**Current Trends: Post-Critical Pedagogy, Plurlingualism, New Materialism, Deleuze and the Notion of the Native Speaker**

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**Post-Critical Pedagogy**

Since the 1970 publication of The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, most academics and practitioners in education claiming to have a progressive orientation have called themselves Critical theorists. However, Critical theory has long been a very loosely defined field (Quantz, 1992) that refers to "a whole range of theories which take a critical view of society and the human sciences or which seek to explain the emergence of their objects of knowledge" (Macey, 2000; p. 74). This “critical view” has often been described as being in opposition to, or at least qualitatively different from, mainstream educational discourse (Sedgwick & Edgar, 2002; McLaren, 2001). As part of this oppositional stance, educators using this approach have usually emphasized that their work is designed to benefit the people they teach and study (Densin & Lincoln, 2000).

The work of Pablo Freire is often cited as the ‘fountain-head’ of critical pedagogy (Giraud, 2010; Simon, 1997). According to Luke (2004), Freire’s work blended Hegelian dialects, Marxist materialism, Dewey's aesthetics and Christian existentialism. The explicit influence of Christianity was new to critical theory, and was characterized by "the recollection and recovery of the self, with a focus on the ethics of care in the face of physical and symbolic violence" (p. 23). As Luke puts it, even though such figures as Young, Bernstein and Bourdieu were developing similar sensibilities in the field of critical scholarship, Freire’s unique language "spoke more directly to the psychic memory and bodily experience of Other" (p. 22).

Freire extrapolates on the relationships between ideology, alienation and the physical forms of oppression, places great value on the role played by intellectuals and is highly critical of sectarianism. What I find especially valuable in Freire’s thought is his stress on the importance of problem solving as a key element in the construction of knowledge. This emphasis is closely related to his criticisms of what he called the banking model of education, the conception that learners are empty vessels into which knowledge is poured (not unlike Descartes’s tabula rasa). In Freire’s pedagogy, on the other hand, learning is part of the construction of knowledge and is closely related to how people interact with their environment to solve problems and complete tasks. These tasks are not for their own sake of course. As Luke puts it, Freire’s legacy means that these tasks must be activist critiques of civil society, political economy, and the human psychology of struggle and oppression.

However, in recent years some have argued that there has been a malaise at the heart of CP. In a Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy (2017), Naomi Hodgson, Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski summarised this malaise in the following way:

Education is, in a very practical sense, predicated on hope. In “traditional” critical pedagogy, however, this hope of emancipation rests on the very regime of inequality it seeks to overcome, in three particular ways: 1. It enacts a kind of hermeneutical pedagogy: the educator assumes the other to lack the means to understand that they are chained by their way of seeing the world. The educator positions herself as external to such a condition, but must criticize the present and set the unenlightened free (cf. Plato’s cave). 2. In reality this comes down to reaffirming one’s own superior position, and thus to reinstalling a regime of inequality. There is no real break with the status quo. 3. Moreover, the external point of view from which the critical pedagogue speaks is through and through chained to the status quo, but in a merely negative way: the critic is driven by the passion of hate. In doing so, she or he surreptitiously sticks to what is and what shall always be. Judgmental and dialectical approaches testify to this negative attitude. (pp.17-18).

**Plurlingualism**

As an initial part of a new SSHRC-funded 4-year study, several colleagues and I conducted a literature review that examined the theoretical background pertaining to plurilingualism and explored its use in empirical studies within the Anglophone context from 2000 to 2020. An enhanced pre-print copy of the manuscript based upon this review can be viewed through the link in my reference list below (Fleming, et.al, 2013; Under Review).

In this manuscript, we summarize the dominant trends in conceptual and empirical work in the Anglophone academic literature that we feel are closely related to plurilingualism. We note that the previous trends within this literature bear many similarities to the notion of plurilingualism, especially in terms of the problematization of decontextualized and standardized orientations towards language. However, we argue that plurilingualism is not simply a matter of “old wine in new bottles”, in that the notion deepens these previous trends and adds valuable conceptual insights that we believe Anglophone teachers should bear in mind for their pedagogy. As a way of supporting this argument, we devote space to reviewing empirical studies focused on concrete classroom practice in this context. This is followed by a discussion of the implications in terms of teacher beliefs and education. In the last fifty years, Canadian governments have invested significant resources in second language education (SLE) education for the express purpose of enhancing the acquisition of the two official languages among the growing numbers of allophones (Stats-Canada, 2022). Given this increased social, cultural, and linguistic heterogeneity, scholars such as Ballinger, Lyster, Sterzuk and Genesee (2017) have questioned the usefulness of simple cross linguistic pedagogy within minority and majority language learning situations.

