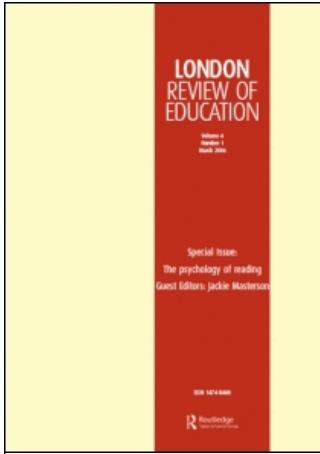


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Disempowering and dislocating: how learners from diverse cultures read the role of the English language in UK higher education

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This paper explores how the English language privileges and empowers certain epistemologies and ontologies in international higher education in the UK. The author discusses how the English language is used to construct assumptions and practices to legitimise particular ways of constructing knowledge. The main argument is that language provides a lead in silencing and marginalising alternative forms of coming to know within diverse cultures, thus creating feelings of disempowerment and dislocation for some learners. The paper highlights how learners from different cultures make sense of the role of language within the context of UK higher education, in terms of power, cultural politics and intellectual hegemony. It also suggests that ontological and epistemological stances are socially and culturally constructed, albeit reduced to linguistic constructions within UK university contexts.

Keywords: culture; intercultural higher education; intercultural fluency; linguistic hegemony

Introduction

Certain notions play major roles in the field of higher education. Currently, 'internationalisation' of higher education in the UK has achieved so much recognition that we now seldom talk about a national system of higher education. Within this context, certain terms such as intercultural learning and learning across cultures as well as borderless higher education have gained much publicity.

Borderless higher education carries a connotation that is perhaps seldom recognised. For it necessarily involves learners coming from diverse cultures of learning and bringing multiple narratives of learning with them. These narratives are basically shaped by different ontologies and epistemologies that the learners live with in their own cultures of learning. Simply put, learners coming from different cultures have varied ways of viewing the world and they have diverse understandings as to how knowledge about the world is constructed (see Jehng, Johnson, and Anderson 1993; Schommer 1998). These epistemological and ontological diversities influence how learners go about learning in their host institutions of learning. In this context in UK higher education, such alternative narratives of learning are either silenced or marginalised even if naively, through certain practices and assumptions advocated by using the English language within the academic context. This situation influences the act of learning in negative ways while also restricting learners' possibilities of learning from and through the encounter with diverse cultures (Welikala and Watkins 2008).

There is a considerable literature related to the international contexts of higher education, ranging from the socio-cultural contexts that the learners come from and the impact of those contexts on the act of learning (Carroll and Ryan 2005), to the need for 'supporting'

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the international students when they immerse themselves in the ways of learning that are expected by the host institutions (Ballard and Clanchy 1984). Some studies indicate that culture shapes the act of learning (Li 2002, 2003), while others claim that 'cultural' differences in teaching and learning are not cultural but emerge in the international academic curricula (Van Oord 2005).

There have been some efforts to comprehend learning within international settings even though an understanding of the impact of culture in shaping one's ways of being and coming to know is still in the making. Significantly, however, there are few studies that specifically focus on the impact of the English language within academic contexts on reshaping the ontology and epistemology of learners who come from different cultures to study in UK higher education. There is a significant literature available on the cultural politics of learning in the field of teaching English as a second or foreign language (Roth and Harama 2000) and in the areas that focus on English in terms of cultural constructs of colonialism (Pennycook 1994, 1998). However, it does not particularly focus on how learners within different learning cultures in higher education read the English language in terms of its historical, political and cultural contexts. This paper, therefore, looks at how far the English language mediates learners' ways of being and knowing within the UK university context.

This paper arises from an empirical study conducted with international students reading for postgraduate degrees at a university in the UK. Hence, even though the paper does not imply that culture is directly related to the geographical locations from which the learners come, the opportunity sample used in this study consists of students from different parts of the world.

The study used active interviewing to gain narratives from learners about their experience of learning in a UK university. Active interviewing was used with the assumption that meaning is socially constituted and all knowledge is created from the action taken to obtain it. Hence, the context, culture and cultural assumptions related to the interview situation were expected to shape the meanings assembled during the interview encounter (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). The main focus of this paper comes from the meta-narratives of the respondents of the study.

