Academic Coloniality in ELT: the case of an Algerian University

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This study explores the concept of 'Academic Coloniality' in ELT at an Algerian University. Academic Coloniality refers to the practices and beliefs of people involved in ELT that contribute to the production, manifestation, and reproduction of power patterns between the 'native speakers' of English and its learners. Through this, we aim to show how the beliefs and reported practices of seven participants within ELT at an Algerian university contribute to it. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analysed using critical discourse analysis. Findings suggest that Academic Coloniality manifests itself in participants' continuous quest to achieve 'native-like' competence and adopt their norms. This resulted from the context, daily interactions, and effects of media. Coupled with gatekeepers' resistance to change, these contribute to the reproduction of Academic Coloniality. In this sense, the concept is a useful tool to conceptualize and contextualize practices and beliefs within ELT that prevent its decolonization.

Key words: coloniality, Academic Coloniality, native speaker ideology, Algerian university

Introduction

Prompted by factors of increased migration, globalization, and the development in online communication technologies, English in the world today has reached an unprecedented global spread. This contributed to the development of ELT as a profession, a discipline, and an industry. A number of paradigms have been developed to conceptualise the rise of English as a global language in relation to ELT, while the traditional term EFL started to be questioned, particularly because *English as a foreign language* (EFL) can no longer capture the diversity of the language use and in ELT practices. Within an EFL paradigm, language teaching is held to 'native-speaker' ideals in that the emphasis is on a '*correct standard*' form of English, which needs to approximate that of the 'native speaker' and enables successful communication with them (Jenkins 2014). In that sense, there is an association between 'standard English', particularly 'received pronunciation' (RP) and 'general American' (GA) accents, and being a 'native speaker' of English (Jenkins 2014). This association was

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perpetuated by English colonial education and sustained through processes of globalization (Tupas 2022) in which 'non-native' English varieties are viewed as 'deficit' and therefore non-standard. This view does not only marginalize 'native' and 'non-native' speakers from Kachruvian outer and expanding circles but goes further to marginalize 'native speakers' from the 'inner circle' whose language does not meet the norms of 'standard English'. It puts Anglo-American varieties and cultures as pedagogical reference and a learning target and gives them privilege over non-Western ways of speaking and cultures (Pennycook 2002; Holliday 2006), which could result in instances of Othering, inaccurate representations, and inequalities. Hence the need for more inclusive practices in ELT.

As a result of the status of English in the world today and its widespread use, it became evident that English is no longer a single entity, it is diverse and multiplex, it is *Englishes*. The paradigm of World Englishes (WE) attempts to account for and legitimize all the different English varieties that are used by the different English speakers. Despite being influential in ELT, this model's emphasis on how English is used within national geographical boundaries still fails to offer an understanding of how the language is used beyond and across those boundaries, i.e., when it is used as a *lingua franca*. As such, English as a lingua franca (ELF) refers to the use of English as a common means of communication in interactions that involve speakers with different mother tongues. In these contexts, speakers develop local uses of English that influence the teaching of the language to go beyond the focus on a monolingual 'native-speaker' model and embrace the plurality of English. Despite the crucial role of these paradigms in challenging the hegemonic discourse about English in ELT, English is still promoted as a necessary 'basic skill' and a privilege which echoes colonial discourse about the language and aggravates issues of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 2017). Furthermore, many recent studies show that ELT continues to focus on standard forms and 'native speaker' norms, and perpetuates monolingual, and 'native speaker' ideologies (Tupas 2022: 2). ELT, then, is still rooted in its colonial history and awaiting decolonization. The latter requires a deep understanding of how colonial legacies are still produced, manifested, and reproduced in ELT, especially in contexts where research has been scarce, which is the aim of this paper. To do so, we introduce the concept of 'Academic Coloniality' to highlight the colonial legacies in ELT that are not necessarily the result of colonialism, and to offer a lens through which these legacies can be conceptualized and studied.

