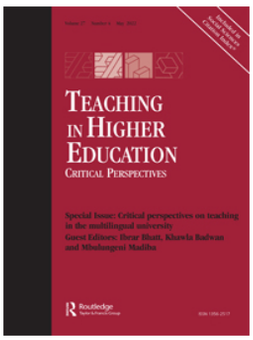

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EDITORIAL

Critical perspectives on teaching in the multilingual university

Higher education's 'Language Problem'

Globalisation, for which language is a pivotal instrument, is defined by Giddens (1990) as the 'intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities' (64). Though it is a contested terrain, of *globalisations* – from above and from below (Torres 2009), there are both negative and positive effects on any society. The globalisation of higher education has elevated the international status of colonial languages, such as English, to the status of a global academic lingua franca, with universities today both collaborating and competing on a worldwide scale in the pursuit of knowledge production. In many international contexts, English has emerged as the language of choice for those undertaking and offering university education, and, subsequently, has become not only a valuable commodity in the global economy (O'Regan 2021), but also a language associated with reproducing certain epistemological stances and worldviews (Santos 2014).

The imposition of a powerful language as a medium of instruction is far from a 'neutral' pedagogical decision. Rather, it is a profoundly political and cultural dilemma for people who are compelled to learn it and use it for teaching within higher education. Its imposition can also elicit sentiments of cultural erasure, occupation, and identity loss (Skuttnabb-Kangas et al. 2009), and lead to linguistic and cultural displacements (Phillipson 2017). Language, therefore, carries much more than communicative value. It creates mechanisms of *symbolic power* (see Badwan 2020), and can act as a tool for *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu 1991). This brings to the fore what we refer to in this editorial as higher education's 'Language Problem'.

To better understand the Language Problem, we must first understand how today's university activity is increasingly tied to a worldwide knowledge economy in a global marketplace which is dependent, in large part, on proficiency in English. Today, through globalisation, and the concomitant neoliberal governance of education, English as *lingua academica* is used in higher education not only by its so-called 'native speakers' but also across the world in inter-cultural and scholarly communication among peoples whose primary language is not English. The questions and dilemmas raised by the Language Problem in sites of tertiary education are both complex and diverse, and have brought an aggressive penetration of a global capitalist economy to most parts of the world.

Universities in the Global South are increasingly adopting neoliberal management strategies, research evaluation regimes, and models of English-Medium Instruction (EMI), all of which inherently require a certain set of anglophonic linguistic and cultural norms as part of effective governance, teaching and scholarly work. This hegemony is set in place by the 'monetized and symbolic capital' (O'Regan 2021, 184) of standard English, that works 'in dialectical combination with issues of race, gender, education and social class' (2021).

Higher education's complex Language Problem is about much more than the adoption of English as the language of teaching and university operations. During the last few decades,

many universities in the Global South have witnessed calls for multilingual approaches to education (Alexander 1989; wa Thiong'o 1994; Santos 2014; Mbembe 2016; Mayaba, Monwabisi, and Angu 2018). Those making these calls constitute loose coalitions of various anti-colonial or 'decolonial' movements that have been calling for approaches that value local knowledges – and languages – as a way forward for universities alongside the need for critical engagement with the imposed (colonial) orders of the past. They see in multilingual higher education an opportunity to promote local languages at university, improve social equality, and raise concerns about students and staff who are disadvantaged through English as a sole medium of instruction. Beliefs and ideas about how language ought to be used in higher education, as well as alternative possibilities for how language could be used (e.g. 'translingual' approaches), and frequently ends up being used (see Madiba 2018), are important fields of inquiry as multilingualism of some sort becomes a mainstay in today's universities. This applies to universities in both the Global North and South, as we argue below.

Language issues, apropos linguistic justice, multilingualism and the like, are absolutely central to decoloniality.[1] What is needed is a concerted and collective endeavour to not just understand how forms of multilingualism are pivotal in everyday teaching in higher education, but to also stimulate critical debate about the role of language in a way that crosses disciplinary boundaries and allows researchers in different contexts to learn from each other. This is one of the aims of this special issue.