Language within a wider context

The paper draws on the socio-linguistic characteristics of the English language, placing it within cultural-political as well as historical contexts. In brief, my argument is as follows. Language empowers particular ways of knowing and coming to know specifically through the discourse related to practices and assumptions concerning both talking for learning and writing for learning. This situation, however, produces tensions among learners from other cultures. Learners struggle with the dominant ontological and epistemological stories narrated by the host institutions, placing such narratives within cultural-political contexts. While learners accept the new narratives of learning for surviving in the new learning environment, they also question the applicability of these narratives of learning in other cultural contexts. Some learners even wanted to reject the stories of going about learning that are appreciated by the host university. Learners from different cultures make sense of the way in which language is used to tell particular stories about learning by the host university in terms of power and politics embedded in the English language.

Daffodils and hibiscus: is it only poetry?

According to Shirley Lim (1986), during a particular period in the history of Malaysia, Wordsworth's poem 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' made Malaysians look for daffodils so much so that they never saw the hibiscus which was growing everywhere in Malaysia. Do Wordsworth's daffodils dance only in poetry? Or do daffodils come fluttering and dancing into

other contexts within human society? Metaphorically, Lim delineates how the English language, symbolised by the daffodils, encourages the native Malaysians to pretend that they never see or feel themselves as they are. Here, the daffodils move beyond being a poetic symbol and portray the English language as a particular culture, constructing certain images for others, of being in the world. Lim's metaphor further implies that language transcends mere linguistic territories and dwells in cultural and social as well as political landscapes. It also unfolds a subtle story of the cultural-political nature of the English language in terms of its power in reshaping its users' ways of sensing the world around them.

Later, the power of English began to operate in a more civilised and systematic way, through the spread of the branches of the British Council and the spread of Christianity (Pennycook 1994). This paper adds international higher education to Pennycook's list, arguing that the English language had never been what Chomsky (1965) claimed it to be; that is, only an abstract system, and a neutral phenomenon, which helps speakers to generate grammatically well-formed sentences. This is a linguistic idealisation that provides particular linguistic practices with the normative model of correct language. This idealisation also encourages people to ignore the social-historical conditions that provided dominance and legitimacy for certain linguistic practices (Bourdieu 1992).

Territorialising the practices: did Defoe get it right?

Galtung (1980, 62–3), developing a framework for analysing power, identifies innate power, resource power and structural power. According to Galtung, the means used to assert power are, respectively, persuasion, bargaining or force. Power needs senders and receivers. Relating this analysis to the role of English in English academia, we find that English has the innate power of creating the most valuable kind of ontologies and epistemologies with their colonial experience in other cultures. It also has resource power since the English language monopolises the construction and distribution of this knowledge worldwide. According to one respondent in the study on which this discussion is based:

because they have written a lot, done a lot of research, they have the authority of writing. Everything is in their point of view. (Yasin, Taiwan)

The English language, with the supremacy it has achieved over other languages, also has constructed a particular structure which negotiates and maintains its linguistic power. In the past, this structure was comfortably constructed and spread around the world in colonising other cultures and their education systems, while creating cultural and linguistic others to portray the supremacy of English over other languages. The power of English language in mastering other cultures and their ways of being in the world as well as their cultural ways of knowing the world is widely present in English literature:

In a little time I began to speak to him, and teach him to speak to me; and, first, I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life ... I likewise taught him to say master, and then let him know that was to be my name.

Master: Well, Friday, and what does your nation do with the men they take? Do they carry them away and eat them, as these did?

Friday: Yes, my nation eat mans up too; eat all up. (Defoe 1910, 192, cited in Pennycook 1998, 15)

This quotation from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, where the 'Master' describes how he managed to 'educate' and dislocate the socio-cultural self of Friday within his own cultural territory, implies how language is used to deconstruct the Self and reconstruct the Other. However, the empathetic discourse used to describe this disempowerment overshadows the

power issues that underpin it. Hence, the question: was Daniel Defoe the first ever director of the British Council? (Phillipson 1992).

Coming to know in English

As Bullock (1999) suggests, the values and beliefs that we hold, which seem to be 'normal' and 'common sense', are constructs of the organisations and institutions that are shared through language. Bullock's suggestion describes the manner in which the normalisation of particular ways of viewing the universe and making sense of it occurs subtly within UK higher education. A senior officer in the Ministry of Education in Malawi, who was doing a postgraduate degree in a UK university, talked about the power issues embedded in language in terms of writing:

I have been using English for years, as a person with a title in our ministry. Never felt inhibited or anything. I knew I know the language. When I was sent the paper to write a critique about ... for my qualifying essay They sent me from A to Z; they went on to say ... 'you make sure you have quoted others and put them in the bibliography ...' as if I have never been to school. I felt it. Why send all these details? I know how to review an article. You know, this is how they teach us to write in their ways. (Oliver, Malawi)