Academic coloniality in ELT

Unlike colonialism, which refers to the actual presence of a colonial administration on the land of another nation (R'boul 2022: 21), coloniality refers to the 'long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism' (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243). Colonialism in that sense is not a period that is now in the past and can be put behind, but rather legacies of colonialism and its forms of domination continue to exist today and manifest in the various domains in the modern world such as in education. It is the notion of coloniality that allows for a comprehensive understating of the continuity of colonialism (Grosfoguel 2007: 219–220). We use the coloniality framework in this paper to understand how power relations and patterns are still maintained within ELT. This is not only because English 'continues a colonial pattern of language and power beyond the period of

formal colonial administration' (Hsu 2015: 125), but also because current practices, theories, and contexts within ELT can be argued to have strong links to the history of colonialism (Pennycook 2002:19). The coloniality framework, then, serves in problematizing practices and beliefs within ELT that are implicitly and explicitly carried in the colonial ideological discourse surrounding English. However, because the coloniality framework can be broad and encompassing of the wider social, economic, and political domains, we propose the notion of 'Academic Coloniality' to further explore traces of coloniality that are specific to ELT contexts.

Academic Coloniality in ELT can be defined as the practices and beliefs of people involved in ELT that contribute to the production, manifestation, and reproduction of certain power patterns between 'native speakers' of English and its learners. The concept aims to scrutinize embedded coloniality in ELT pedagogy at both the macro (i.e., beliefs and ideologies) and micro (i.e., classroom practices) levels. It looks at the contemporary manifestations of coloniality in ELT and how practitioners, educators, and learners contribute to its (re)production. The concept is closely related to Kumaravadivelu's (2012: 22) concept of 'self-marginalization' in which he refers to 'the ways in which the periphery surrenders its voice and vision to the centre'. It is a process through which teachers and learners contribute to their own marginalization and legitimize colonial ideologies that view them as inferior. Academic Coloniality builds on this concept to further explore reasons of such self-marginalization in ELT in a context that was not directly affected by a previous Anglo-American colonialism, but which arguably might carry traces of it. In the same vein, the coloniality of language is another concept that looks at 'the current underlying systems of power formed by the linguistic othering of non-native speakers or learners and the centrality of language in producing coloniality and maintaining hegemonic systems of power' (R'boul 2022: 22). It denotes the processes through which language is used to dominate and alienate dominated groups. In that sense while the focus of the coloniality of language is on the power imbalances that are inherent and promoted for through language, Academic Coloniality focuses on the production of these power patterns through language teaching. This can be particularly useful in informing a decolonial approach to ELT given the status of English as a global lingua franca in the world today. Such status has been shifting the focus away from the colonial and Western bias towards the 'native speaker' model within ELT to embrace local knowledges and cultures and reflects the plurality of English. Within these theoretical boundaries of Academic Coloniality, in the following, we explore aspects of coloniality in ELT in higher education at an Algerian university.

ELT in higher education in Algeria

Increasingly, English in Algeria is becoming a sociolinguistic reality which can be observed in the growing number of students enrolling in English departments and a growing preference for English by younger generations (Belmihoub 2018; Bouhmama and Dendane 2018). Besides that, English Medium Instruction (EMI) is also gaining more popularity. For instance, in the beginning of the 1990s, 95% of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in technical and sciences disciplines were taught in and preferred to follow lectures in French (Benrabah 2013: 233). More recently, in their study, Bouhmama and Dendane (2018.: 74) report that 55.4% of students in science disciplines desired to replace French with English as the MI. Given

the fact that Algeria is an ex-French colony that has already been dependent for decades on the colonial legacy of the French language and that now seems to be turning away from it towards English, such coloniality and dependency can be perpetuated and transferred to the English language. This could be particularly true because ELT in higher education in Algeria adopts the EFL paradigm (British Council 2021) which favours 'native speaker' norms and holds Western cultures in superiority. Despite the historical background of Algeria, which puts it in the expanding circle of the Kachruvian model where English has neither an official status nor a colonial history, adopting an EFL model in this context can still be entangled with aspects of Academic Coloniality. This prompts a pressing need for researching the effects of the EFL paradigm on ELT in higher education in Algeria and how such effects might be rooted in Academic Coloniality. This need, however, seems to be overlooked. This could be explained on the grounds of how certain beliefs and practices get reified and normalized among teachers and learners and could be pushed aside as no longer relevant or worthy of debate (Fairclough 2010). To address what we identify as a need in research in this paper, we try to answer the following research questions: (1) How is Academic Coloniality manifested in ELT practices in higher education in Algeria? and (2) How do certain beliefs of ELT educators and learners reinforce its (re)production?

