



**Decolonising teaching, scholarship
and research at Newcastle University**

Working towards decolonisation

Contents

This document provides support for colleagues wishing to decolonise their teaching, scholarship, and research. It provides:

- definitions of some key terminology related to but not the same as decoloniality,
- clarification on defining decolonisation as a field and practice,
- critical questions for colleagues to ask of their own teaching, scholarship and research,
- some useful resources (case studies, reflections, academic texts and weblinks).

Part 1: Definitions and bibliography

Part 2: Example case studies of decolonising teaching and scholarship.

Part 3: Example case studies of decolonizing research

Part 4: Decolonisation in HE: A Counter Narrative

Part 5: Critical Questions for disciplines and research towards decolonisation.

Numerous academics, researchers and organisations "have reflected on the use of the term BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic)/ BME (Black Minority Ethnic) in research and policy. In 2019/20 alone, Zamila Bunglawala (2019), deputy head of unit and deputy director policy and strategy for the Race Disparity Audit (2018), Professor Kehinde Andrews (2020) of Birmingham University and Nora Fakim and Cecilia Macaulay (2020) to name just a few, highlighted problems with the acronym BAME/BME. Concerns range from BAME/ BME being created as 'safe' terms to avoid concerns about anti-Black racism, to the homogenization of racially diverse people." (Smith and Lander, 2022).

What is decolonisation?

Distinguishing between diversity, EDI, anti-racism and decolonisation

It is important to distinguish between the terms often used interchangeably in the academy. See also the very useful EDI resource produced in NU for research: [EDI Toolkit for Researchers | Our Research DEV | Newcastle University \(ncl.ac.uk\)](#)

Diversity

The term 'diversity' is generally employed to signify the recognition, respect and celebration of difference. In general, however, when HEIs employ the discourse of 'diversity' or 'diversity and equality' or 'diversity initiatives', this often relates to practices which Sarah Ahmed (2018) has called 'non-performatives' in that they are symbolic commitments which are institutionalised to effectively not perform that which they claim to be for, thereby maintaining the status quo (see video: [Sara Ahmed - The Institutional As Usual: Diversity Work as Data Collection - YouTube](#)).

Racism and Implicit/unconscious bias

"Racism, xenophobia and racial discrimination are phenomena that can occur either between individuals (individual racism) or be embedded in organisations and institutions (institutional racism). While individual racism is easily recognisable (for example, through racial slurs, individual discrimination or acts of violence), it does not arise in a vacuum. Societies' beliefs lead to inequalities, which are rooted in the operation of a society that excludes substantial numbers of members of particular groups or communities from significant participation in institutions or access to certain services." ([Protection against racism, xenophobia and racial discrimination, and the EU Anti-racism Action Plan \(europa.eu\)](#))

For example, evidence of structural racism in HEIs can be found in the ethnicity pay gap: [Intersectional analysis shows the largest pay gaps in HE are for Black men and women \(ucea.ac.uk\)](#) [Equal Pay | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](#) Here at NU: [Annual EDI and Gender Pay Gap Report 2022.pdf \(ncl.ac.uk\)](#) (page 58).

Some people refer to implicit or unconscious bias as beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices which impact our interactions, interpretations and understandings of individuals, groups of people and situations. HEIs often offer staff training to make people aware of their biases so they can work to overcome them. See ([Unconscious bias | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](#)). Try the Harvard implicit association test:

EDI

'Equality Diversity and Inclusion' is a phrase most commonly associated with actions towards equality in line with the [equality act](#) in order to legally protect people and groups of people with protected characteristics from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. The equality act has resulted in Public Sector Equality Duties which *"requires HEIs, when carrying out their functions, to give due regard to the need to:*

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not

The broad purpose of the duty is to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the day-to-day business of public authorities." (The Equality Act 2010 | Advance HE (advance-he.ac.uk))

Anti-racism

Anti-racism is action against racism. It involves recognising and naming racism, working to understand its manifestations, and acting to eradicate all forms of racism. Anti-racism is not the same thing as being non-racist.

"The opposite of 'racist' isn't 'not racist.' It is 'anti-racist.' What's the difference? One endorses either the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an anti-racist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of 'not racist.' The claim of 'not racist' neutrality is a mask for racism." (Kendi, 2019, p.9)

What is decolonisation?

Defining decolonisation

The following section draws directly on literature to define the field and practice of decolonisation in HE. Note, many anti-racists believe that decolonisation is only possible through anti-racism activism.

From Morreira et al, 2020

"..decoloniality as it applies to pedagogy and curricula is an inherently plural set of practices that aim to interrupt the dominant power/knowledge matrix in educational practices in higher education. These practices affect both what knowledge is produced via research and then selected for a curriculum (what content is taught), and the ways in which teaching and learning and assessment occur (how curriculum knowledge is taught, including the social power relations at work in teaching and learning)." (Morreira et al, 2020 p.2)

"The political act of decolonising is a process of anticolonial revolution, of questioning, challenging, and overthrowing systems of power and knowledge that serve to oppress" (Ibid, pp.2-3).