English in higher education

Following the various 'social turns' in the social sciences and the humanities, researchers in applied linguistics also began to conceptualise the study of language and discourse as a much more qualitative form of social science inquiry than previously was the case (e.g. Gee 1991; Fairclough 1992; Coupland and Jaworski 1999). This trend, which continues till today, has resulted in the emergence of overlapping concepts such as linguistic *superdiversity* (Blommaert 2013), *translanguaging* (Li 2021), *metrolingualism* (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015), *plurilingualism* (Preece 2020) and *translingual* practice (Canagarajah 2013) all of which, in different ways, describe the dynamic processes through which multilingual speakers navigate complex social and cognitive demands through strategic deployment of multiple languages as one complete repertoire.

Also of note, the *World Englishes* (WE) and *English as a Lingua Franca* (ELF) paradigms have made assertions about the legitimate nature of the many different forms of English used around the world, including through the documentation of non-standard lexico-grammatical forms in academic settings (e.g., Mauranen 2012). The immediate issue to be addressed for higher education teaching, is not just whether these linguistic phenomena are worthwhile areas of inquiry, but rather why, in the face of clearly popularised translingual and hybridised postcolonial varieties of English, standard English continues to spread unabated (Kubota 2015).

The dominance of English exists within institutions of various types, including within international politics and economics and, of course, higher education institutions (such as the ones being reported on in this special issue). Faculty members in higher education are university workers whose economic well-being and career advancement, as well as the prestige of their institutions, are often dependent on their teaching and supervising activities, as well as the revenue gained from grants and written outputs of research. For international academics, success in the economic marketplace of academic labour is highly dependent on success in the linguistic marketplace of standard English. A hegemony that persists despite obvious resistances and transgressions through 'localized superdiverse translingual practices'

(O'Regan 2021, 184) which occur on the part of both staff and students in everyday university life. Universities, therefore, continue to persist as sites of linguistic diversity, in which the institutional favoured medium(s) of communication and instruction will readily come into contact with the diverse linguistic repertoires of both staff and students. Almost any university, therefore, has the potential to be a 'multilingual university', as we argue in the next section.

The multilingual university

While universities in the Global South have continued to grapple with the issue of language, many universities in the anglophone 'centre' are increasingly faced with related challenges which are mainly driven by the increased cultural and linguistic diversification of their staff and student populations, as well as recent calls for decolonisation, inclusivity, diversity and equality (Phipps 2019; Badwan 2021). As a result, many universities in the Global North have joined universities elsewhere in grappling with the Language Problem, and the role of languages – other than English – in university teaching, research, supervision, socialisation, landscapes and soundscapes. The conditions we describe here have collectively led to the emergence of the term the 'multilingual university'. A term that positions contemporary universities as sites of linguistic contestation, while highlighting the role of the university in discussions about linguistic citizenship, education policy, epistemic (in)justice, civic participation and social access. As such, we perceive language in global higher education as a 'wicked problem', an important area of critical inquiry that requires international and inter-disciplinary explorations of opportunities, challenges, tensions, injustices, struggles, fears and hopes that face the multilingual university.

Therefore, when we announced the call for papers for this special issue, we suggested a wide range of themes that critically and reflectively engage with the Language Problem in the multilingual university. The call was drafted with the hope that we would receive submissions from different parts of the world, as we are eager to keep the door for debating the multilingual university wide open. As we committed ourselves to the inclusion of diverse, international voices from scholars at different stages of their academic careers and from different parts of the world, we were faced with numerous challenges. The first challenge is the linguistic glass-ceiling of academic publishing. Historically, journals have detached themselves from the challenges caused by the linguistic expectations placed on multilingual scholars. It is important to survive this linguistic glass ceiling in order to make room for situated knowledges and lived experiences, especially those coming from contexts that have remained on the margins. Supporting multilingual authors to produce knowledge about the multilingual university entailed a lot of invisible labour which the guest editors along with some reviewers have shared in unequal ways. Through the oppressive 'language blocks' (Badwan 2021) that many of our authors had to navigate to produce their articles for this journal (and likely other Global North publishers), we became acutely reminded about the power of language in creating epistemological blindness that renders many knowledges invisible and many practices under-theorised.