Thus, the English language begins the process of reshaping the learners who are preparing to study at UK universities even before they set foot in the UK. The 'qualifying' essay written in the home country decides whether a particular student can perform as a learner in a UK university. The unspoken message is that learners from elsewhere are not up to the level of UK higher education unless they become qualified. And this qualification depends on how competent a learner is in expressing herself or himself in English in a particular manner:

I was taken to be an expert in English back home. But now, I am told to do like this and that the language seems to turn the other way round. Now I feel I do not know any English ... I found I do not know anything. ... We are using their language to understand them We have a different dialect. (John, Kenya)

John, the teacher educator from Kenya, is trying to relocate himself as someone else; someone who does not know anything. He has constructed a relationship between knowing the English language and knowing the world around him. This image transfer from the 'expert' in his own culture to someone who has gone astray in the new culture of learning, symbolises how language intellectually relocates people by making them feel like someone else who is inferior to those who are privileged within a particular language. And this is a kind of self-imposed marginalisation created by the pedagogy of the host university, which is communicated through English. It symbolises traces of linguistic imperialism within a framework of neo-colonialism, where the intellectual relationship between the West and the rest of the world is translated into (English) linguistic colonisation (Phillipson 1992).

The learners who label their English as a 'dialect' impose an imagined superiority for the English language that is used in UK academia. Pennycook (1998, 19) claims that ties between the English language and its political history have produced the native/non-native dichotomy. What is not given enough voice is the tension one lives while transferring the Self into the Other for the mere purpose of succeeding in a sojourn of learning in a different culture.

Writing knowledge correctly: learning to learn in English

writing is very very formal and they have a strict set of criteria ... But ..., everybody could say anything in class discussions and it is like arguing for polar extremes. I made use of class discussions in my assignments and my supervisor told me 'please don't write like this' (Rani, Mauritius)

What counts as knowledge ultimately is evaluated in terms of certain rules and norms of going about the English language. Language is viewed as a form that operates within a social-cultural vacuum. The sense of power embedded in linguistic rules to articulate knowledge in a particular way implies a monolithic view of the act of learning: that every human being makes sense of the universe in a similar way. This context-free and universal meaning of knowledge making has a socio-political and linguistic history. Epistemology was a construction in opposition to the medieval monopoly of the Church in its conveying of 'the' truth about the world through divine texts. The idea of epistemology highlighted experiment and observation, which were assumed to offer logical reasons for comprehending the world in a particular way (Usher, Bryant, and Johnston 1997). This history also introduced a certain vocabulary and practices that articulate right and objective ways of making 'true' knowledge of the world. Hence, the language that articulates knowledge in a distant, impersonal way is supposed to offer 'scientific' ways of knowing the world:

back home what is more important is what you know ... The meaning of what we write not the linking words or commas or ... (Roger, Ghana)

But in the end of the course, I have learnt how to write in English and nothing else. I did not feel that I learnt anything else ... And I did not learn anything from these ... programmes... Always quoting Robson... Real World Research ... What is it? Is that the only way of doing research? (Anita, Italy)

The emphasis on language also encourages the learners to imagine, think, talk and write about knowledge making in a particular manner:

Naturally, when people learn English, for whatever purpose and by whatever method, they acquire something of the flavour of our culture, our institutions, our ways of thinking and communicating. (Iredale 1986, 44, cited in Phillipson 1992, 11)

Hence, UK higher education can quite naively and unwittingly construct cultural-intellectual dislocation for learners who represent different cultural ways of making sense of knowing.

Writing the 'right' knowledge: distancing the self from the written

After all these years, Carolina [her teacher] has put a tick in my assignment... you see. I still do not know what is expected of me. When I do a bit of work and thought that I have done a good piece of writing, it turns out to be hopeless ... Carolina is not happy about it. (Gifti, Jamaica)

Thus, the tick of the teacher still acts as the signal for right knowledge and this tick comes only when the student satisfies the rules of writing in UK academia. Some learners get lost in the ambiguity of coming to know and coming to know the English ways of comprehending the world. This subtlety in the language schematically envelopes the meanings of power and politics in the rules, practices and assumptions related to learning, so that the power issues embedded in language are almost invisible to the learner.