Plurilingualism has been defined as the recognition of “the existence of a complex or even composite competence [in language usage] on which the social actor may draw” (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 2009, 11). As such, plurilingualism “challenges the assumption of complete and balanced competence in [discrete] languages” and “highlights interculturality and the social nature of communicative competence” (Lau & Van Viegen, 2020, 12).

The implications to this shift in orientation towards language use are significant. As Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford and Lawrence (2021) note, a plurilingual perspective validates the real language use of those not deemed to be “native speakers”. Instead of regarding those employing non-standard varieties of language as suffering from deficits, this new orientation takes the position that those who do not conform to imposed and abstract language norms do not suffer from deformity. To express this orientation more positively, those with a command over concrete varied and integrated usage demonstrate that they have a highly developed set of language skills that go well beyond a narrow competence with imposed (and often artificial) standards. As such, plurilingualism implies that varied language use is a form of resistance to these norms, which are often used to reinforce (and even contribute to the production of) unequal power relations (Piccardo, 2018).

In classrooms in which a plurilingual orientation has been adopted, “teachers and students pursue an educational strategy of embracing and exploiting the linguistic diversity present in order to maximize communication and hence both subject learning and plurilingual/pluricultural awareness.” (Piccardo, 2018, p. 214). This is based on “understanding the complex socio-historical context in which students´ language practices are formed and practiced” (Ollerhead, Choi & French, 2018, p. 8).

To a certain extent, we note that it is true that the notion of plurilingualism does amount to being “old wine in new bottles”. However, we argue that there is some new wine in the notion, as well. As Flores (2013) has noted, that “there is a need for a more critical treatment of the concept of plurilingualism to avoid complicity with the promotion of a covert neoliberal agenda” (p.1). It might not be the panacea many might consider it to be, but it is clear to us that plurilingualism is concretely useful. The notion breaks with the common focus on long-antiquated grammar-based and structural orientations within Anglophone second language pedagogy.

**New Materialism**

“New Materialism” is a term originally coined in the 1990s by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin as a way of summarizing an orientation towards theory that deemphasizes several of the tenets found within previous Marxist-based approaches and emphasizes the influence on non-human entities on our understandings of the world and our place within it (Tuin & Dolphijn, 2012). By the beginning of the new century, this orientation had been identified as constituting a significant and growing movement within the physical sciences, technology and the social sciences of gender studies, media and the creative arts.

New Materialism is strongly differentiated from structuralism (and even post-structuralism to a certain extent) in that it moves away from dualism and an emphasis on language, texts and discourse to a focus on the materiality of the social and natural worlds. In Second Language Education, this approach has gained such popularity as to be referred to as “the material turn” within the field (Fox & Alldred, 2018).

As Fox and Alldred argue (2018), New Materialism considers “human bodies; other animate organisms; material things; spaces, places and the natural and built environment [including] gravity and time” (p.5). Human thought, memory and abstract notions are included in this consideration in terms of their material effects. It rejects as simplistic the dualisms found within (so-called) classical Marxism that were inherited from Descartes, Kant and Hegel. So, such concepts as identity, class structures, race, gender etc. are conceptualized within “New Materialism” as being much more complex than simple dualisms and subject to a multiplicity of complex forces, both human and non-human. Change is also thought of differently, now being conceptualized as non-linear, continuous and constantly becoming. Nothing is static or even composed or stages. Entities resist definitive definitions and are thus immanent: self-determined and important in so much as what they do. Individuals are shaped by the environment around them and never fully independent.

Harman (2017) succinctly summarizes the axioms of “New Materialism” thus:

* Everything is constantly changing;
* Everything occurs along continuous gradients rather than with distinct boundaries and cut off points;
* Everything is contingent;
* We must focus on actions/verbs rather than on substances/nouns;
* Things are generated in our practices and therefore lack any prior essence;
* What a thing does is more interesting than what it is;
* Thought and the world never exist separately, and therefore ‘intra-act’ rather than interact;
* Things are multiple rather than singular;
* The world is purely immanent and it’s a good thing because any transcendence would be oppressive. (p.145)

**The Deleuzian Critique of Structural Linguistics**

Deleuze, a contemporary of Foucault, Sartre, Derrida and de Beauvoir, was an influential French philosopher who wrote extensively on literature, film, and fine art. He died in 1995. Most notably in co-authorship with Felix Guatarri, he developed concepts derived from Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson into an orientation towards philosophy he called transcendental empiricism. In ways that foreshadowed what we now call “New Materialism”, he argued that experience is immanent and impossible to categorize along the lines dominant in Western philosophy since Descartes (or even the Greeks).