We also recognise here that we, as guest editors, need to acknowledge the double-bind that many multilingual scholars face in publishing: To write in English and for a global audience within a journal such as this, or to write in their primary language to give their research a more local impact and relevance. For this reason, we initiated optional non-English abstracts for the first time ever for *Teaching in Higher Education*, a practice that will be extended for all submissions following this special issue. We acknowledge that this is just a small step in a particular direction, but we hope it is the beginning of making other languages more visible in

our journal and allowing writers to have their own language – and their multilingualism – seen as an academic (and, ironically, marketing) asset by the journal's publishers. Though we also faced another potential issue: Should academics commission translations from, for example, their institutions or at personal cost? We felt that this could aid the already privileged and well-resourced in enhancing their profile and the reach of their work. If the intention is to highlight the plight of disappearing and under-representation of languages because of the implacable advancement of major languages in academia, writers commissioning non-English abstracts to be written perhaps betrays the point. We deliberated with the journal team about whether a non-English abstract ought to be written by the authors of the article themselves as part of authorship, or, if commissioned by another party, then to be acknowledged as part of 'contributorship'. This echoes some of the teaching-related problems discussed within the papers for this special issue: That any attempt to open up academia to a language other than English is fraught with complexity and far from straightforward.

The second challenge was associated with the role of theory in discussions about epistemic injustices caused by linguistic policies in the multilingual university. While some of our authors were explicit about linking EMI with epistemic injustices, some were faced with questions around how linguistic situations can amount to, and be described as, 'injustice' or 'epistemicide', and whether a linguistic lens can neatly fit some of the established theorisations on epistemic injustice (see Fricker 2007, 2017). We join the authors in noting that the issues in question are global in scale and do not exclusively disadvantage certain types of groups. That is to say, while work on epistemic injustice has mainly focused on certain identity groups who are disadvantaged or even harmed on the basis of race, language, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality and/or political affiliation, the types of epistemic injustices that are outlined in some of the articles in this issue do not fit traditional theorisations. While reviewing contributions, we continued to encourage our authors to form their own theorisations, making a case that the teaching-related language problems we are faced with in the multilingual university deserve new conceptual lenses that critically uncover the impact of adopting a global language upon knowledges and worldviews associated with local languages and cultures.

Another challenge we faced is the need to highlight that teaching in the multilingual university is not exclusively relevant to language courses and programmes, or indeed linguistics research. Rather, higher education's Language Problem is a challenge for any category of research related to teaching in higher education. In this respect, though we (Bhatt, Badwan and Madiba) stem from the field of Applied Linguistics, our respective spheres of concern encompass different kinds of language research in higher education. Bhatt's research focuses on literacies and writing, Badwan's on language and social justice and mobility, and Madiba's on language policy, planning and multilingual higher education.

We felt that multiple critical perspectives and reflective accounts are needed to make sense of and challenge the assumptions about language trends in higher education. Trends which are shifting, and are likely to further shift further in the future. Our choice of this journal for the special issue was motivated largely by our desire for an interdisciplinary orientation, and a need to bring together work in different locales to a general audience of readers – particularly non-linguists – involved in teaching in higher education. As with other interdisciplinary conversations, this was not always straightforward and writers were advised to orient their key points of focus towards critical pedagogical issues and approaches for linguistically diverse universities rather than write solely about linguistic problems.

Therefore, some rounds of revisions were dedicated to highlighting the relevance of contributions to the wider higher education readership, especially to readers who are not directly involved with teaching and researching language. With this challenge comes the joy and pain

of working across disciplines, namely sociology of education, language policy, language reclamation, and applied linguistics.

Introducing the special issue

In this special issue, we present eleven research articles, inclusive of four 'Points of Departure' pieces (the journal's format for provocations), to paint a complex picture of the lived realities for teachers and students in the multilingual university. We aimed our call for papers to a global audience of researchers and intended to provoke critical and theoretical responses which transcend disciplines, fields of concern, and any single higher education context. We are delighted to include contributions from researchers based across ten countries, with research insights coming from studies conducted within Pakistan, Timor-Leste, South Korea, Bangladesh, Somaliland, Afghanistan, Fiji, Colombia, and the UK (including Northern Ireland). For the purpose of this editorial, we have marshalled the contributions into three overall analytic themes: *language and colonial epistemologies*, *language policies and practices*, and *language and research*. Needless to say, some submissions sit at the borders between these three themes.