Here, you explain very nicely your process of doing research. Not being leading and being impartial ... You know, you are doing it impersonally, objectively, not partial ... you need to use the right kind of language ... They make at the end, the research valuable and reliable. (Seema, Brazil)

Seema assumes that the objective impersonal way of constructing knowledge inquiry, as it is promoted through the English language, reflects 'valuable' and 'reliable' knowledge. This is the power of language in constructing certain territories for producing knowledge and helping the receivers themselves legitimise the validity of such intellectual territories.

This also reminds us of the remarkable ability of language to transfer power into right and obedience. Language actually creates power and it is a site where power is enacted. Language

legitimises the concepts of right and duty (Thomas et al. 2004). And for learning, there are discourses, such as the (post)colonial discourse, which makes cultural Others believe in a particular kind of 'valuable' knowledge and creates a desire to obtain this knowledge rather than any other way of sensing the universe (Appadurai 1996; Koehne 2006).

Writing as a way of being in the world

we have the French tradition of teaching and learning in our culture. We generalise things most of the time ... When I write, I go on talking about general things without giving reasons or evidence ... Just go round and round without going to the point directly. ... same with talking. ... I will go on talking ... This is how we write as well. (Marina, Mexico)

Thus, some learners come from cultures where speaking, learning, teaching and writing are intertwined with certain cultural characteristics. They find it difficult to get used to the rational, impersonal way of interpreting the world using language in a particular manner:

Here, the way of writing ... is very different. Naaa...ow, when we want to say certain things ... we go round and round raa...ound before coming to the exact point. But, here, it is the opposite. You know, we never say things directly and we apply the same method in writing as well. (Seema, Brazil)

For some learners, life and learning are intertwined. However, some assumptions and practices of academic writing encourage a split between living human aspirations, norms and emotions to draw a line between the process of how they actually come to know and the knowledge they construct. Academic language, thus, promotes the idea that the meaning of a word mirrors the 'true' nature of the world, telling accurate and universally valid stories about life and knowledge.

Some learners come here with different ways of going about life and learning and pose the question as to why the UK academic way of perceiving and expressing knowledge might be better than their ways:

I have a difficulty in writing here. Back home, we write adjectives, vivid, emotional language We use language to feel. Before I came here ... I knew English. Ah Jee...sus, since I started writing, I am asking myself so, do I really know English?" ... here, it is just blank and flat. No flavour in the language they use. Their academic writing is just like their food No flavour.

And I am still thinking, so, what is wrong with the English I use? (Gift, Jamaica)

In spite of the fact that we live in a postmodern world in which knowledge about knowledge, and ways of expressing knowledge, have been massively contested, still the idea of 'right' knowledge dominates Western academia. Experience validated by rationality is the source of knowledge. Rationalism is the view that considers the ultimate source of knowledge is reason (Cardinal, Hayward, and Jones 2004). Linguistically detaching the act of knowing from the process and from the known is one of the major means of maintaining the rationality of knowledge in academic endeavours. However, the desire to get outside ourselves has limits, and 'since we are who we are, we can't get outside of ourselves completely'. Therefore, no view comes from nowhere (Nagel 1986, 6).

Languaging power: globalising the local?

Having said this, the important issue is: who is authoring these linguistic 'standards' of going about knowledge? Do these standards reflect globally and interculturally appreciated ontologies and epistemologies? How can these dominant tales about learning narrated in English do justice to learners who bring varied scripts for learning to international pedagogies? According to a university lecturer in Kenya:

Here, every statement is been referred to... Definitely too much. Back home we express things in a better ways [sic]. Here ... otherwise, they call it something. Pagaa... ism? [Plagiarism]

Now see, whatever I write is my own and not my own. Because my writing is influenced by what I read, listen to and talk with other people. You know ... these individualistic ... societies ... every single thing has an owner. Very different from us. (Kengi, Kenya)

They talk about this global higher education. But, we only learn how to learn as they do ... nothing global about it. (Stella, Bulgaria)

Communication of knowledge is in the hands of the industrialised nations (Altbach 1981). The implication is that due to historical and political reasons, one part of the world has the power of authoring the world's knowledge, using a particular language. So, inevitably, those who own that language gain the power of maintaining rules about communicating knowledge.

Nevertheless, language is embedded in the rhythm of human life. It is embedded in human dreams, hopes and actions (Thomas et al. 2004). And it is common knowledge that people dream and act meaningfully within contexts. Hence, the act of learning is bound to have contextual meanings and people use local ways of coming to know:

Africans have a culture, a way of thinking and doing things, which are different but enriching. We communicate, interact, socialize, and conceptualize issues from a different perspective, background and experience. (Makgoba 1997, 100)

Thus, cultures have their own ways of perceiving the world. These cultural ways of knowing are overshadowed by the standard ways of sensing the world, highlighted in the host contexts of learning. One of the major tools that are used to construct 'standard' knowledge is the English language. According to Pennycook (1994), the English language has a successful history of suppressing local knowledges.

