DECOLONIZING LITERACY

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Everything we tell people about how we've been treated is dismissed as conspiracy theory until a White person confirms it.
1. Literacy
2. Indigenizing and Decolonizing
3. Language & Colonial Control
4. Academic Language Conventions & Colonialism
5. What might it mean to decolonize literacy in higher education?
LITERACY (AN EVOLVING TERM)

- Ability to read and write (set of skills)
- Ability to use language in ways appropriate for a particular context (situated)
- Ability to make meaning through a range of modalities (multiliteracies)
QUESTION

- In your area of teaching, what do students need to do with language (written and spoken) to be perceived as effective communicators? As good students?
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Teresa McCarty (2005) claims that “on the cusp of a new millennium, we are also on the crest of a new language and literacy divide. Globally, the world’s linguistic and cultural diversity is imperiled by national and transnational forces that work to homogenize and standardize, even as they stratify and marginalize.”
BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE THAT ACCOMPANY THE PRODUCTION OF HOMOGENEITY:

- A firm belief in Standard English/correctness
- Linguistic Othering
- Suppression of alterity
- Legitimacy/Ilegitimacy of speakers of English/ and Native-speakerism
- Silencing
- Resentment of linguistic difference
- Willingness/unwillingness to communicate
HOMOGENIZING LANGUAGE

- What kind of discourses circulate?
  - There is such a thing as Standard English and I speak it.
  - I don’t have an accent
  - I want to get rid of my accent
  - He has a thick accent
  - She speaks a sort of broken English
  - I speak English English, neutral English, regular English, proper English, Standard English...
  - Speaking one language is normal
  - Native-speakers of a language know it best
  - Kids get confused if they learn more than one language at a time
  - My grandparents gave up their language
  - My dad didn’t want me to get confused with more than one language so he spoke to me only in English.
  - I was having trouble in school so my teacher told my parents we should speak English at home.
  - My TA can’t speak English. He shouldn’t be running our labs.

- Where do these ideas about language come from?
This view of language and literacy divides people into two groups, literates and illiterates. Literates speak, read, and write a standard form. While educational policies profess to work toward social justice and inclusionary practices, this view of literacy continues to exclude those groups who are not fluent (in the “right” way) in the national English.
“Indigenizing works hand in hand with decolonizing.”
(Pete, Schneider, & O’Reilly, 2013, p. 103).
o Richard Atleo, 2004; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Barney, 2003; Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 2000; First Rider, 1994; Fraser, 2006; Little Bear, 2000; Pepion, 1999; Relland, 1998; Semchison, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Youngblood Henderson, 2000.)
INDIGENOUS TWITTER

- @IndigenousXca
- @apihtawikosisian
- @EricaVioletLee
- @Bearhead_C
- @Khelsilem
- @adamgaudry
INDIGENIZING TEACHING & LEARNING

- Each of us has gifts to offer to our community.
- It is the educator's role to facilitate and encourage the development of each learner's gifts.
- Amethyst First Rider: “non-interference is respect for others’ wholeness, totality and knowledge” (1994, p.20).
**ENCOURAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF GIFTS**

*Tom:* So if we’re trying to encourage these children to speak but every time, you know, they’re saying something improperly because it doesn’t flow with that certain type of sentence structure that we’re expecting. You’re closing that bridge um and you’re not going to have that language development with that child. You’re just going to see deficit because every time you set them down for testing, well, they aren’t presented with that opportunity to grow *(Sterzuk, 2011, p.99).*
Tom: when you work with elders and stuff, and they’re working with children, you’ll see that constant interaction with them. And, again, that is broken when we get here [school], um, you know, when it’s time for adults to speak, kind of thing, is when kids are meant not to be heard, they’re just supposed to sit there and listen. But during traditional teachings there will be that constant interaction with the elders, with the kids, and nobody’s going to sit back and the elder’s not going to criticize a kid for not speaking properly, because it’s not as important as the kid being able to learn, you know, from the story. If you’re following me... (Sterzuk, 2011, p.99).
“Indigenizing works hand in hand with decolonizing.”
(Pete, Schneider, & O’Reilly, 2013, p. 103).
Decolonization is not a metaphor

Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang

Abstract

Our goal in this article is to remind readers what is unsettling about decolonization. Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. The easy adoption of decolonizing discourse by educational advocacy and scholarship, evidenced by the increasing number of calls to "decolonize our schools," betrays the colonial violence of discourses that have historically been used to represent Indigenous peoples as inferior and in need of improvement through the language of reform. We offer a critique of this call to decolonize our schools, as it is based on the need to make schools more efficient and effective in serving the interests of a dominant society that operates on a logic of domination. We argue that the decolonization of schools must be grounded in self-determination, self-governance, and the repatriation of Indigenous land and life.
The desire for homogeneity in communication is a characteristic of settler nationalism.