Language and colonial epistemologies

This theme is a golden thread that holds together many of the arguments, positions, narratives, and discussions in this special issue. It is mainly concerned with unmasking what Veronelli (2015) refers to as the 'coloniality of language', a term that discusses how language can be used to maintain, sustain and reproduce hegemonic systems of knowledge that rationalise colonial domination and render a presumption of neutrality upon them. Our contributors problematise the role of language in the multilingual university in keeping alive contemporary systems of domination, oppression, and dispossession while claiming that a medium of instruction is chosen to create a global, neutral space. Pushing this argument further, MacKenzie, Engman, and McGurk (2022) argue that these claims of neutrality can indeed reproduce violent processes of inequality that seek to reinforce a colonial separation between people and land. While their article is located in the context of Northern Ireland, it bears a global relevance to many contexts around the world. We share the view that the university has potential for 'world-making' (la paperson 2017) and that language remains key not only to the world-making processes to which students, staff and management contribute, but also to the shaping of university spaces and to connecting or disconnecting people from one another, and from histories, roots, legacies and marginalised 'funds of knowledge'. In their article, MacKenzie, Engman, and McGurk (2022) call for reclaiming colonised and marginalised languages in institutional spaces (Gaeilge, in their context) in order to restore relations with old and new ways of knowing, to disrupt the coloniality of English, and to make visible its symbolic violence.

The discussion in MacKenzie, Engman and McGurk's article invokes a critical engagement with the very notion of 'language' itself and how it is perceived and operationalised in the multilingual university, a task that is pushed forward by Gurney and Demuro (2022) in their article that offers a series of provocations in relation to concepts such as monolingualism and multilingualism in higher education. They are similarly concerned with reductionist and essentialist approaches to language teaching in the multilingual university. These approaches are underpinned by two dominant views. The first is what Pennycook (2010) and Hall (2020) refer to as the 'monolithic view' of language, a view that reduces the sociolinguistic complexity and variations of language into singular, standardised entities that can be called, for

example, English or Spanish. The other is 'linguistic monism' (Holquist 2014, 8) that 'conceives the world as consisting of geographically dispersed common languages each of which has a unique separate identity of its own that is both stable and unitary'. This is an influential ideology in higher education, and is problematic because it is an ideology of denial that opposes the reality of change, fluidity, heterogeneity and mobility. It is also a violent ideology that insists on the stubborn separation between languages. Gurney and Demuro (2022) establish a link between the separation between languages and the coloniality of language, maintaining the view that Western cultures and languages feed into existing processes of linguistic hierarchies and stratifications. To disrupt these hierarchies, they promote a pedagogy of translanguaging as an emancipatory approach to language teaching which could potentially complexify the borders between named languages in ways that may be transformative and counter-hegemonic. Translanguaging can enable language users in the multilingual university to draw upon their diverse linguistic repertoires and to create *languaging* spaces that recognise, represent and validate the linguistic diversity and fluidity brought along and brought about by different social actors within the multilingual university (Badwan 2021). The authors end with a note of caution stating that translanguaging should not be seen as a panacea for the language problem, nor should it be treated as the only alternative singular vision of what language might be in the institutional context.

Moving beyond language, Álvarez Valencia and Miranda (2022) in their contribution, push back against the traditional boundaries of what counts as 'language' in the multilingual university, making a case for broadening the scope of relevance in discussions about coloniality and epistemology. The article brings a much-needed perspective which argues for paying attention to how indigenous students de/re-construct university spaces. While language continues to be important to world-making, it is only part of a wider range of cultural semiotic assemblages. The views presented in this article echo Canagarajah's (2020) argument for the need to understand language as 'distributed practice', spread across places, people, rituals, land, material conditions, and spiritual beliefs. The authors articulate this position through their emphasis on cultural semiotic resources that entail not only indigenous languages but also rituals, ancestral practices and traditions associated with land (as in the case of the community garden). The students in this paper present an expansive vision for what it means to claim space within the multilingual university. They also problematise the easy fixes offered by the university in relation to language courses. In fact, they seem to be troubled by these offers. This paper also challenges the hierarchies of written literacies and intellectual contributions that are detached from emotions by stressing the value of indigenous knowledge(s) that are produced in different ways; ways that appreciate orality and acknowledge emotions, spiritual engagement, and relational entanglement as equally important sources of knowledge production. As such, the paper takes the discussion of the multilingual university outside the classroom walls, painting a picture of what might be possible when students practice agency with joint activism.