"..we can unlearn the systems of power that structure our ways of seeing the world and thinking and hence challenge these systems by finding and asserting the voices of the marginalised – whose experience of oppression informs their critical thinking – to create more egalitarian, respectful, and democratic societies by reclaiming the power and authority that belongs to all." (Ibid, p.4)

"Colonialism is understood as a temporal period of political and structural oppression, with a concomitant set of epistemological and ideological hegemonic positions. It is claimed that while colonialism ended with the coming about of majority rule in former colonies, coloniality endures into the present – hence the distinction between decolonisation, a political and territorial project, and decoloniality, an ideological and epistemological one." (Ibid, p.4)

"..decolonisation of the academy presently asks of academics that they not only study the phenomenon and mobilise it as a tool of analysis, but that they think through ways of applying it to their teaching practices (Luckett, Morreira, and Baijnath 2019)." (Ibid, p.5)

"..critically interrogating a theoretical canon based on an all-white male perspective and its impact on society and the real world in which we live – how we know, exist and experience the world (epistemology, ontology, phenomenology)." (Ibid, p.6)

"..what counts as legitimate knowledge within a discipline: in other words, they work carefully towards expanding the canon and hence curricula in their respective fields such that alternate knowledges (content) and alternate ways of knowing (methods and methodology) are included" (Ibid, p.8)

"..not only opening curricula to include other knowledges or ways of knowing, but also with how to shift institutional cultures and classroom practices to recognise and legitimate participation by all kinds of knowers" (Ibid, p.10).

Defining decolonisation continued

"Calls to decolonize the curriculum seek to introduce different histories, alternative philosophies, and broader concepts, which combine to displace, or rather, decentre, Eurocentric thought and practice within the academy."

(Sian, 2019)

"Calls to critically challenge the institutionalization of these knowledges are not to suggest that universities should simply eradicate European ideas, but rather to recognize the limitations of these concepts within pedagogical practice across disciplines (Patel 2014: 609)."

(Sian, 2019)

"The classroom is a political space with incredible potential to contest and dismantle the inequalities that so negatively impact our students. We can choose to pretend that what we do in the classroom is apolitical or we can acknowledge the role we have as educators in engaging our students."

(Ono-George, 2019, p.503)

"Teaching practice is engaged, anti-racist and decolonial if it forces students, especially those comfortably in the majority, out of their comfort zones. It forces them to employ critical thinking skills, including in understanding their own social positions, entitlements and power. A decolonised, anti-racist and engaged classroom is one in which students' experience and contributions are respected and valued. Instead of only looking at the teacher as the source of all knowledge/power, students are encouraged to be active participants in the classroom community. Instead of assignments and assessments that set students up to compete with one another, the anti-racist classroom encourages collaborative learning amongst students. Lastly, the aim is to make what is learned in the classroom applicable to life outside the classroom. Students are thus encouraged to apply what they learn to their wider communities and lives. Ultimately, anti-racist pedagogy, like other forms of engaged and decolonial praxis, seeks to engage students as holistic beings and to use the classroom to foster learning without reinforcement of existing systems of power and domination."

(Ono-George, 2019, pp.203-204)

Bibliography and Further Useful resources

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Trembath, S. Decoloniality: [Decoloniality - Antiracist Praxis - Subject Guides at American University](https://www.american.edu/decoloniality)

Wellcome's anti-racist toolkit: [Wellcome's anti-racist principles guidance and toolkit - June 2021.pdf](https://www.wellcome.ac.uk/anti-racist-toolkit)

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Space for your notes

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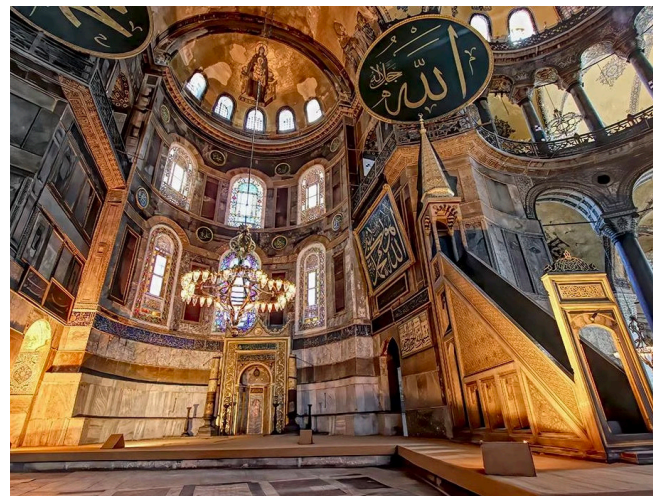
Case Study 1

Encounters with decoloniality in (educational) philosophy and theory

Dr Jane McDonnell

Decoloniality focus

- Questioning the dominance of white, male philosophers in educational philosophy.
- Bringing feminist perspectives alongside post- and de-colonial theory.
- Recognising coloniality and Eurocentrism in theories of the (post)secular



On Feminist Research and Universalism



Why decolonise?

The reflections before the work began from the preponderance of white, male philosophers in educational philosophy, while also recognising the opportunity for intersection of decolonial and feminist theory. Across the two modules, this opened up questions about the centrality of epistemology, the use of a critical lens on critical pedagogy, and the need for a deeper engagement with theories of the post-secular (and their critiques) as part of internationalising the study of religion and education.

