

# Confronting Epistemological Racism, Decolonizing Scholarly Knowledge: Race and Gender in Applied Linguistics

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Recent scholarship in sociolinguistics and language education has examined how race and language intersect each other and how racism influences linguistic and educational practices. While racism is often conceptualized in terms of individual and institutional injustices, a critical examination of another form of racism—epistemological racism—problematizes how racial inequalities influence our knowledge production and consumption in academe. Highlighting the importance of the intersectional nature of identity categories, this conceptual article aims to draw scholars' attention on how epistemological racism marginalizes and erases the knowledge produced by scholars in the Global South, women scholars of color, and other minoritized groups. In today's neoliberal culture of competition, scholars of color are compelled to become complicit with white Euro-American hegemonic knowledge, further perpetuating the hegemony of white knowledge while marginalizing women scholars of color. Valorizing non-European knowledge and collectivity as an alternative framework also risks essentialism and male hegemony. Conversely, the ethics promoted by black feminism emphasizes a personal ethical commitment to antiracism. Epistemological antiracism invites scholars to validate alternative theories, rethink our citation practices, and develop critical reflexivity and accountability.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of applied linguistics, issues of race have been addressed in recent years. Similar to other social identities, such as gender, social class, and sexuality, race raises critical questions on relations of power, inequalities, discrimination, domination, and oppression. Also, race intersects with these social identities, further complicating systems of oppression and domination. While issues of race have become an emerging topic to unpack, investigate, and problematize in relation to linguistic forms and practices and language teaching and learning, they also affect the professional experiences of applied linguistics scholars and students.

Among issues of race, racism is a significant challenge that we need to grapple with. In this article, I define racism as discourse, knowledge, and social practices that, by means of inferiorization, denigration, marginalization, and

exclusion, construct and perpetuate unequal relations of power between groups of people defined by perceived racial difference (see Kubota and Lin 2009). In discussing racism, it is useful to think in terms of three different, but related, forms: individual, institutional, and epistemological racisms. Racism impacts not only the people, texts, or semiosis that we investigate in our research, but also us—teachers, researchers, and students in applied linguistics—in many ways.

In this conceptual article, I will focus on epistemological racism involved in our own scholarly activities, which is often made obscure but maintains unequal relations of power between West-based and non-West-based knowledge and academic practices, and aim to raise our critical awareness of inequalities in our knowledge production and consumption. I write as an Asian woman scholar of language education originally from Japan currently working in a North American university. Because of the location of my work, I will illuminate the dominance of Euro-American whiteness in our field, focusing mostly on North American contexts. Drawing on some real-life experiences as consistent with critical race theory, which situates race and racism at the center of critical inquiry into inequalities and injustices experienced by marginalized people in institutions and society (Delgado and Stefancic 2017), I argue that epistemological racism excludes us from and simultaneously assimilates us into the dominant white knowledge. Resistance to white epistemologies has given rise to ethnic-centered alternative theories in different disciplines. However, advocacy of such theories runs the risk of essentialism and a nationalistic orientation that further oppresses women. This suggests the importance of an ethical commitment to epistemological antiracism, antisexism, and anti all forms of oppressions. As an example of epistemological antiracist scholarly enactment, I will propose that we rethink our citation practices.

Before discussing epistemological racism, I will first provide a brief review of applied linguistics literature on racism and an overview of the concepts of individual and institutional racisms. As I mention below, racism in public discourse often refers to overt forms of bigotry. However, racism presents far broader and deeper problems that affect our lives and society.

## 2. RACISM IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS LITERATURE

Recent discussions on race in applied linguistics are found in two separate but related domains: sociolinguistics including linguistic anthropology (Van Dijk 1993; Hill 2008; Reyes and Lo 2009; Talmy 2010; Alim and Reyes 2011; Bucholtz 2011; Alim *et al.* 2016) and language education (Kubota and Lin 2009; Crump 2014; Han 2014; Motha 2014; Flores and Rosa 2015; Kubota 2015; Lee 2015; Jenks 2017). These two domains slightly differ in their focus and approach to investigating how language and race intersect each other in complex power relations. While the former mainly describes and uncovers features of linguistic practices through discourse analysis, the latter aims to unpack and critique policies, practices, and associated phenomena in

language education through critical race theory, antiracist education frameworks, and qualitative research using interviews and observations. In both approaches, *racism*—the main focus of this article—is the key problem to expose, examine, and critique.

