learn most and based on the results, it would be English while the mother tongue is 'rejected'. This is, according to Phyak, extremely discriminatory and represents the politics of questioning in research which erases and invisibilizes the multilingual repertoires and epistemologies of the communities. Simply put, these either/or questions "misrecognize what multilingual parents in the periphery actually need for their children's education" (p. 226) because they are based on a monolingual view of the communities. Consequently, "multilingual speakers' epistemologies, ideologies, and identities are misrepresented in empirical language policy research" (p. 229). In Phyak's dialogic interviewing, he asks new questions which recognize the multiple multilingual and multicultural knowledge bases of the communities, such as the following (p. 226):

   a. Do you want your children to be proficient in English only?

   b. Do you want your children to be proficient in Nepali only?

   c. Do you want your children to be taught in mother tongue only?

   d. Do you want your children to be proficient in all of these languages?

   e. Do you want your children to be proficient in other subjects such as social studies, mathematics, and science?

With these "counter questions" (p. 230), radically different knowledges are foregrounded – in fact, 'returned' to multilingual speakers and communities – foremost of which would be parents' desire for their children to be educated in multiple languages. These questions "recognize the struggles and knowledge of the historically marginalized communities" (p. 230).

4 Conclusions

In the case of our research on 'Philippine English' and Filipino professional writers' views of it, our decision to ask a different set of questions has radically changed our understanding of 'Philippine English' – that among our respondents at least, it does not exist in the form and manner assumed in the academic literature, and that the Filipino writers configure their world as privileged speakers of English in ways that have redefined our understanding of such world. They force us to problematize

dominant epistemologies which underpin our scholarly work, and generate knowledges about ourselves, our cultures and our worlds which we have known before. It may be argued – and correctly so – that 'Philippine English' as an academic construction has on its own been mobilized to demystify Standard English, the native speaker, and ownership of language (Bautista 2000; Tupas 2006). The entire World Englishes paradigm, especially its early articulations (e.g., Kachru 1986) has had powerful decolonial stances. The notion of linguistic equality was deployed to counter the disparaging mockery and devaluing of 'non-standard' Englishes and their speakers (Tupas 2004). The point of this paper is to push the conversations forward by accounting for slippages and erasures in the use of 'Philippine English' in order to cut open the term and welcome new (read: stolen or erased) knowledges about the communities and users of 'Philippine English'. This does not propose an alternative referent point for the objective reality of a Filipino variety of English; in fact, it demonstrates how all understandings of social phenomena are mediated by discourse, power and culture. The manner by which Filipino writers of English in our research talk about their communicative practices framed through own 'new' questions is also a discursive construction.

Nevertheless, there is nothing particularly new about our claim that academic writing, specifically the practice of literature review, is a political and ideological undertaking. As has been discussed in the paper, citational politics has been unpacked and exposed as extremely problematic especially in relation to its role in privileging as well as erasing particular bodies of knowledge and the communities within which they are mobilized (Guillermo 2023; Kim 2020). A decolonial lens pushes us to question our citation lines and explore alternative sources of knowledge, or what Smith (1999) refers to as our *dissent* lines. A geopolitical lens (Canagarajah 2002; Tupas 2020) highlights the unequal production of academic knowledge, in particular how indeed our citation lines reflect the dominance not only of research from and in the more prosperous academic sites in the North, but also the dominance of Western modes of thinking and doing knowledge work.

Our paper zeroes in on literature review and the formulation of research questions that goes with it not only because they concretely capture the massively political and ideological nature of academic writing, but they also serve as a sufficiently graspable or legible academic phenomenon through which we can map out specific logics of symbolic violence and epistemic thief. Not only are researchers engaged in literature review, but teachers also teach students how to do it. In other words, there is much value in exposing the symbolically violent nature of literature review because almost everyone in the academe is invested in it, even to the point of demonstrating "a method for teaching students some of the key techniques for writing literature reviews" (Zorn and Campbell 2006, p. 172). To put it in another way, literature review is a locus of multiple layers of symbolic violence, shaping our own

practices of doing academic research, controlling what we know and how we should know the world – and ourselves.

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