Methodology

The data reported in this article is part of a larger-scale qualitative phase of an exploratory sequential PhD project that closely examines aspects of Academic Coloniality in a department of English at a university located in the east of Algeria. This phase included both teachers and students who were recruited using a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling strategies. In this paper, we present data analysis from seven participants: three students and four teachers. Participant students included two undergraduate students (1st and 3rd year Bachelor) and one postgraduate (1st Master), while participant teachers included at least one teacher from the following disciplines: Applied Linguistics, Culture and Civilization, and Language Science. Participants voluntarily accepted to take part in the study upon their invitation through social media posts and emails.

Data was generated using semi-structured, in-depth interviews which took place in July 2020. Students' ages ranged from 19 to 30. Teachers' ages, on the other hand, ranged from 35 to 50, with various teaching experiences which ranged from three years of experience to over 25 years. All interviews were conducted by the first author in English. They took place online through Facebook Messenger calls and Skype-to-phone calls with each interview lasting between 40 and 70 minutes. The interviews tried to explore participants' views on English varieties, culture, and their attitudes towards those, and towards their learning and teaching. The data presented in this paper reflect some of the participants' underlying beliefs behind their practices in the classroom; beliefs that are linked to Academic Coloniality such as bias towards 'native speaker' English and potential factors which may contribute to its (re)production. All participants provided written consent to the audio recording of their interviews and the dissemination of the data collected from them. Data obtained from participants was anonymized and any traceable data such as locations and names of people were omitted during the process of transcription.

Data was analysed using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. CDA resonates with the stance that this paper takes in looking at the power patterns (re)produced in ELT, in that it focuses on 'the effect of power relations and inequalities in producing social wrongs [. . .] and their effects on other relations within the social process and their elements' (Fairclough 2010: 8). Following this framework, data analysis focused on three levels of analysis, namely: (1) content or topic of the text; (2) the discursive strategies used in articulating the text; and (3) the linguistic units employed in discourse. The analysis resulted in the emergence of the following two themes which are explored in the next section: (1) manifestations of Academic Coloniality in ELT; and (2) (re)production of the asymmetry.

Findings

Manifestations of Academic Coloniality in ELT

In the following, we report on data about how Academic Coloniality is manifested in ELT classrooms through certain teachers' and learners' views and practices. One way was through insisting on the use of 'native speaker' varieties. Data showed that the use of a 'native speaker' variety over others is favoured during classroom interactions. Excerpt 1 below is from one of the participant teachers stating that students are instructed to only use 'native speaker' varieties in the classroom:

Excerpt 1

> Interviewer: Now, what about the other varieties; other than American or British, do you think they are important or relevant to ELT practices in Algeria?
>
> Samir: I don't think so, no, no, no; I don't think so. I wouldn't allow my students to speak French English for example.

By French English, Samir is referring to the distinctive characteristics of the English variety spoken in France. In the above excerpt, the teacher associated the concept of English varieties to the different English accents. He also held 'native speaker' accents as the learning target in the classroom and strongly expressed intolerance towards 'non-native' English varieties '*no, no, no; I don't think so*'. He asserted that by opposing their use stating that he would not '*allow*' it, proceeding to give an example of English language use that he would not tolerate. The use of the linguistic unit '*allow*' could also be taken as an indication of the imbalanced power relation between this teacher and his students. This same perception seems to prevail among students:

Excerpt 2

> Mariem: When the teacher is trying to speak different accents and trying to avoid RP, the students think that the teacher is not fluent enough.

