Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Native-Speakerism: Reconsidering Multilingual Education with Ryuko Kubota

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Huseyin Uysal conducted the current virtual interview with Ryuko Kubota on January 19, 2024. In this conversation, Kubota discusses her recent work focusing on knowledge mobilization in the realm of multilingual education and shares insights from a study on experiences of racism among graduate students and faculty members, transforming the findings into animation videos. Kubota also addresses challenges in shifting away from deficit-based thinking, highlighting her commitment to not correcting students' language use. She delves into the impact of ideologies around native-speakerism and race on educators and suggests the need for global awareness in addressing linguistic biases. Finally, Kubota advocates for collaborative efforts, citing her department's antiracist caucusing meetings as transformative in fostering solidarity and raising awareness.

Keywords: language ideology; monolingualism; multilingualism; native-speakerism; raciolinguistics

1. INTERVIEW

Huseyin: Can you provide an overview of the recent research related to equity and fairness in multilingual education, specifically addressing deficit-based thinking about learners of English?

Ryuko: Thank you for the question. I have been interested in the relationship between race and language learning and teaching. The most recent work that I have been

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focusing on is knowledge mobilization. Instead of doing traditional research only by collecting data, interviewing students, teachers, and so forth, I have been creating some materials for teachers, students, and others. My hope is that these materials will raise their awareness about linguistic diversity and the link between language and race. Ultimately, I hope they will become aware of the importance of intersectional justice.

One of the studies on which I collaborated with my colleague and graduate students investigated the experiences of racism among graduate students and faculty members of color. We interviewed them about their experiences of studying or teaching at an institution of higher education in Canada. We published it as an article called "Your English is so good: Linguistic experiences of racialized students and instructors of a Canadian university" in *Ethnicities* last year (Kubota et al., 2023). In this article, we focused on raciolinguistic biases and what these participants experienced. Based on that, I worked with my colleague and other graduate students to create animation videos by drawing on research-based theater. It is an approach for collecting data for research and disseminating the findings through the method of theater. Based on the interview accounts, we created composite characters, developed two episodes, and generated audio recordings. We then asked a student with expertise to develop animation videos. Earlier, we thought about simply creating a short drama script for a reader's theater and video recording a performance, but we realize that casting would be challenging since it would be necessary to match the racial and linguistic backgrounds for these characters in order to make the story realistic. So, we opted for animation videos. But first, I developed the scripts with a graduate student with expertise in research-based theater. We recruited six students on campus who speak with specific accents, and they went through a short training of reading the script. We recorded their reading performance, and the recording was used for the animation. We are in the process of disseminating the videos. We hope to use them during faculty meetings to raise our colleagues' awareness. The videos are publicly accessible on YouTube and our project website (Raciolinguistics UBC, 2023). They can be used by anyone for educational or staff training purposes. In this project, we turned our research into public scholarship.

Huseyin: Can you discuss any challenges or resistance you have encountered in promoting a shift away from deficit-based thinking and monoglossic approaches in teaching ELs? How have you navigated or overcome these challenges?

Ryuko: Nowadays the concept of translanguaging has become quite popular. A lot of language educators and researchers embrace the idea of multilingualism, translanguaging, plurilingualism, and they are moving away from the deficit and monoglossic orientation, in theory. They try to promote that in their publications and presentations. Some of those researchers and teacher educators may talk about pluricentric principles of language in their classrooms to teacher candidates or graduate students. But when it comes to practice, challenges come in. How do we practice translanguaging or how much do we allow students to translanguage? How do we

practice multilingualism? For example, I have been increasingly discouraged and frustrated by being corrected when I write in English because it is my second language. I have been in this field for more than 30 years and I have done a lot of publishing. But I still feel that English is my second language, although some people do not like to use the term "second language" or "nonnative" speaker or writer. My "native" language is Japanese, and I am a "native" speaker or writer of Japanese, but the terms like "native speaker" or "nonnative speaker" are often avoided from a perspective of translanguaging. But Japanese is what I grew up in for years. I completed my primary, secondary, and tertiary education in Japanese monolingually, so I still use those terms. Why? Because they signify my identity.