Sociolinguistic research on racism unveils the ways in which racist meanings and ideologies are expressed through discourses and semiotic practices. In an early study, Van Dijk (1993) utilized discourse analysis to examine political, corporate, academic, educational, and media discourses in Europe and North America. The study illuminated how the texts and talks produced by elites reproduced racism in subtle, implicit, and sometimes seemingly benevolent manners. This study and others examined discourses and linguistic practices to expose racial stereotyping of racial minorities (Hill 2008; Reyes 2010; Lippi-Green 2012). The fixed images of the racialized other interact with the ideology of linguistic legitimacy and monolingualism, an example of which is Mock Spanish in the USA—the appropriation of Spanish by white English speakers that assign a demeaning label to Latinxs (Hill 2008). Mock Asian also marks Asians as the racialized other, and yet it has been appropriated by a Korean American comedian and reformulated as a critique of racist ideology (Chun 2004). This subversive use of Mock Asian parallels ethnic solidarity expressed by Inverted Spanglish (Rosa 2016)—Spanish in hyper-Anglicized pronunciation used among Latinx American youth from different ethnic backgrounds. While linguistic mocking used by white people produces racist discourse through indexicality (i.e. social, cultural, and ideological meaning contextually attached to a certain linguistic expression), similar linguistic practice used by racial minorities can signal oppositional meanings and functions.

More overt forms of racism are found in slurs and gaffes, which often draw public criticism for the individual's racist intention and the racist meaning of words (Hill 2008). Here, racism is interpreted as personalist ideology. As another overt example, Reyes (2011) analyzed instances of Korean American students' calling out 'Racists' in classroom discourse. She illustrated how the students indexically linked the word 'black' to racist ideologies. In sum, sociolinguistic research uncovers how racism is expressed in linguistic and discursive practices and draws attention to the ways in which racism is subtly and overtly entrenched in everyday discourse.

Conversely, research in language education illuminates how racialization and racism underlie and reproduce inequalities in language education practices and policies by drawing on theoretical and empirical tools—including critical race theory, postcolonial theories, ethnography, interviews, and so on. In US school contexts, for example, Motha (2014) revealed how an Asian-American and three white teachers of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) negotiated racialization and racism in institutional structures and ideologies in educating marginalized ESOL students of color. The issues raised—the conflation of non-native English speakers with nonwhiteness, colorblind ideology that perpetuates racial inequalities in the institution, superficial celebration of difference in liberal multiculturalism, evasion of race by replacing it with

culture (i.e. new racism), and white privilege in colonial relations of power—are also addressed in other works (Kubota and Lin 2009; Kubota 2015; Lee 2015). The hegemony of whiteness associated with native speakerism is widespread with the rise of popularity of English language education promoted under neoliberal globalization. This reproduces racial biases in teaching and learning, teacher employment, and teaching materials worldwide (Taylor-Mendes 2009; Lee 2011; Rivers and Ross 2013; Ruecker and Ives 2015; Yamada 2015; Jenks 2017; Phan 2017).

As in sociolinguistic research, the intersection between race and language is illuminated by critiquing raciolinguistic ideologies in teaching language minoritized students, which perpetuate the white monolingual norm of linguistic appropriateness (Flores and Rosa 2015) and in proposing a conceptual framework of Critical Language and Race Theory, or LangCrit, which acknowledges racism in everyday engagement with language (Crump 2014). Han (2014) further sheds light on the intersection of language learning, race, and religion as observed at a Christian church in Canada attended by Chinese immigrant learners of English and leaders of Chinese descent, uncovering how the members reproduced a racial and linguistic hierarchy in viewing English speakers as legitimate Canadians. All these examples demonstrate how racism is entrenched in multiple ways in language teaching and learning.

Taken together, both sociolinguistic and educational research uncover how racism interacts with the ideologies of language and other social categories, resulting in individual denigration and a reproduction of power hierarchies and inequality within society. In most cases, however, the critical gaze is cast on language users, learners, and professionals rather than on us as researchers who are implicated in epistemological racism in our knowledge production and consumption. It is necessary to critically examine how our own scholarly activities produce and maintain racial hierarchies and inequalities of different academic knowledges, further impacting the institutional status of racialized scholars. Epistemological racism should also be scrutinized by acknowledging how it intersects with other dimensions of difference, especially gender. This discussion is important for all applied linguists, since we engage in the production of knowledge, which can maintain or transform inequalities. My intention here is to add another lens to the scholarship on racism so that all of us can turn our critical gaze toward the reproduction of racial and gender inequalities at the epistemological level.

### 3. INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Individual racism is targeted toward individuals or groups of individuals, as seen in slurs and gaffes (Hill 2008), and it can be either overt or covert. Overt bigotry, which is sometimes reported in public as inappropriate comments or behaviors, is what many people think what racism is. Examples can also be found in online media triggering sensational reactions (see Chun 2016). Liberal-minded people in civil society typically think that they are not racist

since they are outraged by such overt racism. However, individual racism may surface as subtle microaggressions or 'brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group' (Sue *et al.* 2007: 273). For example, in Lee (2011), a native English-speaking Asian teacher of English born in North America was repeatedly asked where she was really from by colleagues and included with international students in program promotional materials. Indeed, the nationality and ethnicity talk such as 'Where are you really from?' are often interpreted by racialized subjects as banal racism (Zhu and Li 2016). Such subtle indignities often remain ignored and hidden.