Teaching: what we did

This case draws on reflections from two modules on the BA Education: **Philosophy of Education**, and **Religion, Education and Societies**, which provide examples of how these decoloniality themes are engaged in teaching.

In **Philosophy of Education**, the work moves from **the study of philosophers to the interrogation of key questions**, including **why is educational philosophy so male and pale?** The module introduces feminist, post- and de-colonial perspectives through a critical engagement with the theoretical canon and with questions of **"how we know, exist and experience the world (epistemology, ontology, phenomenology)"** (Morreira et al., 2020, cited in Smith, 2026, p. 3). It also draws on resources including Tuck and Yang (2012) on decolonisation, Ahmed (2018) on feminist research, Rizvi (2021) on cultural dislocation, and Zembylas (2025) on critical and decolonial approaches in educational philosophy and theory.

In **Religion, Education and Societies**, the work explores **the relationship between religion and education** and engages with theories from the Sociology of Religion. The module considers theories of the (post)secular, while recognising that "critically challenging the institutionalisation of these knowledges is not to suggest that **universities should simply eradicate European ideas, but rather to recognise the limitations of these concepts within pedagogical practice across disciplines**" (Patel, 2014, cited in Smith, 2026, p. 4). It also engages with debates on secularisation, post-secular theory and a **"co-existence" approach** to studying religion, including work by Woodhead et al. (2020).



What happened?

After the work, the reflections turned to how these questions related to students and to wider disciplinary conversations.

This included:

- the applicability to students' interests and contextual knowledge;
- the wider disciplinary landscape, including the plurality of critiques of Eurocentrism across disciplines;
- the application of a 'co-existence approach' to the study of religion and education
- the ongoing question of whether the work was talking about rather than doing the work of decoloniality;
- a movement from the academic to the personal, raising the issue of implicated-ness.

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Case Study 2

Decolonising Cultural Competence Education in Speech and Language Therapy: The CultuRACE approach

Linda Jose

Decoloniality focus

- Making power, inequity, and professional assumptions explicit.
- Broadening what counts as legitimate knowledge.
- Moving from passive transmission towards dialogue, reflection, and co-construction.

Why decolonise?

The CultuRACE intervention emerged from concerns that cultural competence education within Speech and Language Therapy education risked being fragmented, implicit, or treated as an "add-on". Dominant SLT and healthcare knowledge could be presented as neutral, universal, and unproblematic, while marginalised perspectives, lived experiences, and structural inequities were not always sufficiently centred.

There were also limited structured opportunities for students to critically examine racism, privilege, bias, representation, and culturally responsive care. Without this work, cultural competence education risked remaining surface-level rather than critically transformative.



Teaching: what we did

CultuRACE was developed as a scaffolded curriculum intervention across Newcastle University's three pre-registration Speech and Language Sciences degree programmes moving from foundational awareness and reflexivity towards structural understanding, professional responsibility, integration, and application.

The intervention included five sessions the first two aimed to increase reflexivity and foundational awareness and focused on culture and cultural competence, bias, power, privilege, anti-racism and allyship, the third and fourth session aiming to improve structural understanding focused on health inequalities and culturally responsive care, and systemic racism and decolonising healthcare. The final session focused on synthesis and integration of learning through playing the CultuRACE digital board game. Across the sessions, students were invited to critically examine assumptions, positioning, representation, and professional responsibility in Speech and Language Therapy practice.

The sessions created space for students to draw on lived, narrative, and placement-based experience. Sessions 3–5 deliberately connected these discussions to practice encounters, while inviting students to examine their own assumptions and positioning, and to reflect on self, power, and professional identity.

Pedagogically, the approach moved away from passive delivery and fixed knowledge towards dialogue, critical reflection, and co-construction. This included discussion-based learning, LEGO® Serious Play to explore health inequalities and culturally responsive care, and a bespoke CultuRACE digital board game for integration and application, and positioning students as active participants in meaning-making.

What happened?