When I write in English for publication in particular, I always send my manuscript to a proofreader. Oftentimes, I receive a lot of lexical and grammatical feedback. Sometimes I make obvious mistakes like grammar, punctuation, and lexicon, so the proofreader's feedback is helpful. But most of the feedback is about stylistics, like personal choice. So, when I go through the feedback, I spend a lot of time choosing what to accept and what not to accept. At the same time, I get really discouraged. I do not know how you feel when you write, but I feel like my own voice is seen deficient. I felt the same way when I wrote in Japanese the other day. It was a very short thought piece, just one page, for The English Teachers' Magazine published in Japan (Kubota, 2024). The proofreader of the publisher corrected my Japanese. There were a couple of errors that needed to be corrected, so I appreciated the corrections. But, again, it is about personal preference and stylistic alterations. When I think about translanguaging and multilingualism and the concept that there is no boundary between languages and we need to respect students' right to their own language, it seems to me that this is just talking the talk. That is a struggle, a challenge that I find. So, what I try to do these days is to walk the talk. I try not to correct my students' writing except for obvious errors. As long as I understand what they are saying, their voice should be respected. That is something that I have been thinking about these days.

Moving forward, our challenge—not just my challenge, but the challenge to the field and scholars and teachers who embrace those notions—is to answer questions like: How do we actually make changes in our daily practice, not just by talking about those concepts? How do we actually practice it? Even if we actually put it into practice, we still need to change the system, too. In reality, for testing and assessment, and for publications, there are some expectations imposed by teachers, organizations, publishers, and editors. Working against these expectations involves systemic issues--it is sort of like systemic or institutional racism that goes beyond interpersonal racism. You have to change the system and the structure in order to achieve antiracism. Similarly, to establish translingual equity or plurilingualism, we need to intentionally address these structural barriers.

Huseyin: How does the intersection of ideologies around native-speakerism and race influence the teaching practices of educators working with students classified as ELs? What changes or reforms do we need to better address these intersecting ideologies and their impact on the educational experiences of ELs?

Ryuko: Thanks to many scholars like Suhanthie Motha, Jonathan Rosa, Nelson Flores, and others, the concept of raciolinguistic biases, ideologies, and issues of antiracism and language education have penetrated academic discourse these days. I think liberal-minded scholars embraced that, but we still need to answer the question: How do we put that into practice? Racism and linguicism are pervasive, and we really need to address these problems every day in our practice. And, it is also a systemic problem, as I mentioned earlier. I think the question is: First of all, how do we raise teachers' awareness more? In North America, a lot of teachers are now aware of these issues. But when you step out of North America and visit EFL contexts, teachers are still influenced by native-speakerism and raciolinguistic ideologies.

Many people in EFL context still believe that native-English-speakers are White people. I think we need to do a lot more research and knowledge mobilization for teachers, scholars, parents, administrators, and students, and continue to do that within North America, since there are many international students, as well as outside of North America. At the same time, we need to be aware of the diversity of these ideas and ideologies. For example, the current antiracist movement in society and academia is rooted in Western thinking, especially influence by the "Black Lives Matter" movement in the United States. This kind of justice-oriented idea tends to reflect Western ideals. But when you go to different parts of the world, there are different understandings and interpretations of these justice-oriented ideas, even antiracism.

Feminism is a good example too. Issues of women's rights or women's identity and how women are treated or should be treated are different in different societies, even though women's rights are part of fundamental human rights and ought to be respected. For example, Roslyn Appleby wrote about a crash in gender expectations between white Australian female teachers of English and their male students in East Timor (Appleby, 2009). Social expectations can be very different in different parts of the world. Also, queer issues can be interpreted differently too. For example, in some countries, homosexuality is illegal and punished. You may even lose your life. Queer theory or queer pedagogy has drawn increased attention in our field since Cynthia Nelson introduced queer theory to ESL teaching more than two decades ago. But we know there are contextual limits to the application of the concept.