Institutional racism or systemic racism refers to racial inequalities created and perpetuated in social institutions. For example, it is observed in over- or underrepresentation of particular racial groups of students in remedial or gifted education programs in schools (Motha 2014) and a lack of instructors or administrators of color in schools and universities (Henry 2015). Institutional underrepresentation of racial minorities is often a result of underrecognition of the merit that minorities demonstrate. This problem also rings true in the professional associations within applied linguistics (Khan 2018), including the American Association for Applied linguistics (AAAL). Bhattacharya *et al.* (2019) recently pointed out a lack of racial diversity in AAAL's leaders and award recipients. Although women scholars of color across disciplines in higher education have problematized racist and gendered institutional practices (Vargas 2002; Lin *et al.* 2004; Li and Beckett 2006; Gutierrez y Muhs *et al.* 2012), the problem persists.

Individual and institutional forms of racism, as well as the epistemological racism focused on in this article, are interrelated. Individual discrimination in an institution both reflects and produces deeper systemic inequalities; at the same time, epistemological racism in our system of knowledge production and circulation excludes not only racialized but also white scholars institutionally and individually in their scholarly engagement outside of white Eurocentric norms.

#### 4. INTERSECTIONALITY AND GROUP STRUGGLE: A TENSION

In discussing all three forms of racism, it is important to consider how race intersects with other identity categories, including gender, class, ethnicity, language, nationality, sexuality, ability, and age. Although all people of color in white dominant settler societies, such as the USA and Canada, are negatively affected by white racism, their individual and group backgrounds are diverse, and thus they are placed at different positions in power hierarchies.

Some philosophies or theories prioritize one identity category as a major element in analyzing human experiences, social practices, and institutional structures. For instance, classic Marxist thought foregrounds class as the primary unit of analysis for understanding inequality among people, whereas

critical race theory primarily focuses on race, racialization, and racism, although it places an importance on intersectionality in understanding the experiences of racialized people (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). However, focusing only on a single category creates the problem of homogenizing and essentializing the group members that belongs to that category. This problem characterized the second-wave feminist movement that aimed to promote women's collective rights in various social and domestic domains. This wave of feminism was criticized since it mainly focused on white middle-class heterosexual women and excluded other marginalized women. Without taking into account all the identity categories, it is impossible to comprehend the complexity of human experiences. In discussing the importance of intersectionality in coalition building, Matsuda (1991: 1190) argues that the women of color movement 'has challenged communities of color to move beyond race alone in the quest for social justice'.

The antiessentialist perspective also questions the black–white binary. Within critical race theory, concerns specific to ethnic and other groups have given rise to LatCrit, AsiaCrit, TribalCrit, QueerCrit, Critical White Studies, and Critical Race Feminism (Wing 2001; Crump 2014; Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Intersectionality invites us to understand how racism is experienced differently by people from diverse backgrounds.

While intersectionality cautions against viewing racialized people as a homogeneous group, racial solidarity can bring about social transformation for people who have traditionally been marginalized, excluded, and oppressed. This tension between antiessentialism and strategic essentialism needs to be taken into consideration.

Since the 1970s, postmodernist ways of thinking have permeated the academic fields of humanities and social sciences. These approaches question the essentialist understandings of culture and identity categories, and instead highlight plurality, fluidity, and fragmentation. Postmodernist conceptualizations were also introduced to applied linguistics in the 1990s and have influenced the ways we understand the nature of linguistic forms and practices in relation to gender, culture, sexuality, and identity. Foucauldian poststructuralism especially influenced our field, perhaps due to its focus on the discursive construction of knowledge, which resonates with the field's concern with the construction of identities and meanings in discourse.

However, this theoretical framework may not become an effective tool to achieve concrete forms of emancipation and social change, as Marxist-oriented scholars in various fields have pointed out (Hartsock 1987; Ahmad 1992; Anyon 1994; Holborow 2015). Nancy Hartsock, for instance, has argued that postmodernist theories, which recapitulate Eurocentric Enlightenment theories, provide minoritized people with little guidance as to why they are systematically excluded and marginalized and thus, in broad terms, 'postmodernism represents a dangerous approach for any marginalized group to adopt' (Hartsock 1987: 191).

This is related to a tension between difference and sameness or between individually conceptualized experiences of diverse subjects/agents and collectively understood group experiences. To make any concrete change toward antiracism and racial equity, it is necessary for the oppressed group to unite and fight against the systems of oppression, as seen in the civil rights movement in the USA or the antiapartheid movement in South Africa. While collective resistance is essential for achieving racial equality in policies, it also risks homogenization and essentialism, which can undermine difference within the group, further marginalizing women. Here again, affirming intersectionality becomes essential. I will return to this tension later.

## 5. EPISTEMOLOGICAL RACISM

*Epistemological racism* in academe is ingrained in our academic knowledge system. James Scheurich (1997), an American educational researcher, discusses it as part of *civilizational racism* in education, which privileges the modernist (or postmodernist) assumptions of white Euro-American civilization and positions them as superior to the knowledges embraced by other civilizations, cultures, or peoples. The predominance of white perspectives is circulated through discourse as Van Dijk (1993) demonstrated in his analysis of sociology textbooks in English and school textbooks used in the Netherland. This form of racism works as epistemological hegemony, compelling non-Euro-American people of color to adopt these white assumptions as legitimate knowledge.