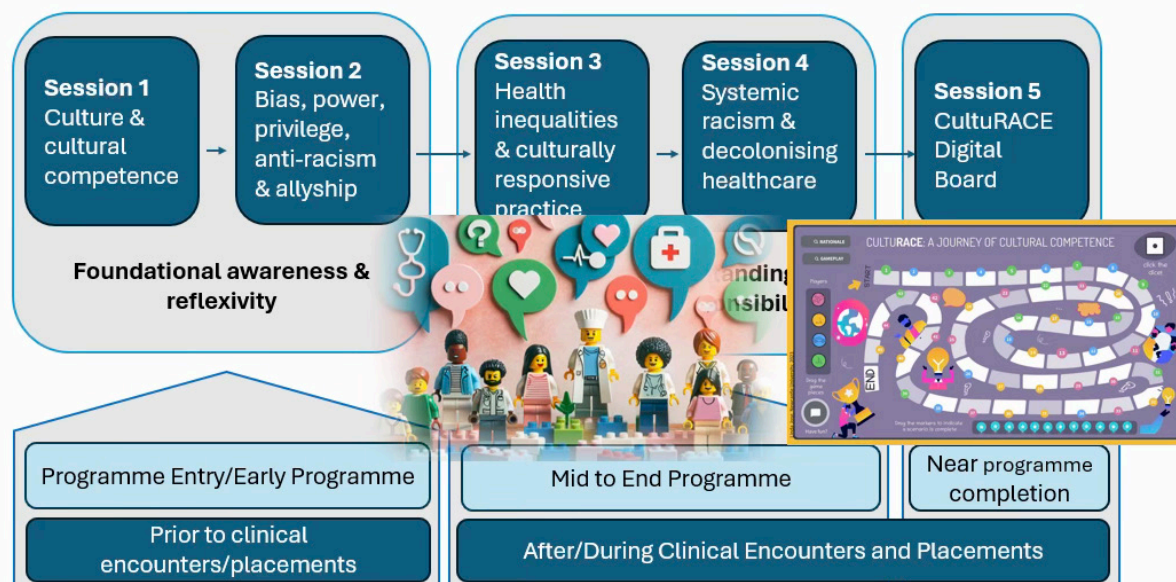
The work introduced decolonising moves within cultural competence education. Student reflections suggest a growing consciousness of culture, inequity, bias, and professional responsibility, with students beginning to connect these issues to clinical decision-making and culturally responsive practice.

Ongoing challenges include:

- supporting students to develop the depth of critical analysis this work requires;
- staff positionality, willingness, confidence, and competence shaping delivery;
- the risk of reliance on one person to carry the work.

Next steps include publishing pilot study data and using Catherine Cookson funding to support exploration of including fiction and storytelling in cultural competence education. This may widen what counts as knowledge through narrative and imaginative ways of knowing. The CultuRACE work remains iterative, partial, and unfinished.

The CultuRACE journey as a scaffolded curriculum intervention



Case Study 3

Exploring Decolonising the Application of Attachment Theory for Trainee Educational Psychologists

Dr Wilma Barrow

Decoloniality focus

- Attempting to subvert Eurocentric assumptions when considering attachment theory in DAppEdPsy teaching.
- Recognising globally diverse child-rearing practices when considering the application of attachment theory.

Why decolonise?

Bowlby (1969)'s account of relationship as primary (and not secondary to biological need) is presented to students as a revolution in childcare. This case recognises the importance of attachment theory and its positive impact on policy and practice in childcare. It also values the role of attachment theory in supporting 'relational practice' in schools and how this can support a shift from behaviour management which is informed by behaviourism. In doing so it recognizes that while research highlights the risk of attachment difficulties to longer term development, negative outcomes are not inevitable (Sroufe, 2005) and therefore there is a need to ensure a critical perspective on the determinism underpinning some popularized messages about attachment. There is also a need to recognize the contested nature of universal understandings of attachment (Keller &

Chaudhary, 2017) and that most research informing attachment theory is Western (Thompson et al., 2022).

This case study aims to support ongoing curiosity and critical reflexivity about our understandings of attachment for students who are trainee educational psychologists working with diverse communities. In doing so it aims to support trainees in the development of the following professional competencies:

- to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of varying family characteristics and /or structures
- to take appropriate professional action to redress power imbalances and to embed principles of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice in all professional actions

This is considered in the light of their professional responsibility to:

- challenge views and actions judged potentially harmful to the child or young person;

Teaching: what we did

This case study reflects work which has been undertaken in both 24/25 and 25/26 sessions. Each year it has involved an initial teaching session on parenting, inviting students to consider how concepts such as caregiver, security and sensitive child-rearing may vary across cultural contexts and family structures (Kellner & Chaudhury, 2017).

A two-step response followed, aiming to support developing criticality about understandings of attachment and claims which can be made in practice. Step one involved trainees completing two cycles of enquiry-based learning (EBL). EBL is a student led approach driven by curiosity and critical questioning and dialogue. It is embedded within the DAppEdPsy programme from week one. Initially students worked collaboratively to research the literature in this area and to consider implications for their practice with families, schools, and communities. They then embarked on a second Enquiry Based Learning cycle to explore how they might develop workshops to share their findings and reflections with a group of A level psychology students. For step two, a group of sixth-form A Level Psychology students (studying attachment as part of their curriculum) and their teacher, were invited to Newcastle to participate in the student designed and delivered workshops.

This teaching was supported by a wider programme ethos which emphasises collaboration across difference, psychological safety, cultural humility, and a dialogical approach to teaching. This ethos helped to frame the project as a collaborative and questioning process, rather than the transmission of a fixed account of attachment theory. The programme team is explicit from recruitment events onwards about the nature and limits of our psychological knowledge and the need for reflexivity in applying this in practice with diverse populations.

Things to think about

Educational psychology practice as inquiry, and therefore as a form of research, is stressed by the programme. This is supported from the first weeks of year one through teaching sessions designed to encourage critical understanding of alternative epistemological positions, their implications for theory, research and practice, and the positioning of the educational psychologist in relation to those with whom they work.

All members of the tutor team explicitly invite trainees to raise any issues that may need to be addressed in relation to their own teaching, language use, assumptions or interactions. This is intended to ensure that trainees feel safe to critique, as practice in cultural humility and as a means of avoiding ableism or oppressive practice in the learning environment and the workplace.