Mariem equated above the use of 'non-native' varieties by her teachers to their lack of competence in English. She stated that such practice would be pejoratively interpreted and would mean that the teacher is not '*fluent*'. This shows that, similar to their teachers, students are also intolerant of the use of 'non-native' varieties in their classrooms even by their teachers. Teachers are then burdened with the task of having to adjust their practices to prove their competence. Another way Academic Coloniality is manifested and reinforced is through teachers' emphasis on the obligation of learning 'native speaker' culture. Sarra argued in excerpt 3 below:

Excerpt 3

Sarra: as teachers, we cannot divide the language from the culture [...] it's a package, it's a whole.

In reference to her classroom practices, Sarra associated teaching English to teaching the culture and emphasised their inseparability, referring to them as a '*package*'. The certainty in her language also denotes that this belief is reified to her. Likewise, Salima below (excerpt 4) claimed that teaching culture is necessary and should be part of her classroom practices:

Excerpt 4

Interviewer: do you think culture is relevant to your ELT and pedagogical practices in Algeria?

Salima: [...] students have to understand that ['native speaker'] culture is important, the way of eating the way of- yeah. If a British tell you "Some coffee?" or "some tea?", you have to say "yes"; if he says, "any tea?" you have to say "no" because he is inviting you and at the same time, he is expecting you to say "no". This is cultural.

The culture the participant referred to is the '*British*' culture placing it in the centre of her practice in a similar way to 'native speaker' variety. Moreover, the example of the social situation she provided is evidence for an inaccurate and stereotypical image. This unrealistic image of the 'native speaker' could be taken as evidence for the construction of an oversimplified Other. The focus on 'native speaker' English and culture as a learning target in the classroom can be linked to a variety of reasons amongst which was participants' learning motivation:

Excerpt 5

Malak: if I will be teaching, for example, English in America, or in Britain, I have to, first of all, learn the culture of this country to abide by.

Malak's reason for learning 'native speaker' culture is linked to her belief that the aim of her learning English is to communicate with the 'native speaker'. Under this belief, she is required to '*abide*' by 'native speaker' norms. This also perpetuates a monolithic view of culture that bounds it to a specific geographical place. To this end, it can be argued that these reported and perceived practices and views are manifestations of Academic Coloniality and can be rooted in the ideologies upholding it.

(Re) Production of the asymmetry

Under this theme, we explore how certain ideological constructs underpin the above reported classroom practices and contribute to the (re) production of Academic Coloniality beyond colonialism. The tendency to prefer 'native speaker' varieties and encourage its use in the classroom lies in the belief that 'native speaker' varieties are superior, as excerpt 6 below demonstrates:

Excerpt 6

Samir: they [students] would rather opt for the British English because until now there is this idea that the British accent is kind of classy or posh. If you can manage to use a British accent, you will sound classy and posh, it's because of the idea of Royalty of course. Because it is the accent of Royalty, that's why you would sound classy.

Samir argued that the reason students prefer 'native speaker' varieties is because they associate it with being '*classy*' and '*posh*'. In this sense, ELT learners idealise not only the 'native speaker' variety, but also their lifestyle. British English, in Samir's view, is monolithic and is confined to the standard RP variety that is traditionally associated with the Royal family as is portrayed in the media. In fact, data showed that many of these ideological and stereotypical constructions about the 'native speaker' stem from the media:

Excerpt 7

Samia: When it comes to students, I can tell you 99% of the students speak rather American loose pronunciation. Because of as I said the exposure to the culture and TV shows. All the shows they are seeing now on Netflix and songs and all the artists and influences, they have American accents, and it is dominating now.

Excerpt 8

Mourad: People are giving more attention to the American variety.

Interviewer: What's the reason for that?

Mourad: The world is being Americanised [...] If we go back to the world being Americanised, we go back to movies, and series and music. Especially movies, every movie I have watched – the majority – used the American variety.

Due to their exposure to American media, both Samia and Mourad above acknowledge the influence of the latter on students' learning practices and their preference for the American '*accent'* and culture. Music, movies, and TV shows all contribute to what Mourad referred to as '*being Americanized*'. As such, media can serve to (re)produce Academic Coloniality in ELT through portraying stereotypes and idealized representations of the 'native speaker' that makes them attractive to learners. This, as discussed above, leads to constructing the 'native speaker' culture and variety as superior and setting their norms as learning targets.