In the fields of education and language education, the dominance and normativity of white Euro-American-centered knowledge in school curricula have been challenged (e.g. Willinsky 1998; Kubota 2004; Abdi 2006; May and Sleeter 2010). Gloria Joseph, a black feminist educator, characterized the US school curriculum as 'White studies' and 'male studies', 'focusing on achievements, cultures, experiences and perspectives of white men and omitting or distorting the histories, experiences, cultures, and perspectives of people of color, and women of all colors' (Joseph 1988: 178). Advocates and researchers supporting students of color promote *culturally relevant teaching* (Ladson-Billings 1994), which honors the history, culture, language, and identity of minoritized learners.

The predominance of white Euro-American-centered school and academic knowledge—in music, art, history, science, research theories, and methodologies—can be observed in non-Euro-American countries as well, indicating its global hegemony (Kubota 2017). The field of teaching English as a foreign language is a case in point. Japanese curricula and instruction, for example, emphasize standardized English and overrepresent inner circle countries, especially the USA, as well as whiteness (Yamada 2015). This is reflected in Japanese students' preference for white native English-speaking teachers over black or Asian ones (Rivers and Ross 2013).

The Eurocentrism of knowledge often excludes research focused on non-Euro-American issues produced in non-Euro-American locations or utilizing

alternative orientations, especially when it is produced by non-Euro-American scholars of color. As Canagarajah (2002) argued, *local knowledge*, which has been suppressed by the Western mainstream epistemological paradigm, offers an alternative intellectual practice of thinking in research. To illustrate some of these points, I will present three episodes—one experienced by researchers in Brazil and the other two by me. Consistent with the spirit of critical race theory, my intention here is to offer subjective accounts based on my own positionality and to contextualize my subsequent theoretical discussion, rather than providing data for empirical analysis or objective interpretations.

### **5.1 Episode 1: ‘Frame the paper in a more global context’**

Two researchers in Brazil in the field of language education—a female professor and a male student of hers—wrote a paper based on a study investigating the results of a pedagogical implementation of a critical topic in an English language class at a university in Brazil. They submitted their paper to a prominent international journal of language education, which is based in the USA. The authors received a comment from the editor encouraging them to ‘frame the paper in a more global context’. They struggled to understand what this meant.

In this example, scholarship from the geographically Global South was not regarded as ‘global enough’ or was positioned outside of the ‘global context’. The concept of ‘global’ in turn is made equivalent to northern (i.e. Euro-American) theory and practice. The same topic studied in the Global North would not be considered as ‘not global enough’. Equally disturbing is the hierarchy between scholars of color in the Global North, including myself, and those in the Global South like my peers in Brazil. This resonates with a critique raised in the 1990s in the field of cultural studies. Critics pointed out the enormous amount of privilege held by postcolonial scholars of color in the Global North, who were studying about postcolonialism in the Global South, compared with the people who actually lived in the Global South (Dirlik 1994; Moore-Gilbert 1997).

### **5.2 Episode 2: ‘Submit your manuscript to a journal with an area focus’**

Several years ago, I wrote a manuscript on qualitative research focusing on the experiences and subjectivities of Japanese adults learning English in nonformal contexts in Japan and submitted it to a journal in our field. The journal provides an international forum for interdisciplinary research on language and education. After more than six months, I received an outright rejection from the editor with ‘summary’ of reviewers’ comments. Besides the dubious process (e.g. no disclosure of the number of reviewers and no sharing of the original comments from the reviewers), what troubled me most was the



following comment added at the end of his email message (which the editor claimed to have come from a reviewer):

I believe that the manuscript may be of greater interest to specialists in the teaching, learning and use of English in Japan. The author may wish to submit the manuscript to a journal with such an area focus (e.g., *Japan Association for Language Teaching Journal*; *Social Science Japan Journal*; *Journal of Japanese Studies*).

Two of the three journals mentioned are area study journals featuring topics in social sciences and humanities, mostly concerning history, literature, sociology, and public policies. They are not forums that publish the works of applied linguistics researchers. The editor and the reviewers apparently thought that because the context of my research was Japan (and possibly because my racial and gender background was indicated subtly to the reviewers and explicitly to the editor), any Japan-related journal, regardless of the discipline, would be more appropriate than this *international* journal on language teaching and learning. This symbolizes colonial exclusion of knowledge—an attempt to contain the knowledge within the non-Western academic community.

The rejection signified an act of exclusion of not only a scholar of a non-Western origin but also the knowledge on the non-Western location from this academic forum. The article was eventually published by another major applied linguistics journal (Kubota 2011).