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Case Study 4

Decolonising Phonetics: Language varieties in the UK and around the world

Dr Cong Zhang and Professor Ghada Khattab

Decoloniality focus

- Questioning accent and language hierarchies in phonetics and phonology.
- Moving away from a single prestige norm or default reference point in teaching.
- Recognising accent and phonetic diversity as systematic and legitimate, rather than exceptional or deficient.

Why decolonise?

Accent awareness was needed because accent bias is not simply individual preference, but a structural legacy. In the UK, accent shapes how speakers are perceived and evaluated in everyday and institutional contexts, and perceptions of "competence" and "professionalism" remain tied to proximity to historical centres of power.

Decolonising phonetics involves challenging inherited hierarchies, treating all accents as systematic and legitimate, and recognising their social and political significance. Cross-linguistic examples are also needed because using English as a baseline reflects a western-centric tradition, while uneven representation reinforces implicit hierarchies of languages. This involves moving from selective to systematic integration of global examples, using multiple languages as equal points of reference, and avoiding positioning non-English data as exceptions or add-ons.

[SPE1059/SPE8151] Group Project: Socio-Phonetics Oscar

Overview

In this group project, you will explore the differences between English varieties. Your task is to create an **8-minute presentation** that raises awareness of socio-phonetic and accent-related issues, providing a clear understanding of the linguistic diversity in the United Kingdom.

Objectives

1. **Learn the difference between English varieties:** Gain a deeper appreciation of the socio-phonetic and accent variation across different regions of the UK. This is an important aspect to consider in your future practice since you will need to differentiate between delayed/disordered speech from dialectal features.
2. **Digital literacy:** Enhance your digital literacy by creating a video presentation, recording a video lecture, or making a PowerPoint presentation.

Teaching: what we did

This case is situated within the Speech and Language Sciences degree programme, where phonetics and phonology are core skills, including knowledge of speech sounds and the skills needed to transcribe them.

The decolonising work centred on two activities. The first was **Phonetic Oscar: Accent Awareness**, which moved away from SSBE/RP or AmE as the default and positioned regional, ethnic, and global Englishes as equally legitimate objects of analysis. Students introduced their own accent backgrounds, making analysis explicitly situated and encouraging awareness of how identity, class, race, and geography shape accent perception. The activity also foregrounded interviews, anecdotes, and lived experience as community-centred evidence, and framed comparison with SSBE/RP as difference rather than deficit. This supported Speech and Language Therapy practice by distinguishing dialect features from disorder features. Students were also required to engage with sociophonetic literature rather than stereotypes, bringing academic grounding to the activity.

The second activity was **Beyond English: Cross-linguistic Examples**. Cross-linguistic examples had previously been used occasionally, often to illustrate sounds not found in English. The revised approach used global examples more widely, reinforcing that no single language is the default reference point. Student language backgrounds were surveyed at the beginning of Year 1 so that examples from their languages could be integrated into teaching, including for sounds also present in English.

Cross-linguistic examples of voicing/aspiration

Some languages have a 3- or 4- way voicing and aspiration contrasts

Thai	Hindi
[d̪àː] curse	[bal] hair
[t̪aː] eye	[pʰal] knife blade
[t̪ʰaː] landing place	[pal] take care of
	[bʰal] forehead

Marathi has the same system as Hindi

Going forward

There is further work to be done in considering how phonetics teaching can be more inclusive of clients with multilingual backgrounds. This is an important area for both phoneticians and speech and language therapists, particularly in relation to how multilingual speakers' speech patterns are understood, described, and responded to in professional practice.

2.1 Ejectives: Language examples

- Lakhota ejectives (native American language, North Dakota and South Dakota, USA)

Bilabial	Dental	Velar
p'o	t'uʃɛ	k'u
'foggy'	'at all costs'	'to give'

<https://corpus.linguistics.berkeley.edu/acip/course/chapter6/lakhota/lakhota.html>

Cross-linguistic examples of voicing/aspiration

Some languages have a 2-way distinction

- 2-way voicing contrast:** Puerto Rican Spanish, Hungarian, Russian
 - voiced vs. voiceless (no aspiration contrast)
 - <https://corpus.linguistics.berkeley.edu/acip/vowels/chapter13/hungarian.html>
- 2-way aspiration contrast:** Cantonese
 - unaspirated voiceless vs. aspirated voiceless
 - <https://www.phonetik.uni-muenchen.de/studium/skripten/languageexamples/Demos/cantonese.html>

Case Study 5

Decolonising multilingual research

Dr Judith Reynolds and Dr Sara Ganassin

Decoloniality focus

- Questioning and decentring dominant academic traditions and assumptions.
- Foregrounding the political implications of conventional research processes.
- Recognising that knowledge is shaped by power and history, particularly through dominant language ideologies.

Researching Multilingually (RMly)

RMly considers the process and practice of using, or accounting for the use of, more than one language in the research process, e.g., from the initial design of the project, to engaging with different literatures, to developing the methodology and considering all possible ethical issues, to generating and analysing the data, to issues of representation and reflexivity when writing up and publishing (Holmes et al., 2016, p. 101).