While the above three articles discuss the Language Problem with a focus on the coloniality of language and what this might mean for individuals' relations with one another, with land, and with their linguistic repertoires, other articles in this special issue take the coloniality of language further by discussing it in relation to epistemic outcomes and the politics of knowledge production in the multilingual university. The article by Williams and Stelma (2022) problematises the role of the language of instruction in relation to epistemic outcomes, drawing on their research in the context of South Korea. Like many other articles in this special issue, the authors discuss the spread of EMI as part of a broader socio-economic drive for individual and national development, capacity-building, and international collaborations. However, they uncover the hidden consequences of the global hegemonic dominance

of English on individuals' tendencies to trust knowledge produced in other languages, including their 'native' or 'local' languages. While the role of English as a 'killer language' (Phillipson 2001) has been widely debated in the applied linguistics literature, the critical decolonial turn that is taking shape in the field is pre-occupied with the epistemic injustices caused by the global dominance of English. This is a contemporary concern that echoes Santos (2014) view that 'there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice' (42), and to achieve cognitive justice it is important to affirm the diversity of the world in ways that turn Western exceptionalism on its head. But, is this even possible, and what is the role of language in this quest? In their article, Williams and Stelma (2022) provide disconcerting findings regarding how Korean undergraduate students trust the Korean and English languages differently, raising concerns about the hierarchies of knowledge which are inherently linked to global linguistic hierarchies. While the students associate instruction in Korean with the ability to better understand and engage with the subject of study during classroom interaction, they seem to trust English printed materials more than the translated versions and hence associating English with originality and scholarly authority even when the original textbook is not necessarily produced in English. The authors assert that if English becomes the trusted language to access subject content, there is a risk that South Korean students and their instructors might reproduce an ideology that reduces the epistemic value of Korean, leading them to conclude that their own language has limited legitimacy. Therefore, the authors provide a theoretical frame for understanding epistemic outcomes in EMI contexts, extending Fricker's (2007) notion of epistemic injustice. The article opens up discussions and debates about how epistemic injustice can be conceptualised within the multilingual university bearing in mind far-reaching implications and possible future concerns regarding epistemicide.

The article by Kester and Chang (2021) further problematises the role of English in the construction of epistemic injustice in two conflict-affected contexts: Afghanistan and Somaliland. This work centres language in discussions about peace, conflict and education, and highlights the complex trajectories of university students affected by forced migration, incomplete schooling, and low literacy in 'native' or 'local' languages. It appears that the acute experiences of migration and conflict can lead to amplifying the perceived prestige and social value associated with English, so it becomes the language of 'hope', 'mobility', 'power' and 'neutrality'. However, this is not only what English represents in conflict-affected contexts. This study finds tensions associated with what is deemed as acceptable standards of English and reveals the interplay of socio-economic status and *raciolinguistic* biases, leading to the construction of unequal multilingualism, with some repertoires and non-racialised bodies acquiring more prestige; thus, leading to the emergence of elite multilingualism that reinforces Western, anglophonic linguistic norms. This is further imbricated in favourable attitudes towards Western research and systems of knowledge. Kester and Chang join other authors in this special issue calling for the promotion of critical educational perspectives to challenge unequal multilingualism and unequal systems of knowledge.

In their response to issues of language coloniality, epistemic injustices, and language use in the multilingual university, the authors demonstrate the importance of exploring new ways of thinking and doing teaching-related linguistic research by working across social disciplines, extending theories, and challenging grand narratives in order to produce critical, situated scholarship that aims to highlight the deep-seated inequalities in how knowledge in the multilingual university is produced, valorised and distributed.