### 5.3 Episode 3: editor's names won't sell(?)

This episode parallels what Kumaravadivelu (2016) experienced. Kumaravadivelu, a scholar well-known in the field of English language teaching had his first book proposal rejected by a prominent publisher in the field and instead published by Yale University Press in 2002. Around that time, he received the following comment from a leading US scholar at the booth of a major publisher during a conference: 'It's a good thing that you went to Yale. Mainstream publishers like this one wouldn't have published your book' (p. 67).

My story is very similar. I coedited a book entitled as *Demystifying Career Paths after Graduate School: A Guide for Second Language Professionals in Higher Education* with Yilin Sun. The book provides graduate students and novice scholars with practical suggestions for navigating their professional lives. The coeditor is a distinguished practitioner in the field.

Our proposal was rejected by one prominent publisher. We then approached another major publisher that had published a book with related contents before. Our proposal was rejected. One reason provided was that edited volumes performed poorly, and thus only one was signed per year. Later, I looked at this publisher's book catalog to see whose work was being published. Very few obviously Asian names were found, and I found no books written or edited

by one or more people with Asian names. Perhaps, a book cover with 'Editors: Ryuko Kubota and Yilin Sun' would not look attractive from the publisher's point of view, on top of a potential concern about text quality because most contributors were nonnative English-speaking professionals (even though many were experienced in publishing). All of this is of course a speculation, but Kumaravadivelu's experience endorses its plausibility. Recently, more authors with non-Western names are publishing academic books in our field, so the situation might be improving. It is also problematic to assume a direct association between name and race/ethnicity. But I still wonder what would have happened if our names (and our racial backgrounds) had been compatible with the mainstream knowledge production system.

The book was eventually published by Information Age Publishing in a series edited by Terry A. Osborn, who is a scholar in critical language education and strongly supported our project.

## 6. RACE, LOCATION, AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

From these episodes, we see how the perceived legitimacy of knowledge is linked to the location of knowledge production. Knowledge inclusion/exclusion works geographically, signifying the West and the non-West, which also indexes whiteness and nonwhiteness. In this sense, epistemological racism, as seen in the first and second episodes, is partly symbolic. In addition, the legitimacy of the knowledge is linked to the knowledge producer's racial background along with the location, as in the second and third episodes.

Topics arising from non-Euro-American locations are often viewed as less important or legitimate. This also explains part of my ongoing struggle at a North American university to obtain funding for research projects related to Asian contexts. Likewise, international students from Asia in my graduate program seem to be discouraged from conducting research on their own countries, especially if they are seeking research funding. This is despite the fact that, to take international students from China studying in Canada as an example, the population of their home country is almost 40 times larger than that of Canada. The perceived (il)legitimacy of knowledge is compounded by the dominance of English in academe, which also implies whiteness in colonialist ideology. Lillis and Curry (2010) documented how non-Anglophone scholars in Europe struggle to publish their research about their country of residence in major Anglophone-centered *international* academic journals because their scholarship is perceived as parochial, or not *international* enough, similar to the situation in my first episode. Although these scholars may identify as white and may experience white privilege, their locality and language index symbolic nonwhiteness.

These difficulties are not just about knowledge and its location. They are linked to the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the scholars as well, as speculated in the second episode. Of course, an author's racial and ethnic background is not always transparent in written communication. Nonnative

speakers/writers is another indication of one's background. Although there have been increased academic publications by nonnative English writers in various disciplines, as argued by Hyland (2016), this does not erase the privilege of native speakers of English, nor does it override the persistent gender and racial discrimination in our broader society (Politzer-Ahles *et al.* 2016).

In addition, race or ethnicity evoked by individual names may significantly affect professional opportunities. Experiments conducted in the USA, Canada, and Australia on the relationship between job applicants' names on their curriculum vitae and the callback rates from employers for interviews all demonstrate disadvantages for non-European ethnic names (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Oreopoulos 2011; Booth *et al.* 2012). Such prejudice may have affected my experience in the third episode.

These examples demonstrate the troubled relationship between race, location, and knowledge, which leads to privileging white Euro-American-centric knowledge and scholars in the Global North while marginalizing the other. Yet, we need to more closely examine the hegemonic nature of this knowledge as well as knowledge production by considering the complicity of the other.

## 7. WHITE EUROCENTRIC KNOWLEDGE AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON SCHOLARS OF COLOR

White Eurocentrism in our knowledge system has been problematized from the perspectives of various racialized groups, including African people in the global diaspora and indigenous people (e.g. Joseph 1988; Collins 2000; Battiste and Henderson 2011; Smith 2012). In postcolonial studies, it has been critiqued as an ideology and mechanism that positions white European knowledge and subjects as superior to others (Said 1978; Spivak 1988; Mignolo 2000; Alatas 2006; de Sousa Santos 2014; Loomba 2015). Critics argue that white Euro-American values, beliefs, and worldviews, including individualism, meritocracy, progress, and so on, have dominated the rest of the world through colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and neocolonialism, negatively affecting nonwhite groups socially, culturally, economically, and psychologically.