Pedagogy of the other: talking language critically

In his novel *Animal Farm*, George Orwell (1951) implies that people's thoughts can be controlled and made limited by the language available to them. Language can also privilege people when they own the linguistic capital that is appreciated within a certain context. As Bourdieu (1992) suggests, linguistic utterances are always produced in particular contexts and markets. Every market has different values. Hence, some products are more valued than others within particular markets or contexts:

We are not for this arguing, questioning, and critically reviewing others' point of view In China we have self-criticism ... we do not like to criticise others and, I think, that this habit has influenced the way we go about learning. ... Even if the course is in Chinese, we would be quiet ... it is the way we do. (Sheng-Yu, China)

One of the major concerns in UK higher education pedagogy is that it should promote criticality of learning. The assumption is that the world is becoming radically unknowable (Barnett 2000), and hence any attempts at comprehending this universe should be intellectually enriched through critical discussions. In higher education, such pedagogies, which help learners find, develop and construct voices, are called critical pedagogies. Such critical pedagogies may indeed help learners to move away from the contemplative relationship with the world. However, the notion of criticality does not comprise a singular meaning and action across cultures:

here I have to be critical and analytical for every single thing. Even while talking ... English people are arguing critically. They talk as if they are writing an assignment. We never ever do that. ... Be critical. Be critical ... not used to this ... the teachers ... they think we do not know anything. You talk; they think you know everything We are self-critical and we do not ... criticise others openly. We do not like confrontation with others. (Akihiro, Japan)

This respondent distinguishes between verbal criticality and critical thinking and reveals the intertwined nature between values related to living and being verbally critical during lessons. Language itself is daily life and, therefore, language is embedded in many meanings of the way in which people in particular socio-cultural contexts go about life (Bourdieu 1992). Languaging, therefore, involves much more subtlety than adhering to certain linguistic rules. For instance, for Japanese learners, criticality is interwoven with their norms related to interpersonal relationships. Moreover, they do not relate verbal silence to intellectual passivity. Their argument is that critical learning also involves critical thinking, and hence, for them, arguing for a point of view is not itself a guarantee of critical learning. Interestingly, some mentioned that those who talk too much during lessons may not be critically reflecting but 'shouting' to attempting to demonstrate their language fluency.

Language as a symbolic system: who is doing 'better'?

Language used by human beings is transmuted into a symbolic form. It empowers human beings with the ability of positioning the self within a particular social cultural context.

international students ... their voices are not heard and they are not happy and not feeling comfortable. And it is always the English talking ... You know, it is their language ... from the childhood, they get used to this talking and arguing thing ... So, they talk. (Seema, Brazil)

The linguistic capital promoted within UK academia is owned by certain learners. Linguistic capital, like economic capital or cultural capital, is symbolic of the locations of individuals within particular social spaces. Therefore, inevitably, a particular group of learners becomes privileged in owning the right kind of linguistic capital required to address the ontological and epistemological stances dominant in the pedagogy.

We come here and learn the theories constructed by the West. Never question the bad aspects of them or applicability for us. Even if we want to speak ... feel vulnerable ... language problem. (Rifca, Pakistan)

Some respondents pointed out that the ownership of linguistic capital helps learners to exploit the system of difference to their advantage. For instance, most of the learners who come from different cultural contexts use English vocabulary, accents or grammar differently from those who own the linguistic capital that is promoted in UK universities. They can also negate the objective relationship of power between academic use of English and the English they use symbolically, by using their linguistic capital and cultural capital which are valued within the context of higher education in the UK. Thus, all linguistic expressions and utterances are 'euphemised'. They are modified by a certain kind of 'censorship' of the market (Bourdieu 1992, 19). Therefore, students with more linguistic capital can understand and anticipate the kinds of linguistic expressions that are appropriate within different contexts in the pedagogy. They can use expressions which are suitably euphemised. Also, those who have more cultural and linguistic capital can better employ their day-to-day English with academic English in such a way that the fusion of these two aspects of language provides the accepted form of linguistic expression within the context (Bourdieu 1992, 20). Hence, learners who lack the linguistic and cultural capital valued within UK academia can become marginalised in performing and understanding the critical orientation within the UK university context.