As a discipline, linguistics famously got its start with Saussure’s binary notions of langue and parole, a distinction between the ways in which we concretely use language and its formal/abstract nature. As Lecercle (2005) argues, there has been a subsequent privileging of langue in an attempt to create the “science” of linguistics. As a result, there has been what I would call a “fetishization” of standardized grammar and structural approaches to Second Language Education.

Deleuze and Guattari criticized mainstream (i.e., structural or transformational syntax-based) linguistics. They argued that this orientation towards linguistics has misrepresented language as being divorced from the serious consideration of a non-linguistic phenomenon. In other words, linguistics cannot realistically aspire to be a distinct scientifically-based discipline that examines a distinct phenomenon. Sentient human nature (and our use of language) is just too complex.

Deleuze argues that language is not a hierarchically organized and standardized set of biologically-derived rules that constitute statements of fact. Instead, language should be viewed as indelibly connected to other phenomena that always means more than what the speaker intends. In that sense, it has a material force that is historical and without clear boundaries. Individual languages are sets and sub-systems in constant flux and contention subject to ideologies and politics. Language use is thus highly complex: partially organized and partially chaotic (Deleuze 1969, 1990).

In their criticism, Deleuze and Guattari summarize the principles of mainstream linguistics as being:

* best done in ways that downplays any consideration of non-linguistic phenomenon: a scientifically-based discipline;
* concerned with a series of hierarchical functions based on representation and unfettered and transparent exchange of information: power relations, ideologies and politics have no bearing;
* concerned with language as an abstract and idealized system governed by sets of fixed rules that constitute a standard: the native speaker and universal grammar;
* concerned with language change as advancing in a series of stable states: languages evolve and are self-contained.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that language is better thought of instead as a series of materially-based heterogeneous “mots d’ordre”: slogans, which do a number of things. They represent complex phenomena in complex ways that are open to interpretation. The maker of slogans inherits a body of communication that they are not in full command of. In this sense, the author of a slogan (like the user of a language) is using a form that cannot convey the complexity of nuances that they would ideally like to convey. Slogans are also forms of commands/order in the sense that they project dominate structures of power. Language is thus a form of imperfect communication that contains inherited structures of power that the sender and received are not in complete control over. As Lecercle (2005) succinctly summarizes, language is a “sedimentation of rules, maxims, and meanings, in which the history of a culture is inscribed” (p. 53).

Deleuze (1969, 1990) continues in this vein by saying that language:

* is NOT a hierarchically organized and standardized set of biologically-derived rules that constitute statements of fact;
* is indelibly connected to other phenomena;
* always means more than what the speaker intends;
* has material force;
* are sets of sub-systems in constant flux and contention
* is historical (becoming);
* is partially organized and partially chaotic

The effort to “scientificize” linguistics has resulted in the discipline’s attempts at constructing a series of hierarchical functions based on what is conceived to be a largely unfettered transparent exchange of information. According to this orientation, the complexities of power relations, ideologies and politics have little bearing on linguistic phenomena. The disciplinary goal of linguistics is to conceive of language as an abstract and idealized system governed by sets of fixed rules that constitute standards. The supposed existence of the native speaker becomes part of bedrock of this mission.

Deleuze & Guattari argued that language is not a hierarchically organized and standardized set of biologically-derived rules that support the concept of universal standards associated with the notion of the native speaker. They emphasized the productivity of language rather than abstract notions about staid structures. Key to this understanding is their use of the notion of becoming.

May (2005) argues that becoming is a central concept within the Deleuzian oeuvre because it is explicitly set against being and identity, central notions within the tradition of western philosophy since the Greeks (whether it be the essential forms of Plato or the categories of Aristotle). Instead of putting the focus on a linear movement from one stable state to another, becoming emphasizes the instability of these states and, in addition, the unpredictability of the multiple movements between them (as opposed to the linearity found within how Kant’s dualism or Hegelian dialectics). In Deleuzian nomenclature, these movements are rhizomatic molar and molecular lines of flight between spaces. A state is continuality being deconstructed and reconstructed, or deterritorialized and reterritorialized into new forms of difference. The notion of becoming helps capture both the complexity of language and the multiplicity found within the teaching of language.