The psychological impact of whiteness on people is especially significant. Various authors of color have revealed the ways in which whiteness psychologically influences people of color in understanding the self, the other, and the world. The notions of *civilizational racism* and *epistemological racism* in fact parallel what Franz Fanon calls 'cultural imposition' (Fanon 1967: 192). Fanon, a postcolonial black Antillean intellectual, argued that cultural imposition forces black people to identify themselves with whiteness—not only physical whiteness but also the white ways of viewing themselves and the world. This overlaps with W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of 'double consciousness',

a sense of 'always looking at one's self through the eyes of others' (Du Bois 2003: 9).

In the context of the USA, Asante and Hall (2016) argue that a desire for whiteness is reflected in today's black conservatism. Drawing on a speech delivered by Malcolm X in 1963, the authors shed light on a historical hierarchy among African slaves by employing the terms *house Negroes* and *field Negroes* to discuss socioeconomic, psychological, and political differences between them. Although both groups were enslaved, house Negroes were trusted enough to work in the white master's house, whereas field Negroes worked in the field and shops. Asante and Hall argue that the current black conservatives, who represent a minority compared to black liberals, carry the legacy of house Negroes. The house Negroes, who lived closer to their white masters, developed more affinity with the white culture and appreciated white literature, art, and music, as well as white values, such as individualism and meritocracy. Instead of respecting black heritage, culture, and values, they rejected them and even loathed their own people.

We can draw a parallel between house Negroes versus field Negroes and Antonio Gramsci's notion of traditional intellectuals versus organic intellectuals as discussed by Kumaravadivelu (2016). Discussing the advocacy movement for nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in the field of TESOL, Kumaravadivelu argues that despite a quarter-century effort to raise the status of NNESTs, very little change has taken place. Referring to Gramsci (1971), he draws a distinction between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. While the former support and maintain the existing hegemonic knowledge systems, the latter strive to make a change by seeking a synergy between theory and practice. For Kumaravadivelu, NNEST scholars in TESOL who continue to depend on center-based knowledge systems with a self-colonized mentality are traditional intellectuals. He calls for 'result-oriented action' (p. 66) to bring about epistemic decolonization. Certainly, not all NNESTs are people of color. However, the fact that many of them are suggests the importance of his call.

In these discussions, we need to turn our critical lens away from the white masters/colonizers who dominate the knowledge systems, and instead look into ourselves. We must scrutinize our complicity with white hegemonic knowledge—mainstream theories and methodologies—in our academic activities, including teaching, conducting research, writing, mentoring, and doing service for the university and professional communities. The epistemological hegemony of white Euro-American centrism often compels many of us to believe that the white Euro-American knowledge system is normal and natural. Thus, we try to mold our ways of thinking into this framework. The racial/ethnic/gender/linguistic biases that exist in our academic activities, as implied in the three episodes, further compels us to conform to the white hegemonic system to increase our perceived legitimacy. In other words, we strive to become white in our thinking and doing. However, continuing to seek membership in the white Euro-American club of knowledge would simply

reinforce the existing unequal system and hierarchy; it will not transform the oppressive status quo. Moreover, as more male professionals of color are joining this club under the current neoliberal impetus to produce more for competition, women intellectuals of color often get exploited, marginalized, or ignored, further becoming pigeon-holed as gendered and racialized subalterns in academe. I will return to this problem later.

## 8. ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGE AND THE PERIL OF ESSENTIALISM

Scholars from various disciplines who critiqued the hegemony of white Euro-American academic knowledge have explored how it can be decolonized and replaced with alternative knowledge (e.g. Mignolo 2000; Alatas 2006; de Sousa Santos 2014). Connell (2007, 2014a) proposes *southern theory* as an umbrella term to signify an epistemological orientation that stands in opposition to Eurocentric knowledge. Southern theory draws on postcolonial and indigenous perspectives and engages in alternative knowledge preservation, production, reconstruction, and application while continuing to critique the hegemony of northern theory. In the USA and Canada, the injury of slavery and antiblack racism is to be recovered by Afrocentric education, which honors the history, culture, and values of people of African lineage to develop greater cultural identity and self-esteem (Shockley and Frederick 2009). In Asia, concepts such as Asia as method (Chen 2010), provincializing Europe (Chakrabarty 2000), and alternative discourses for social science (Alatas 2006) invite scholars to center Asian perspectives to understand Asia and de-universalize the knowledge of the West. Educational research has also engaged in this discussion (Park 2017; Lim and Apple 2018). In the field of teaching English, scholars have problematized the effectiveness of West-centered pedagogical practices in non-Western countries (e.g. Canagarajah 1999; Hu 2005; Chowdhury and Phan 2008; Phan 2008), while the field of world Englishes has sought alternative national forms of English.