It might be possible to consider changes around English in higher education as an act of decolonization.
The Indian Affairs program of studies of 1896 stated: “Every effort must be made to induce pupils to speak English and to teach them to understand it; unless they do, the whole work of the teacher is likely to be wasted.”

The schools had differing language policies over the years, but the message most children received was ‘don't speak your own language.’ “If we were heard speaking Shuswap, we were punished. We were made to write on the board one hundred times, ‘I will not speak Indian any more.’”

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p.24)
Espérance, a woman who attended the Maliotenam school in Sept Isles, Quebec, found that “because we spoke so much French, when we returned home for the holidays, we couldn’t speak our language anymore. That really isolated us from each other.”¹¹

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p.79)
Provincial Policies and Activities

1968  An amendment to The School Act permits the establishment of designated French schools. Prior to this date, English was the only language which could be used as a language of instruction in Saskatchewan schools.

1974  The School Act is amended to permit a language other than English to be taught or used as a language of instruction for a limited time of the school day.
Language shift and planning towards English was deliberate.

There was state investment in this project.

Decolonizing literacy will need to be equally deliberate.

It will require investment.
While linguists recognize national variants such as British, American, Canadian and Australian Englishes as legitimate, the Englishes used by colonized peoples are often suspect.

Indigenous peoples have, in the words of Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo, “re-invented the enemy’s tongue” in order to express themselves in an unfamiliar language and in the absence of a mother tongue.

These new Englishes are inflected by Aboriginal languages and meet the needs of community.”
REINVENTING THE ENEMY’S TONGUE

- Settler colonial views of Indigenous Englishes
- Brocket 99

**History of Brocket 99**

In 1986, Ernie Scar (actually, a local DJ in Alberta) was given a tape of a controversial and somewhat offensive radio parody. He and a few friends decided that they wanted to apply a similar idea to both the local Natives and the Hutterite community in Southern Alberta. Although the Hutterite spinoff never became more than an idea, Brocket99 took off like fire through hell.
“Recognizing that literacy has been often regarded as a White trait, something that Whites possess naturally, rather than as a White privilege, I maintain, more accurately reveals why many Whites—including those recently contesting affirmative action in educational settings—have acted as if something has been taken away from them when the goods of literacy are redistributed.” (Prendergast, 2003, p. 8)
“in my defense my style of writing is not laziness or lack of knowledge of proper usage of the English language; it is a form of grammatical resistance as a deconstructionist in the manner of many writers especially American poet E. E. Cummings; he graduated with a master degree in English from Harvard University and they called him experimental and innovative; not words likely to be used to describe an indigenous writer who breaks all the rules of writing (the behavioural ethics board at the University of British Columbia suggested that I hire an editor as it appeared that I did not know the English language); times though they are changing”
in this dissertation, I am writing as in an oral fashion, writing like I speak and hopefully it is being read as if I am speaking directly to you ♡ to your heart.
Patrick Stewart wrote his dissertation like this because he “wanted to make a point about aboriginal culture, colonialism, and the blind acceptance of English language conventions in academia.”
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between academic language conventions and colonialism?
2. What might it mean to diversify understandings of English in the educational context within which you work?
3. What might make it difficult to take up a diversified view of English in your teaching?
Andreotti (2007) provides a synthesis of potential connections that can be made between the writing of postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak and education.

Andreotti outlines four steps for educators working towards establishing an “ethical relation to the Other.”
If we apply these steps to educator linguistic bias, instructors might work towards:

1. developing their own critical awareness of standard language ideologies
2. learning to understand and acknowledge how standard language ideologies benefit us as white settler educators
3. changing practices in classrooms that privilege speakers of settler English varieties
4. understanding that there is no “best practice” that is going to guarantee success.
DECOLONIZING LITERACY: UNIVERSITY LEVEL

- Indigenous language classes required in more programs
- Teaching courses with an indigenous language as the medium of instruction
- Linguistic landscape (written and spoken)
- Language policy for graduate theses
- Pluralizing instructor perspectives on English language variation and other languages
MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: BEYOND ENGLISH?
The program is entering its tenth year and adds a new grade every year.