In addition to that, teachers' and learners' experiences are also influenced by senior staff's decisions about policy. The emphasis on the standard, formal, and correct English that models the 'native speaker' in policy documents often do not reflect the plurality of English. Some teachers, however, might feel a lack of agency when it comes to making changes as Samir argues in excerpt 9:

Excerpt 9

Interviewer: Do you feel you're able to influence the canevas?

Samir: Oh, I wish. Like in a formal manner, no [...] Teachers with associate professors and professors are the ones who get to have a voice, in these decisions because they have been there for the long time. but I think that it's a little bit unfair.

A canevas is an official policy document issued by the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research that governs ELT courses' content and classroom practices. It is issued/revised on a regular basis after a series of meetings with senior teachers across state universities.

Samir reported that they had little to no power to change its content, indicating the unequal power relation he has with his colleagues. In fact, the teacher's response indicates that change, or lack thereof, is dominated by his more senior colleagues '*associate professors and professors*' who act like gatekeepers of the problematic practices and beliefs through maintaining the policy documents unchanged. This could explain the persistence of these practices and beliefs, and how Academic Coloniality continues to be reproduced, especially that the '*voices*' of teachers who want to bring updates are marginalized and dismissed.

Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we looked at the (re)production and manifestations of Academic Coloniality in ELT at a university in Algeria. We argued that the concept of Academic Coloniality can prove useful when navigating context-specific issues related to power asymmetries in ELT. The premise of the concept is that understanding how colonial legacies are manifested and (re)produced within ELT requires a deep understanding of the practices and beliefs of those involved in it. Among the manifested practices in our findings was the emphasis on adopting 'native speaker' language and culture in the classroom. Both participant groups held 'native speaker' ways of speaking as learning targets and believed in a Western culture that is associated with the language. In other words, for them, learning the 'native speaker' language required adopting Western culture at the expense of the local one (Holliday 2006; R'boul 2022). These manifestations of Academic Coloniality lead to imbalanced power patterns and marginalize the learners of the language and their culture. Taking a closer look, however, findings revealed that there exist deeper aspects of Academic Coloniality within ELT that are related to its (re)production and that result in the persistence of these manifestations. Although at times such aspects are not directly linked to colonialism (e.g., media and senior staff), they serve in its continuation through replicating its discourses. Academic Coloniality recognizes these context-specific aspects of coloniality that go beyond colonialism and requires paying attention to the local specificities as is further explored below.

Underlying teachers' and students' classroom practices are the beliefs and stereotypes they hold about what English language teaching/learning should and should not entail. Given Algeria's colonial history, bias towards Western cultures and lifestyle at the expense of the local one has long prevailed. The colonial legacy of France paved the way for English and 'its culture' to be preferred and highly valued, as those people already viewed their norms as inferior. Reinforced by the conditions of globalization and media's representations of the West, it seems that all the necessary conditions existed to stimulate the production of Academic Coloniality. Once produced, the practices and beliefs that constitute it are passed on among and between teachers and their learners through imbalanced power relations. Evident in the data, teachers' intolerance to 'non-native' varieties in their classrooms influenced learners' attitudes towards them who in turn held their teachers to the same standards. In that manner, Academic Coloniality is reproduced through creating a cycle of intolerance that is biased towards 'native speaker' norms. Not only that, but because the voices of those who want to break the cycle often go unheard due to power imbalances that occur within people involved in ELT, Academic

Coloniality persists. Through preventing any changes or updates, senior teachers in that case act as gatekeepers for Academic Coloniality and as reproducers of the beliefs and practices that are anchors of it, which holds back any attempts to decolonize ELT within this context. As the concept of Academic Coloniality proved useful in identifying and highlighting aspects of coloniality within ELT in a context without previous Anglo-Saxon colonization history, it can be taken up and further explored in other similar contexts. In those contexts, a promising area for further development is the focus on classroom interactions and practices in action, rather than reported ones, through systematic observation, which was not possible in this study due to Covid-19 restrictions.

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