Although this type of group-centric collective view certainly promotes epistemological resistance and renewal, there is a risk of essentialism. For instance, in communication studies, there has been a trend of promoting various ethno-centered paradigms against Eurocentrism in research on communication (e.g. Afrocentrism, Asiacentrism, Native American centrism, Pacific Islands centrism—see Kuo and Chew 2011). However, this approach risks falling into Orientalist self-essentialism without addressing the real nature and complexity of the newly conceptualized cultures and traditions that are supposedly rescued from Westernization (Wang 2011). In examining transnational education, Phan (2017) argues that scholarly discussions on the rise of Asia actually reproduce the West-Asia dichotomy, while overlooking Asia's complex desire for the West as seen in the growing English-medium programs in Asia, Middle East, and Africa. Indeed, underlying today's English dominance in language

education is the contradictory existence of Orientalist and Occidentalists' desires in the non-Western world.

Another problem of valorizing collectivity is its complicity with the rise of right-wing political movements around the world. Loomba (2015) problematizes state nationalism in postcolonial politics in various parts of the world, which reclaims ethnic and racial unity on the one hand, while strengthening religious fundamentalism, undermining the women's movement and caste- and class-based resistance on the other. Fundamentalist politics are coopted even by some women and other oppressed people, making them active supporters of repressive values and policies. As we saw in the case of house Negroes, the social status of racial or other minorities does not necessarily lend itself to resisting oppression; rather, minoritized people can actually become supporters of oppression.

## 9. CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY ON RACE, GENDER, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

However, there are efforts to resist essentialist and oppressive ways of creating a group identity. From a Maori perspective, Smith (2012) proposes an indigenous research agenda by focusing on survival, recovery, development, and self-determination. They intersect with four directional processes: decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization. These principles do not promote essentialist cultural beliefs that impose certain ways of thinking; rather, they provide a tool for achieving an ongoing process of liberation, autonomy, and critical reflexivity. Black feminists in North America have illuminated intersectionality in systems of racial oppression and developed black women's epistemology. Henry (2006: 347) combines black feminist epistemologies promoted by Joseph (1988) and Collins (2000) and lists the following principles: '(a) the use of dialog in assessing knowledge claims, (b) the centrality of personal expressiveness, (c) the ethics of personal accountability, and (d) concrete experience as a criterion of meaning'. These principles resist male dominance within the racialized group.

Male dominance indeed intersects with the hegemony of white Euro-American knowledge. If we shift our focus to global contexts, then we can almost universally observe male dominance in society. In many countries in the world, the selection and description of historical events and cultural references seen in academic and public discourses typically reflect the perspectives of the ruling-class men from the racially and ethnically dominant group of those nations. This defines and legitimates the ways in which history and culture are conceptualized. Male dominance is observed even in postcolonial resistance against Eurocentrism. For example, the decolonial advocacy of de Sousa Santos (2014) is criticized by Connell (2014b) for its overrepresentation of the ideas produced by male scholars of the Left. Loomba (2015) points out that the psychoanalysis of the colonized by Fanon (1967) dismisses both black

and white women, leaving them in the darkness of oppression. Subaltern women—women from minoritized racial/ethnic/linguistic backgrounds—tend to be left invisible in patriarchal systems of power. In applied linguistics, as more male scholars of color participate in knowledge production, critical reflexivity on the potential peril of gender inequalities needs to be exercised.

Critical reflexivity is closely related to ethics. With regard to ‘the ethics of personal accountability’ as one of the above-listed principles of black feminist epistemology, Collins (2000) offers an example. In a class discussion on a prominent black male scholar’s analysis of black feminism, students wanted to examine the author’s personal biography to validate the knowledge presented in the text. In this process,

They used this information to assess whether he really cared about his topic and drew on this ethics of caring in advancing their knowledge claims about his work. Furthermore, they refused to evaluate the rationality of his written ideas without some indication of his personal credibility as an ethical human being. The entire exchange could only have occurred as a dialogue among members of a group that had established a solid enough community to employ an alternative epistemology in assessing knowledge claims. (Collins 2000: 265–266)

This indicates that male scholars of color, or any scholars for that matter, are held accountable for their ethics of personal commitment and ‘result-oriented action’ in promoting alternative antioppressive epistemology. Critical reflexivity for ethical engagement is essential to epistemological antiracism.

## 10. ENACTING EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANTIRACISM IN ACADEMIC WORK: RETHINKING CITATION PRACTICES

Drawing on Spivak (1988), Loomba (2015) suggests that intellectuals engage in two tasks: a philosophical skepticism for recovering the agency of subjugated people and a political commitment to uncover the position of the marginalized. These tasks are consistent with ethical commitment to equity and social justice. Critical applied linguists must continue to remain skeptical of traditional knowledge with epistemological tools that question power and ideologies. Traditional applied linguists should also embrace this ethical vision. At the same time, we must also *enact* epistemological antiracism in our academic activities. What can we actually do to contest epistemological racism in academe?