Although there was a strong emphasis on reflexivity, positionality and ethical practices in research (e.g. Ganassin and Holmes, 2020), RMly was initially mostly concerned with more practical aspects, including what and how to translate, who to involve in the research etc. Gradually, however, the work developed an emerging acknowledgement that choices about language(s) in research are always political (e.g. Holmes et al., 2016, p. 100), leading to a more critical interest in what the consequences of language choices are for our research processes and products. We understood the need to challenge

assumptions about what counts as legitimate knowledge, and to advocate for greater visibility and valorisation of multilingual research within existing institutional cultures and practices. This positions language choices within wider questions of knowledge, power and research practice.

Together with Prue Holmes, we critically examined these issues through our Multilingual Matters edited volume, 'The Politics of Researching Multilingually' (2022). Several chapters explicitly address how language choices in contributors' research impacted on power dynamics and research outcomes in decolonial contexts. For example, a chapter by Olga Camila Hernández Morales and Anne-Marie de Mejía considers Olga Camila's ethnographic doctoral study of the heritage of colonialism in educational contexts on the Caribbean Island of San Andrés, examining the impact of decisions made about the language of the research and positionality in this context.

Another example of our work in this space is the Multilingualism in Doctoral Supervision (MIDS) Project (Ganassin et al., 2026), which focuses on the tension in HE Anglo-Saxon doctoral education between English-dominant monolingual policies and ideologies, and multilingual realities and practices. These multilingual realities arise not just through the presence of international students, but also through the linguistic resources of multilingual home students and staff and international staff members. Despite such multilingual richness, a "monolingual disposition" shapes institutional responses to linguistic diversity, framing it as a deficit and a problem (Preece & Marshall, 2020, p. 117), while languages other than English are marginalised in the production of research (Fay et al., 2021). Some existing research has challenged this orientation, advocating the conceptualisation of doctoral researcher education through multilingual and translingual lenses (Fay et

al., 2023). The MIDS project explored the attitudes and experiences of UK-based doctoral supervisors in the humanities and social sciences towards multilingualism in the doctoral supervision process.

The **MIDS Project** showed that although participating supervisors recognized the value of linguistic diversity in research and showed positive attitudes towards their students' multilingual research practices, supervisors felt less confident about supporting students to work effectively across languages. The project indicated that:

- supervisors' awareness of linguistic diversity in their students' research activities can evolve through structured reflection grounded in RMly principles, which encourage supervisors to see languages as a site of epistemic negotiation (Choy et al., 2017; Fay et al., 2021).
- Systemic interventions, such as RMly training, are necessary to reframe linguistic diversity as an integral component of doctoral education and to challenge the monolingual orientation of British HE.

Things to think about

As Morreira et al. (2020, p. 2) note, "While debates on decoloniality and decolonisation have proliferated at a theoretical level, work on operationalising them within the academy is just beginning." The question arises of how this decolonising work can be done from a position at the centre of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011). Our response is that even from this centre, we can and must promote multilingualism and epistemic diversity in research, foster critical language awareness amongst scholars, and encourage and support students and colleagues to reflect critically on their own positionality in relation to decolonial issues.

Other relevant work in this space includes Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work on decolonising methodologies (1999; 3rd ed. 2021); Richard Fay, Jane Andrews and colleagues' work on translingual researcher mindset (Andrews and Fay, 2020; Fay et al., 2021), epistemic justice (Fay et al., 2023), and the ethics of intercultural knowledge-work (Huang et al., 2017); Michael Singh and colleagues' work on post-monolingual research methodology (Singh, 2017) and trans-language and trans-cultural research practice (Choy et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2025); and work by Phipps (2019) and Ndlovu and Makalela (2021) on decolonising understandings of multilingualism itself.

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Case Study 6

Decolonising decoloniality: emerging tensions

Professor Heather Smith and Dr Lydia Wysocki

Decoloniality focus

- Questioning and decentring dominant academic traditions and assumptions.
- Expanding curricula to include marginalised voices and alternative knowledge systems.
- Recognising that knowledge is shaped by power and history.

Decolonising research: what we did

Roma communities across Europe face persistent racism, discrimination and social exclusion. In education this manifests as inequities in experiences, exclusion rates and attainment for Roma pupils.



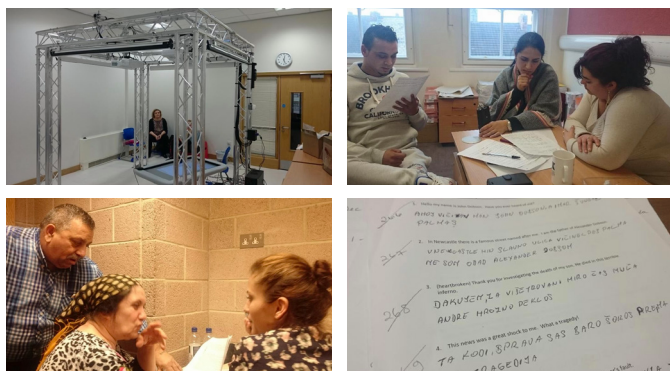
This research project, ROMtels (Roma translinguaging enquiry learning space), which was Erasmus+ funded, aimed to improve Roma pupils' experiences of schooling through the creation of translinguaging enquiry learning spaces. Translinguaging (tlang)