For Deleuze & Guatarri (1980, 2004: 2) “becoming is an immanent concept in the sense that change and difference develops out of these states themselves and not from some transcendent essence or standard imposed from above”. Becoming thus “proposes novel ontological commitments that exceptionally accommodate dynamic complex phenomena” (Weinbaum 2011: 2), and is particularly useful for the exploration of something as complex as language.

**Critiquing the “Native Speaker”**

First coined by Leonard Bloomfield in the 1930’s, the notion of the “native speaker” became a fundamental aspect of Chomsky’s transformational generative grammar. Chomsky argued that the existence of this notion is evidenced by the rapid first language development in children. It is part of our species’ biological inheritance. However, as Cook (1997) and Firth & Wagner (1997) later argued with the support of Halliday’s systemic functional model of linguistics, that the notion of the “native speaker” has set up an impossible and monolingual ideal that represents most speakers of English as deficient.

Even though some scholars, such as Reves & Medgyes (1994), have argued that native and non-native both have their place in second language teaching, Nuzhat Amin (2000) clearly documented that non-native teachers of English (such as herself) have been usually viewed as inferior to those considered native. Phillipson (1992) went even further by attacking the very notion as a fallacy which has led to a hierarchy within the profession closely linked to the discourse that English is owned by those born and raised within the linguistic mainstream of Anglo-American contexts (Norton 1997; Widdowson 1994).

The native speaker fallacy, which is still a pervasive notion in much of second language teaching, sets up a hierarchy in which so-called non-native speaking teachers are commonly subordinated (in terms of pay, status and working conditions). This notion encourages the use of highly paid foreign experts (who often have little training), standardized tests such as university entrance exams and reinforces neo-colonialism through its privileging of so-called first world accents and dialects. The notion of the native speaker is at the core of what Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) termed *linguicism*: the discrimination against minority groups based on language.

**Consequences for Applied Linguistics**

Stern (1983) once observed that applied linguistics has not been greatly influenced by potential insights about concrete teaching and curricular methods from general education theory. The disciplines of psychology and (more recently) sociology have added much to the field. As is implied by the nomenclature, however, linguistics has long held dominance over applied linguistics. The varieties of language and the people who use them are problematic for an aspiring scientifically-based discipline that is intent on examining a distinct phenomenon. Davies (2007: 65), in fact, has called this continued neglect of the concrete aspects of teaching within the field evidence of “the dead hand of linguistics”.

The issue Stern expressed concerns about years ago has not gone away. On a keynote stage at a major North American conference the author of this article attended two years ago, one eminent scholar (who shall remain nameless) argued that scholarship within applied linguistics should now take teachers and teaching methodology more into account. It seems strange that concerns which have long been commonplace in general education (at least since Dewey) now constitute a novel call in our field.

The impact of human agency on how we view reality (including the realities of teaching and learning language) contradicts universal and static models. This is true now even in the physical sciences (Feyerabend, 1993; Wilczek, 2021). Notions within applied linguistics that appeal to idealised standards, such as that of the native speaker, might persist in much of our practice (as Zhang & Li 2014 show), but these have slowly becoming more and more clearly antiquated in view of newer approaches to theory and practice (at least since Canagarajah, 2012).

**International Teachers: A Case Study**

English as an International Language.

The expansion and growth of English as an international language has increased the number of people around the world studying this language in different contexts and settings. There is a considerable body of research that has looked at this phenomenon using a decolonial lens (starting with Pennycook, 1998). This increment and interest in learning English has also increased the need to have instructors teach the language in foreign-language contexts. Due to a shortage of qualified English teachers and the need to improve the level of English in the public sector, governments are increasing their budgets in second language education through various initiatives such as participation in professional development courses abroad or visits by experts from western countries hired to teach local teachers in universities and schools in foreign countries (Danguo & Edwards 2014, Matear 2008, Zhou & Shang 2011).

In countries like China, English instruction has been dominated by a grammar form-focused pedagogy and the memorization of structures provided by the language teacher (Zhang & Li 2014). However, the Chinese government has recently launched a set of educational reforms designed to shift accepted models of pedagogy from traditional didactic and transmission approaches to those that are student-centered and based on critical thinking. In second language learning and teaching, the goal is to emphasize task-based project work (Danguo & Edwards 2013, Guo 2012).

In order to implement these new curricular innovations and to improve the standards of teaching and learning English, the China Scholarship Council sends teachers abroad for three months to take professional development courses in English speaking countries, such as Australia, the UK, New Zealand, and Canada (Danguo & Edwards 2014). Danguo & Edwards (2013) studied the impact of overseas training in the UK on the curriculum innovation and the teaching practices of a group of English teachers from Western China. Teachers reported the benefits of taking part in the course, such as awareness of the existence of new teaching methods, sharing what they learned with colleagues in their school contexts, and the implementation of activities that are more communicative in nature.

