Cultivating Critical Language Awareness in TESOL

Addressing Colonialingualism in TESOL: Raising Critical Language Awareness through Transepistemic Education

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Languages shape worldviews, inform behaviours, and are not disconnected from local political, sociocultural, and ecological contexts. Critical Language Awareness (CLA) highlights how languages are affected by power relations and ideologies we are often unaware of (Fairclough, 1992). For example, English has a human-centered, colonial, and imperial legacy which continues to the present day in TESOL (Macedo, 2019). The human-centered and imperialistic worldview transmitted through dominant uses of English exemplifies colonialingualism (Meighan, 2022). Colonialingual TESOL environments perpetuate epistemic and linguistic superiority, racisms, assimilation, and further marginalize Indigenous, heritage, and minoritized language speakers. The relational connection between languages and place-based knowledges, crucial for addressing the climate and humanitarian crises, is also not a priority in TESOL.

In this webinar, I argue an epistemic (un)learning of the western "epistemological error" is required to enable equitable validation of all languages and knowledge systems, including those Indigenous and minoritized, in TESOL. I propose heritage language pedagogy, conceptualized differently from mainstream versions, as part of transepistemic education to action this (un)learning. Transepistemic education is the act of learning from multiple knowledges and lifeways while languaging (Meighan, forthcoming). I demonstrate how transepistemic education reckons with colonialingualism, enables place-based knowledge exchanges, and raises CLA for more equitable TESOL.

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