History repeated?

we ... behave that way due to our ... history. The Whites are free to talk since they have dominated us for a long time ... Blacks are more reserved and think that the teachers should not be questioned.

We have been under the British for a long time. They [the English] have been the controllers. ... This reflects in our classroom teaching and learning. They [the English students] feel very free to talk ... go against teachers' point of view. But we being the dependents have a culture of dependency. We think ... the authority should not be questioned ... Here, when we want to question, the language ... you know ... only they do talk ... all the time. (Pat, South Africa)

Pat, like most of the respondents who come from former British colonies, described the embedded nature of their political past in the present. Penetrating through the mere linguistic appearance of language, she maintains that silencing certain voices in the classroom is a political construct mediated by the English language. She draws on the long-lasting impact of the political history of language in constructing particular selves for learners in certain cultures.

It is the Black and White debate. Their language, White being the Master ... the masters' language. (Rifca, Pakistan)

we were colonised by the British ... people were pointed at and got the work done ... We are a culture of obedience ... has the feeling of slavery in the classroom ... we have been under the British ... no freedom to argue ... Now ... here we have to argue, be critical ... all their rules, easy for them. (Lee, Hong Kong)

Lee's comment reminds us of Bakhtin (1986, 89), who observes that every utterance comes with a particular history and that the history of the world is always present and hence, 'Our speech [is] filled with others' words'. Hence, the kind of language advocated in UK universities leads some learners with certain political histories to construct images or identities for themselves. And these identities are often spoken by them in disempowering discourses. They begin to live in a self-imposed image of a victim of a particular linguistic and political history who, as a result, cannot successfully meet the demands of the new learning environment. They make sense of the world in terms of social, political and cultural constructions. Therefore, the ontologies and epistemologies that are familiar to those learners can sometimes be antithetical to those which are promoted in UK academia.

Nevertheless, some learners try to find some location by using the very discourse that makes them feel disempowered.

These people always look down upon the learners who come from non-Western countries ... we need to tell them that we have something important to tell... The British think what can we learn from Africans? Indians? We know ... We have the responsibility to represent our country to say that our country has something wealthy to say ... does not matter which dialect we use to say it. (Pat, South Africa)

Here, Pat negates her image as a silent Black student to confront the power in the pedagogy. In this attempt, she tends to locate herself in a kind of triumphant or challenging role, empowering herself, and addressing intellectual dislocation using her own 'dialect'.

Conclusion

you see, we come here with lot of hopes ... But, we only learn their accent, their academic writing ... What is international in this? See, ultimately, it is we who learn to eat sandwiches and not that they learn to eat chapatti ... ? (Maya, India)

Learners who come from diverse cultures of learning to participate in the UK higher education system read the role of the English language in terms of its power in reshaping their process of knowing. They feel that the power of the English language and the discourse that is appreciated within UK academia encourage them to feel and become particular selves going about learning in particular ways. While some students resist this kind of intellectual transmutation during their stay at the university, others question the absence of appreciation for

other ways of coming to know. They make an attempt to understand how the act of learning can be reduced to following a particular set of language forms or rules. Still others move on to think whether the role of the English language has not yet completed its act of colonising cultural Others and whether international higher education provides spaces for linguistic hegemony.

What has also emerged is that learners from other cultures become much more sensitive about their ways of being and knowing once they encounter different ways of knowing. Moreover, the issues that dislocate them from their own ways of knowing are read in terms of power, politics and history. Within this context, the English language is identified as a politically empowered linguistic power that dominates the alternative ways of knowing that learners bring to UK higher education pedagogy over other cultures.

This power of language results in the disarticulation between the pedagogy of the host institution and the pedagogies that are familiar to learners who come from different cultures of learning. However, if this situation were articulated, new intercultural learning spaces would arise where learning would take place between varied cultures. Within an intercultural learning space, there will be a lot more spaces for both the learners and the teachers to improve their intercultural fluency; the ability to engage with and to relate to the stories of learning and teaching of other cultures. These intercultural learning spaces occupied by people with intercultural fluency would help to construct rich pedagogies rather than a pedagogy that marginalises alternative narratives of learning through the power of language.

Notes on contributor

Thushari Welikala gained her PhD from the Institute of Education, University of London in 2006 on cultural scripts among international students. Currently, she is an Associate of the Centre for Higher Education Studies at the Institute of Education. Her main areas of interest include international higher education, the student experience and the narrative approach in conducting research.

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