However, they also reported challenges at the moment of implementing curricular innovations as a result of taking professional development courses abroad. For instance, teachers experienced anxiety and uncertainty about how to implement what they had learned overseas in the face of established administrative structures and standardized testing.

The literature reports on the challenges of studying abroad but mainly from the point of view of Chinese graduate students rather than from the perspective of language teachers. Studying in a new country where a different language is spoken results in challenges experienced at different levels. For example, studies report on Chinese students experiencing language barrier and academic cultural shock after being exposed to different educational systems that are characterized by an interactive teaching approach and the expectation of students developing critical thinking skills (Liberman 1996, Lin 2006).

The study.

In 2018, one hundred English as a Second / Foreign Language (ESL / EFL) teachers from rural and remote areas in two Western Chinese provinces took part in a three-month professional development project at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa (Canada). The teachers worked on improving their communicative teaching practices and English language proficiency while living in Ottawa over the summer.

In setting up the project, the team believed that it was important to operationalize theoretical constructs, such as the communicative approach to second language teaching, in relationship to local contexts. Drawing on Kachru’s notion of the three circles of English, our goal was to develop a program that was context sensitive and critical of the Western models of pedagogy that have often viewed the varieties of English used in the so-called third world as substandard.

As an important part of the project, we consciously decided to counter the notion of the native speaker. As part of this goals, we drew upon multilingual faculty to represent the diversity of the Canadian linguistic landscape, explicitly critiqued the unidirectional dissemination of knowledge from (western) teacher to (peripheral) learner and designed our assignments so as to encourage the production of curricular material adapted to the unique linguistic needs and goals of the students these teachers faced. In addition, as was continually emphasized in the lecture content and workshop facilitation, the participants were encouraged to evaluate (the multiplicity of) dominant trends within current second language teaching theory and classroom practice so that they could determine for themselves the most useful approaches for their own teaching contexts.

As was shown in research findings conducted with the project’s participants after they returned to China (Fleming, 2000), the orientation we adopted made a difference. To cite one example: in contrast to the way in which the teachers had predominantly used commercial materials produced in English-dominant countries previously, the participants adopted activities and created materials that they felt could be applicable to their own situations.

Working with international teachers provides an opportunity to negotiate and collaborate on an equitable basis so as to address the global imbalance of power in second language education between the Centre and the Periphery. To do this in a decolonial manner necessitates problematizing the notion of the native speaker. Theoretically, this is supported by notions derived from New Materialism and Deleuzian theory. In a practical manner, this means adopted measures similar to ones described above.

**Conclusion**

Deleuze & Guattari argued that language is not a hierarchically organized and standardized set of biologically-derived rules that supports the concept of universal standards associated with the notion of the native speaker. They emphasized the productivity of language rather than abstract notions about staid structures. Key to this understanding is their use of the notion of becoming, which strikes at the heart of the native speaker fallacy.

As I have argued elsewhere (Fleming, 2019), for Deleuze & Guatarri (1980, 2004: 2) “becoming is an immanent concept in the sense that change and difference develops out of these states themselves and not from some transcendent essence or standard imposed from above” (p.2). Becoming thus “proposes novel ontological commitments that exceptionally accommodate dynamic complex phenomena” (Weinbaum 2011: 2), and is particularly useful for the exploration of something as complex as language.

May (2005) argues that becoming is a central concept within the Deleuzian oeuvre because it is explicitly set against being and identity, central notions within the tradition of western philosophy since the Greeks (whether it be the essential forms of Plato or the categories of Aristotle). Instead of putting the focus on a linear movement from one stable state to another, becoming emphasizes the instability of these states and, in addition, the unpredictability of the multiple movements between them (as opposed to the linearity found within how Kant’s dualism (1787, 1996) or Hegelian dialectics (Hegel, 1816, 1969) (as have commonly been interpreted). In Deleuzian nomenclature, these movements are rhizomatic molar and molecular lines of flight between spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980,1987). A state is continuality being deconstructed and reconstructed, or deterritorialized and reterritorialized into new forms of difference.

The native speaker fallacy depends on a static and biologically derived conceptualization of language. I argue that that the notion of becoming helps capture both the multiplicities of language and the teaching of language, which are far more complex (and interesting) than the dry attempt at the antiquated approach to science attempted in many studies found in current applied linguistics.

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