The inaugural Cree class at St. Frances had 12 students, but in 2013, over 250 children were enrolled in the school’s bilingual path. “We now have kindergarten to grade six, ten Cree-speaking teachers and support staff that supports them,”

School administrators point to community outreach as one reason why the school has seen its numbers rise over the years. “We started to involve the community a lot more and share with our elders and get input from them,” said Vangool.

Students in the Cree-track follow the same core curriculum as the rest of Saskatchewan’s schools.
“Self-Determination in Education is a recognized inherent right of Cree Nation's people. The Onion Lake Education System and its governing Board, the Onion Lake Board of Education, were established by the exercise of this right under the Onion Lake Cree Nation’s Chief and Council. It is the intent of this Cree Nation, in due time, for Cree Nations people to assume all leadership roles within this education system.”

“As a result of a long and detailed discussion and learning process, the Onion Lake Cree Nation finally took total control of their children's education in 1981. In 1984, control of the post-secondary allowance system was added to the Cree Nation's responsibilities. Thus the Board of Education has assumed total responsibility for an educational system which meets the unique needs of its band members. At the same time, its doors remain open to all students regardless of race, creed or national origin.”

Kihew Waciston Cree Immersion School was built by the Nation. The language of instruction for the children attending is Cree. Presently there are over 200 students attending this immersion School.

http://www.onionlake.ca/education/kihew-waciston#sthash.fsArRg1j.dpuf
DECOLONIZING LITERACY: UNIVERSITY LEVEL

1. Critical discussion
2. New language policy
3. Institutional practices
Instructors need to be reminded that “these students and their texts represent a broad range of needs, strengths, and challenges and to structure their feedback accordingly” (Ferris, 2011: 224).

Instructors should not simply tell their students to see a tutor or go to the writing center or read the handbook or consult a particular Web site. “Rather, classroom instructors should (a) ensure the resources to which they are sending their students are appropriate and of good quality; (b) prepare students to use those resources effectively by suggesting to them specific issues to learn about or get help with; and (c) work cooperatively with tutors or writing centers” (Ferris, 2011: 224).
DECOLONIZING LITERACY: MY TEACHING

- Writing feedback (explicit, discuss in person)
- Refer students to campus services and provide notes for the tutor
- Refer students to “They say, I say: The Moves that matter in Academic Writing (Graff & Birkenstein) or OWL Purdue
DECOLONIZING LITERACY: MY TEACHING

- Allow/encourage other languages in class and in assignments
- Support graduate students in their writing
- Examine assessment materials for bias
5. Communicates Professionally

a) Spoken

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Audible, clear, & expressive.
Enunciation is correct & distinct.
Able to relate to students through language. Shares communicative burden with interlocutors.
Demonstrates ability to adjust to communicative needs of other through adjustment to tone, stress, and rhythm.

Speaks rapidly. Language used. Student communicative needs are congruent. Interlocutors have difficulty understanding verbal messages.

Was: “audible, clear, pleasant & expressive; enunciation is correct & distinct; absence of distracting mannerisms; excellent language usage modeled; language matches pupils’ ability levels; able to relate to pupils through language”

Was: “mumbles, inaudible or monotone; abrasive quality; incorrect enunciation; distracting mannerism; poor English usage; language used and pupil ability incongruent; pupils have difficulty in understanding verbal messages; little effective effort to improve language usage”
“During my research, I learned to value my voice and identity while writing. All interactions are linked to identity and construction through social power relations (Norton, 1995), and writing is a way to interact with social discourses of power. I am aware that I wrote this study in my second language, thus my writing style or “accent” belongs to a group that I might describe as non-mainstream writers of English (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). My accent in writing can be seen in my word choices or sentence structures. For this study, I decided to keep my “accent” as part of my voice, as a way of expressing my individualism and as a way of using English as a world citizen. You might say that I use English as a lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2005). Having my own voice does not imply that I do not follow the grammatical rules of my second language. It means accepting my culturally specific norms of thought and way of writing in order to express myself. Therefore, I made an effort to keep my voice in this study even though I respect the grammatical rules and the native speaker revision (Altbach, 2004; Knight and de Wit 1995). This decision aligns with the focus of this research.”
THANK YOU!

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