Language policy and practice

Research on language policies, either in universities in the Global North or Global South, clearly shows the gap between language policy and language practice. This gap is exacerbated by the fact that top-down, explicit or overt university language policies often run counter to covert language policies and practices. Papers in this section of the special issue demonstrate how particular EMI policies, particularly in postcolonial universities, are unsuccessfully implemented in practice as they run counter to the real-life and heterogeneous linguistic realities of students and staff.

In her paper on 'The scramble for EMI: Lessons from postcolonial 'old EMI' universities', Willans (2022) decries the increasing adoption of EMI policy in traditionally non-anglophone postcolonial universities. The adoption of EMI in these universities runs counter to their multilingual realities which favour the use of local languages in teaching and learning. Willans warns that the 'new EMI' universities, who are looking to join the neo-anglophone higher education sector, would do well to learn from the decades of experience of the 'old EMI' universities and their failure in implementing EMI efficaciously. The main lesson from these universities is that a construct of EMI based on monoglossic ideologies, is unsuitable for multilingual university contexts where languages, such as English, are viewed as social practices rather than separate and discrete entities or autonomous systems.

The challenges faced by universities in implementing EMI in postcolonial multilingual contexts are further discussed in detail within two other contributions: One on Pakistani and the other on Bangladeshi universities. In these case studies, the authors clearly demonstrate the mismatch between policy and practice in higher education. In their paper on Pakistani universities, Manan, Chanaa and Haider (2022) demonstrate this mismatch. Although Pakistani universities are required to implement EMI in their teaching and learning programmes, teachers, faced with the challenge of implementing this policy, use their agency to manoeuvre the policy in class to ensure the use of students' full linguistic repertoires in classroom learning. However, this 'smuggling' of multilingual pedagogies in classroom leaves them with feelings of 'guilty multilingualism' since such practices are not in accordance with the institutional language policy which upholds the use of English only. This guilty multilingualism is founded on entrenched monoglossic ideologies that underlie the use of English in Pakistani universities and the marginalisation of local languages. This is not only confined to Pakistani universities. In South Africa, for example, Probyn (2009) also noted the same language practices among science teachers who smuggle the use of indigenous languages in class to support students for whom English is not the first language.

The case of Bangladeshi higher education, presented by Rafi and Morgan (2022), adopts a linguistic ecology approach to the study of language policy, with a view to show a similar mismatch between policy and practice. The findings of the study shows that there is a disconnect between macro-level language policy and actual practice at meso and micro-level within universities. Translanguaging is recommended as an alternative pedagogy that promotes multilingual staff and students' use of their full linguistic repertoires in teaching and learning. Recently, translanguaging has been the focus of a burgeoning of studies and is increasingly recognised as the basis for alternative pedagogic theory and practice in multilingual universities (see Heugh 2015; Hibbert and van der Walt 2014; Madiba 2018; Makalela 2018; Stroud and Kerfoot 2013).

Language and research

In this section of the special issue, the contributors provide differently focussed accounts of how teaching practices related to research activities are impacted by language in the

multilingual university. These authors bring to the fore the Language Problem as it relates to the importance of sustaining the vitality of learners' linguistic repertoires in everyday teaching in the multilingual university.

Newman (2022), for example, presents a critical account of how multilingual teaching practices of tertiary lecturers are entangled with 'diverse ideological forces'. These forces include industry sector 'standards' in higher education, local socio – and geopolitical discourses, and historical conditions within the context. All such factors, Newman argues, are key components for us to understand how teaching, as it relates to research and industry, occurs in a multilingual university. Newman (2022) finds that teachers use diverse linguistic and semiotic resources across a range of modalities in order to get the work done of transferring technical knowledge and expertise to students; but this is also a site of significant tension. During teaching, whether it is the use of a hybridised form of Tetum, a switch to Indonesian words to index a particular heritage, or the presence of English as a constant reminder of the pressure to 'produce' English-speaking graduates, there are subtle and ideology-laden discourses that lie behind the ordering of language choice.

In Mazanderani et al.'s (2022) paper they explore the development of doctoral writing for a group of international students in the UK. Through uncovering 'continuous acts of translation' they conclude that the development of doctoral writing skills is beyond the purview of 'procedural, technical and productive writing support' in today's multilingual university. Relatedly, in their Points of Departure piece titled 'Opening up spaces for researching multilingually in higher education', Arafat and Woodin (2022) present a dialogue between a PhD student researcher and her supervisor, as the former struggles with a complex project. They highlight important issues which came to the fore for both, including how multilingualism should feature in the development of a doctoral student's authorial voice and how doing so is part of broadening the intellectual vision of both doctoral students and their supervisors.