First, we need to validate alternative worldviews and marginalized voices that challenge white Euro-American knowledge in our scholarship. A question to explore is what alternative conceptualizations and descriptions are possible regarding language use, acquisition, learning, teaching, and other topics within our field. In validating such alternative views, we should be cautious of essentialism that ignores the diversity of people’s identities, experiences, and

social statuses as well as the risk of creating yet another academic patriarchy. The aim should be to collectively contest the oppressive ways in which hegemonic knowledge undermines racialized and oppressed people and to legitimate different ways of knowing.

Second, to achieve this goal, we need to become critically aware of our own academic practices. One significant practice to scrutinize is the ways we refer to academic ideas produced by others. We must ask: whose words and ideas should I borrow? Who do I cite in my writing? Why? What are the consequences? Should I cite, for example, a prominent European scholar on post-humanism, whose ideas closely resonate with indigenous worldviews of nature, land, and animals, and yet who gives no credit to indigenous scholarship (Todd 2016)? Should I cite well-known scholars, who do not demonstrate their ethics of personal accountability, regardless of their race or gender? If I do, will I become complicit with academic colonization and oppression?

Here, I do not necessarily want to support the idea that words exclusively belong to the speakers and writers. A postmodern perspective would contend that words no longer belong to the author but rather exist in discourse (Pennycook 1996), which in turn implies that the author's personal ethical accountability is dissolved in the discursive field—we are simply referring to or borrowing ideas. Yet, our white Euro-American knowledge system compels us to cite well-known white (or brown or black) scholars with Eurocentric epistemologies to show the legitimacy of our academic work. The same can be said about citing well-known male scholars regardless of their epistemological positions. This practice perpetuates institutional racism and sexism, since the academic merit of individual scholars is often measured by citation records, and highly cited scholars are likely to receive more honors, recognitions, and professional opportunities. Here, we see how epistemological racism/sexism is connected to institutional inequalities. Even though the author may have disappeared in the postmodern discursive field, they are alive and well in the colonial, neocolonial, neoliberal material world.

Moreover, if any male (or female) scholars with white Euro-American epistemologies (or even anti-Eurocentric ones) ignore or belittle indigenous or woman scholars of color, why should we continue to mention their work? My black female colleague once revealed to me that a well-published black male scholar 'stole' some of her work. A similar injury was felt by Todd (2016) as an indigenous scholar when listening to a white scholar's lecture on posthumanism.

We should start asking ourselves: why do I cite this scholar but not racialized women? What does this citation do to my epistemological stance in relation to race, gender, nationality, culture, and so on? How does this citation influence the overall status of subaltern scholars? How can I reconcile the practical need to get my work accepted with the promotion of antiracist and antisexist causes? These questions should also be explored with our students.

Finally, to create a less oppressive and more liberated epistemological space, all scholars, including subalterns, need to stay critically self-reflexive. It is necessary for us to reflect on whether there is coherence between what we write/



speak and how we treat students, colleagues, and audiences in our daily interactions and academic work. As Collins (2000: 265) argues, 'Knowledge claims made by individuals respected for their moral and ethical connections to their ideas will carry more weight than those offered by less respected figures'.

## 11. CONCLUSION

Epistemological racism in academe is not isolated from individual and institutional racism. All three forms of racism are intertwined, producing, and sustaining the system of domination and marginalization of ideas, systems, and people. What we see and hear in books, journals, or conferences are the results of the decisions to accept or reject certain ideas produced by real people. These decisions made by authors, presenters, reviewers, and editors affect how many male or female scholars or white, black, indigenous, Asian, and Latinx scholars appear in publication titles and conference programs. This ultimately influences the racial and gender diversity of faculty members in higher education.

Many women scholars of color from non-Euro-American backgrounds become invisible in this scene. When one of us is cited by a well-known white male scholar, it is sometimes even treated as a nice surprise. This happened to me in my casual conversation with a colleague, who mentioned, 'I was reading A's article the other day and I noticed that he cited you!' It is indeed a great honor that I was cited by A, who is a distinguished scholar. I also appreciate a few other prominent white male scholars' regular citations of women scholars of color in our field. But this comment reflects a subtle nuance of epistemological racism, which makes it extraordinary for a white male scholar to cite the work of a NNES woman scholar of color. The fact that this comment has stuck in my memory with a subtle feeling of hurt indicates a trace of microaggression, which was obviously not intentionally inflicted in this case but was a reflection of deeply ingrained epistemological racism.

To transform the status quo, all scholars—racial majority and minority, men and women—must raise their awareness of where they stand in the intersection of racial and gender hierarchies and critically reflect on our academic activities. This includes even the small activity of deciding who to cite, which ultimately affects the epistemological diversity of race, gender, and culture in our scholarly work and influences institutional diversity. We should continue to investigate and critique the discursive and institutional mechanism of racism, but we should also enact antiracist practices in our knowledge production. At the same time, we as intellectuals must be cautious of the rising nationalism in various parts of the world and critically reflect on whether a southern theory we want to support will be consistent with the ethnical and emancipatory ideal for men and women of all racialized groups. Lastly, as intellectuals committed to epistemological antiracism and antisexism, we must continue to walk the talk.

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