pedagogy is a way of allowing, supporting and enabling pupils to draw on all of their languages (or languaging repertoire) in the pursuit of learning. This approach is viewed as a way of challenging the status quo by affording children the right to employ every resource at their disposal for learning in what are traditionally monolingual classrooms. Tlang spaces were created as a way of purposefully and strategically leveraging pupils' tlang practices to enhance their learning experiences, whilst enabling pupils to demonstrate what they know and can do (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Garcia and Li, 2014) and to develop and enact standard academic ways of languaging (Garcia and Sylvan, 2011).

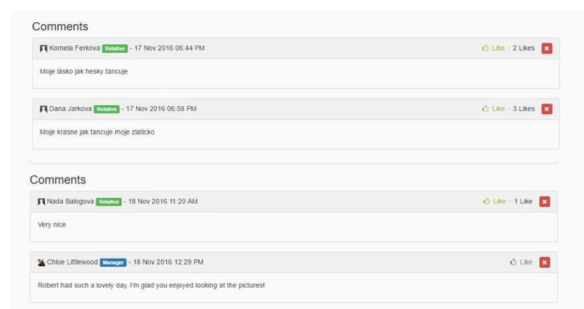
Roma pupils drew on a combination of their own Romani language, their knowledge of an Eastern European language, and English to make sense of and learn about subjects through a series of enquiries; for example as part of the history curriculum, they learnt about the Great Fire of Tyneside, where pupils worked as fire investigators to consider who Alexander Dobson was, how he died, and who was responsible for starting the fire; and about the Ancient City of Babylon, where pupils worked as history investigators to consider the purpose of an artefact and what life was like for people living in Babylon.



Families' "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992, Yosso, 2005) were employed through their expertise in tlang, including in the production of prestigious resources for the enquiries (such as voicing enquiry characters speaking Romani), and as co-researchers.



The work supported more effective learning for the multilingual Roma pupils, and a more positive relationship between home and school. Families reported feeling more included and valued in their children's education, as evinced in their participation in online communication forum for early years



where they shared photographs and some comments in their own languages. Parents also greatly appreciated the use of Roma languages in school and reported feeling empowered. The Roma pupils showed improved engagement and attendance and increases in attainment, including in learning to read English.

Things to think about

Whilst the experience in schools and with Roma families was positive, when sharing our findings with Roma academics, a major tension emerged between the project's recognition of linguistic pluralism for emancipation at school level, and the need at a transnational level to present a collective voice as one Roma people, for action towards equality and human rights for Roma across Europe.

In reflecting on this tension, the research team recognised that Eurocentric theorisation and liberal politics had not been effectively decentred, including Western theories of learning (Smith and Robertson, 2020) and liberal post-structural ideas of

linguaging, to acknowledge the geopolitical reality for Roma people across Europe. In other words, there was a need to further decolonise our efforts at decoloniality. As Smith et al. (2020, p. 127) write in attempting to address the tension, "[translanguaging pedagogy] must be ever vigilant to the ways in which pluralism can be hijacked to work against collectivism, and collective action towards redistribution can occlude the need for a recognition of plurality during the journey towards transformation."

Published work

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HB1 Handbook 1: Translanguaging Pedagogy: handbook for teachers (HB1 English) (HB1 Finnish) (HB1 French) (HB1 Romanian) (HB1 Spanish)

HB2 Handbook 2: Translanguaging Pedagogy: handbook for teacher educators (HB2 English) (HB2 Finnish) (HB2 French) (HB2 Romanian) (HB2 Spanish)

HB3 Handbook 3: Schools and Plurilingual Communities Working Together: handbook for schools (HB3 English) (HB3 Finnish) (HB3 French) (HB3 Romanian) (HB3 Spanish)

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Decolonisation in Higher Education: A Counter Narrative

How does this land for you the reader?

Before I respond to the questions, I want to acknowledge something important. Like anyone sharing their story, I cannot control how it will land or how it will be received. I am writing this to build awareness and to give voice to experiences that are often unheard, hard to articulate without resorting to an exposition dump! This is my story, and I offer it with honesty and intention.

1. I am the decolonisation!

When I say this, I mean that my presence changes the space around me. Higher education was built through white and male colonial traditions of knowledge. When I enter these spaces as a Black woman, I disrupt old assumptions without speaking a word. I am not blaming individuals. I am naming the habits that institutions develop over time. These habits shape who is seen, who is heard and who is valued. They work quietly and many people do not notice them at all. My presence brings pride to some students. They see themselves reflected in me and it matters. But it also brings pressure. I am visible in ways others are not. At the same time, I am invisible in moments when my experience should matter. I live with this mix of being watched and being overlooked. Because of this, I cannot be passive. If I am visible, my visibility must carry intention. My intention becomes small actions that centre Black people and Black knowledge. These actions feel simple to me, but some people may misunderstand them. They may wonder why am I 'making it racial.' In truth they are wondering about the wrong thing! My presence is never neutral. By being here, by speaking here, I change the space. I am key in the decolonisation agenda.