Antiracism is similar. Working against racism to establish racial equality should be a universal mission, but how race and antiracism are understood is different in different parts of the world. I came across the concept of multiracism proposed by Bonnett (2022), which pluralizes the understanding of racism. It is necessary to diversify our ideas of social justice.

Racism is typically easy for people to understand that it is a disgraceful idea, although there are deniers like Ron DeSantis, who said the other day that there is no racism in the United States. But it is a matter of fact that racism does exist, and it stems from Black slavery and settler colonialism. In contrast, linguicism or language discrimination is something that many people are not really aware of. For non-native speakers or non-standard language speakers, linguistic discrimination is real. But for other people, it is so easy to dismiss. So, people just assume that speaking like a native-speaker is the norm and whoever speaking with an accent is abnormal or deficient. So that is something that we still need to work on. We need to raise more people's awareness of linguistic biases. As I said, racism is more visible, and many people are careful. But many people do not notice linguicism. This is also relevant to both oral language and written language. Of course, accents that people hear tend to be linked to perceived racial background of the speaker too, as Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa pointed out.

The research on reverse linguistic stereotyping by Okim Kang and Donald Rubin is also helpful in this sense. When people look at a white person speaking in standard English and look at people like you and me speaking in the same standard English, people will hear more non-standard accent from us even though they are listening to the same speech. Just like racism is social injustice, linguistic discrimination is also social injustice. So, this kind of bias is something that we need to continue to draw people's attention to through research and public scholarship.

Huseyin: From your perspective, what role can collaboration between researchers, educators, and policymakers play in fostering positive change in ESL and Bilingual Education programs and literacy teaching to challenge traditional deficit-based thinking and promote positive educational outcomes for ELs?

Ryuko: Maybe some other people who have actually worked collaboratively with school administrators or policy makers can answer that question better. But let me talk about the community work in our department that I have been involved in. We started to hold antiracist caucuses meetings inspired by a guest lecture given by Manka Varghese at the University of Washington. She visited us several years ago and introduced the activity called antiracist caucusing (JustLead Washington, 2019). We adopted this in our department, and we have had a monthly meeting. It is based on voluntary participation, so anybody is welcome, including undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and staff. Typically, 10 to 15 members gather and discuss a monthly theme about antiracism.

During the meeting, we divide the whole group into two: the IBPOC (Indigenous Black, and People of Color) group and the white group. Then, we discuss the monthly topic within each group. That would provide you with safe space. Oftentimes, people of color feel uncomfortable to talk about race-related issues in front of white colleagues. White colleagues need to discuss these issues and engage with the theme in their own group

without relying on the people of color to teach them. We have been doing this for more than four years, and it has been really transformative in terms of learning, raising awareness, and building solidarity. One of the department heads in our Faculty of Education was interested and attended these meetings. So, antiracist caucuses create a great opportunity to invite administrators as well. I think this kind of community activity would be really useful for discussing social justice issues and building solidarity among us. One of the regular participants is a faculty member who teaches courses on language and literacy teacher education, and she has mobilized teacher candidates and teachers to adopt the idea. I hope teachers and teacher educators will promote this type of community engagement for justice-affirming practice.

THE AUTHORS

Huseyin Uysal, currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Knox College, obtained his PhD degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in ESOL/Bilingual Education from the University of Florida. His research interests include fairness, justice, and equity in language assessment, and plurilingualism at public schools. He is serving as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Education for Multilingualism*.

Ryuko Kubota, a Professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia, holds a PhD from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Specializing in critical applied linguistics, her research centers on culture, multiculturalism, written discourse, race, and critical pedagogy. Her contributions have been published in reputable journals such as *Applied Linguistics*, *TESOL Quarterly*, *World Englishes*, and various edited books. She served as the 2023-2024 First Vice President and Conference Chair of the American Association for Applied Linguistics.

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