Importantly, both Mazanderani et al.'s and Arafat and Woodin's insights are drawn from so-called 'monolingual' universities in an anglophone nation. They both demonstrate that these institutions are still multilingual through their students and staff, and that these 'hidden' aspects need to be interrogated. Both papers indicate the need for doctoral supervisors and institutions to engage more with the intricacies of the Language Problem during the doctoral research writing process and the ontological and practical uncertainties that occur through the writing of a thesis. These contributors show that as higher education institutions attract students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, higher education teachers can play a more fruitful role in promoting and utilising the multiple languages of tertiary level learners for research-related teaching activity.

Concluding thoughts

We hope that the summaries, arguments, and discussions presented in this editorial reflect some of the contemporary concerns that surround the multilingual university as presented by the contributors to this special issue. The Language Problem of the multilingual university is complex, multi-faceted, and one which connects teaching in higher education with inquiry into linguistic challenges, moral dilemmas, (de)colonial efforts, cognitive (in)justice, neoliberal pressures, and global epistemological inequalities. The contributors continue to remind us of the coloniality of language and of the linguistic stratification that govern the epistemological structures and power relations in the academy. They turn our attention to the hostility of seemingly 'neutral' academic conventions, policies and practices that tend to recognise knowledge only when it is produced in certain ways and modalities, mainly in English, written, and described as 'intellectual'.

The articles in this special issue constitute a collaborative listening project that weaves together threads from multiple global contexts, differently troubled by the Language Problem, yet all trying to produce new lines of argument that are hospitable, transformative, culturally sustaining, and unsettling. While they prove that in the context of the Language Problem 'unlearning habits of oppression and inequality is not straightforward or neat and tidy' (Phipps 2019, 8), they point towards a future which we cannot yet see clearly. It is a future for a higher education that nurtures and sustains the languages, knowledges, literacies, cultures, worldviews and histories of the diverse communities it serves; a higher education that is not based on a singular monolithic, neoliberal mould that expects all serving students and staff to comply with an imposition of rigid linguistic and cultural norms forged in the furnace of the ideologies of the nation state and colonialism. It is important to clarify that we do not argue against the role of higher education in providing access to dominant linguistic, epistemological, and cultural spheres. Rather, the case we make with our authors is that teachers in the multilingual university have a lot to learn from their linguistically diverse populations and that this, in itself, is an opportunity to decolonise the university. This is because 'language is not merely a passive way of referring to or describing things in the world, but a crucial form of social action itself' (Rosa 2019, 35). This raises the question: How can teaching, research, supervision in the multilingual university be hopeful, transformative, and socially just?

We would like to conclude this special issue with the words of Alison Phipps (2019) who in the context of decolonising multilingualism, reminds us that:

> We aren't going to get it right first time. Or even the tenth time. It's not something you can clean up theoretically or conceptually and have a correct methodological framework for developing. It's going to be messy, it's going to be like all creative human endeavour, it's going to need some awkward practice, uneasy rehearsals, the development together of new scripts which we trace out from having made it up as we went along the journey with others. (7)

The multilingual university is an intercultural site of endless possibilities, but, only if we put aside the biases associated with hegemonic languages and knowledges, and decide to acknowledge and accept the university's heterogeneity as a valuable resource for un-learning, co-learning and re-learning. This special issue started with a call for papers and it now concludes with a call for action. We invite those teaching and researching learning in global higher education to explore what the multilingual university offers not only within classroom walls but also in communal spaces, offices, corridors, associated parks, and on notice boards; not only through written words but also through multi-modal literacies that span across bodies, memories, rituals, words, and materialities.

Note

1. For a thorough discussion of the different issues surrounding decoloniality in higher education we refer the reader to a double special issue of *Teaching in Higher Education* on 'Possibilities and complexities of decolonising higher education: critical perspectives on praxis', Volume 26, Issue 7–8 (2021).

Disclosure statement

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