2. What I want white colleagues to understand

A. Starting one step behind

In many academic spaces, whiteness is treated as the quiet norm. Because of this, I often need to prove my credibility before it is assumed. Others begin with the benefit of trust. I begin with questions about whether I belong. This is not about blaming individuals. It is about understanding how default assumptions work. When I name this, I am not being oversensitive. I am describing a pattern that many colleagues never have to notice because it works in their favour.

B. Decolonisation is lived work

Decolonisation is not abstract to me. It shows up in the reading lists we design. It shows up in whose research counts as standard. It shows up in whose perspectives are treated as neutral or expert. For Black academics, this work is part of daily life. It is not that others are not committed. It is that I feel the effects in my body and in my day-to-day experience. This is not theoretical work for me. It is lived reality.

C. Speaking up involves risk

When I speak about race or equity, there is risk. The consequences may be subtle, but they are real. The risk comes from how institutions respond to challenge and to difference. It shapes how free I feel to name a problem. My silence is not fearfulness or oversensitivity. Sometimes silence is self-protection. It is a choice I make to remain safe in a system that does not always protect me.

D. Representation without inclusion becomes tokenism

Representation matters. Seeing Black colleagues in academic spaces matters. But representation without real inclusion can feel hollow. If I am only visible but not heard, not supported and not valued, then representation becomes performance rather than progress. This is not an accusation. It is an invitation. I am asking white colleagues to think beyond bodies in the room and towards genuine belonging. Inclusion means influence, voice and shared responsibility for change.

3. I do not always see my colour until someone else does

There are moments when I am simply working. I am teaching, writing, supervising or planning my day, and for a while I feel like any other colleague. I am focused on my tasks, my deadlines, my thoughts. In those moments, I forget about my colour because it is not what I am thinking about. I am thinking about what to wear for an event. I am thinking about whether I paid a bill on time. I am thinking about how tired I am. I move through my day in a state of normal life. Then something happens that turns my presence into a racial moment, before I arrive, speak or behave, that I have not given consent to and more often than not is inaccurate. These moments are rarely dramatic. They are subtle, but they build up over time they are my lived experiences. They remind me that racial assumptions are present, even when unspoken. This is not oversensitivity. It is simply what happens. The shift is sudden. I go from feeling ordinary to feeling watched through a specific lens. It can be triggered by a small comment or assumption. Someone might assume I can sing or dance. Someone might make a casual remark that links me to a stereotype. The intention is not malicious. But the effect is real. In those moments, I realise people think they are seeing me, but they are not. They are seeing a version of me filtered through the idea of my colour. I become partial. I become reduced. I become something smaller than who I am. These moments are reminders that I do not get to decide when race becomes part of the interaction. Someone else decides that for me. Each reminder pulls me out of my ordinary life and back into awareness of how I am perceived.

Critical questions for disciplines and research towards decolonisation

By way of conclusion, the chapter by **Azumah Dennis** (2018, pp.10-11) offers ten defining pedagogic approaches to decolonizing education (useful as a scaffold for Higher Education too), which have been reframed here as questions for colleagues to engage with:

Critical question	Ideas/discussion points raised	Associated actions	Reflections on those actions
1) Is it possible to establish a space within which it is possible to speak about decolonisation, and what would this look like for your subject, courses and research? This may require a rejection of the most readily and easily available spaces, necessitating the deliberate cultivation of an undercommons, or an otherwise space.			
2) If you were to recognize and reflexively explore your own implicatedness within the structures you critique, what would this mean for your teaching and research? It is possible that this might not feel empowering.			
3) Is there space in your subject/research to interrogate the existing cultural interpretive monopoly of European knowledges, assumptions and methodologies and what would this look like?			
4) Can you identify those too frequently unexplored ways of being that are of most interest to you; imagine the shape of a curriculum or piece of research driven by them, what would that look like, what would you need to do?			
5) Alongside acknowledging the specific content taught or researched, have you considered also the way your subject is taught and the enactment of particular sorts of pedagogic relationships, or the way you carry out a piece of research?			

Critical question	Ideas/discussion points raised	Associated actions	Reflections on those actions
6) You may want to consider refusing a single authoritative voice, perspective or approach. What would it mean to remain within indeterminacy, accepting all conclusions as tentative, all settlements as temporary – including this suggestion? This may be uncomfortable.			
7) Have you placed the disciplinary founding fathers of philosophy and social sciences in their place: contextualizing them and their ideas as emergent from a specific time and place rather than universal?			
8) Have you located unheard, silenced or trivialized voices relevant to your discipline or research to exemplify and amplify them, placing them alongside orthodox voices in an implicit motion of critique?			
9) Have you explored and identified the political implications of specific pedagogic approaches? These may not be the ultimate drivers of your pedagogy, but they are its inescapable by-products.			
10) What would your subject or research look like if you extricate your curriculum/research from all power which is not constituted by free decisions but made by free people and using the resources of imagination, organizing, opposition and resistance in pursuance of that end (Quijano 2007, p. 177)?			

