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## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND NEOLIBERAL ENGLISH- MEDIUM HIGHER EDUCATION

Contextualizing the Impact of Race and Language  
Ideologies

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### Contextualizing the Impact of Race and Language Ideologies

*Vander Tavares*

#### **Introduction**

Under an increasing neoliberal influence, efforts to internationalize higher education have had a dramatic impact on the purpose of higher education. Neoliberal ideologies have gradually worked to undermine higher education as a locus of intercultural and humanistic education by focusing instead on academic development for economic gain and workplace success (Patrick 2013; Zepke 2018). The covid-19 pandemic helped expose important domains neglected by neoliberal internationalization, particularly those navigated by multilingual international students who speak English as additional language, such as better and more institutional support designed for international students' socialization, academic and linguistic success. Racism and neo-racism became even more pronounced toward racialized international students during the pandemic, especially those of an Asian background, despite (neoliberal) academic rhetoric that has emphasized cultural diversity and social justice in many institutions around the world (Tavares 2024).

Within this rapidly evolving educational context, English has played an instrumental role with in the materialization of efforts to internationalize higher education. However, ideologies of language and race, such as native-speakerism, raciolinguistics, and monolingual norms remain rigidly embedded in English language education and use in academic contexts. Native-speakerism elevates the 'native speaker' of English against whom multilingual international students are compared. Yet, native-speakerism is not only a linguistic but also a political ideology that advances the cultural ideals of English-speaking contexts of Global North higher education at the expense of Global South knowledges and identities—the place which most international students are recruited from. This chapter contextualizes and problematizes the impact of English language use informed by neoliberal and language ideologies in English-medium higher education by exploring the experiences of multilingual international students. Neoliberalism and language ideologies will be explained in detail in subsequent sections.

In this chapter, multilingual international students will be used as a term to refer to international students who speak English as an additional language. This reference is more inclusive and correct than English as a second language (ESL) or ‘non-native speaker’ (Slaughter and Cross 2021), for English may be one of many languages spoken by an international student. Moreover, from a perspective of multilingualism, the sequence in which the language was learned holds less importance. At times, however, it will be necessary to evoke the native/non-native dichotomy because most of the research literature reflects such a construction. Nevertheless, as Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014: 2) have maintained, this occasional reference is not meant to ‘bestow legitimacy on the distinction, which we frame as an artificial and disempowering construct’, but rather to delineate the politics of language teaching and learning in English-medium higher education.

This chapter begins by reviewing the humanistic and intercultural goals of traditional higher education. Internationalization of both higher education and the curriculum is then discussed by drawing on seminal research. Subsequently, neoliberalism is employed as a framework to help understand key changes in higher education, but also as an object of critique, especially by focusing on its impact on the individual student, teaching, learning, and assessment. Prior to contextualizing and problematizing language ideologies, this chapter presents a discussion on the interplay between the English language and the internationalization of higher education. The concluding section offers reflections and recommendations for English-medium institutions of higher education from a decolonial perspective.

### **The Humanistic and Intercultural Goals of Traditional Higher Education**

The historical development of higher education spans centuries with origins in various regions and civilizations of the world. In the Global North tradition, which has been extended to many post-colonial contexts, higher education can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome. In Greece, institutions like the Academy founded by Plato and the Lyceum established by Aristotle were centers of philosophical and intellectual inquiry (Baltes 1993). These schools shared the common goal of developing critical thinking and philosophical knowledge in students. In Rome, higher education also emphasized rhetoric, law, and training for political leadership (Clarke 2012). The concept of the university as an institution of higher learning as understood in contemporary terms emerged during the Middle Ages in Europe (Clarke 2012). These medieval universities focused initially on religious education and training clergy but later expanded to include a wider range of subjects, including theology, philosophy, law, medicine, and the arts.

Throughout its development, higher education has been characterized by a focus on the humanistic development of the student. Humanistic development includes skills, values, and dispositions that can contribute, at the individual level, to the personal and professional growth of the student, while at the collective level, to the betterment of society where students act as responsible, informed, and engaged citizens (Aloni 2011). Within the humanistic tradition, critical thinking has been considered an essential skill meant to support students’ broad analytical mindset. Generally speaking, critical thinking emphasizes questioning assumptions, evaluating evidence, and developing independent perspectives, which McPeck (2016) argued to altogether constitute ‘the appropriate use of *reflective skepticism* within the problem area under consideration’ (7, emphasis in original). Today, colleges and universities have courses dedicated completely to the development of critical thinking, typically at the undergraduate level.

In the intercultural domain, one of the purposes of higher education is to develop cultural and social awareness in students. Institutions may do so by exposing students to a variety of perspectives and experiences that differ from their own through learning within and outside the

classroom (Porto and Byram 2015). This includes not only reading about different cultures, histories, and social issues but also engaging in educational activities that scaffold students' interaction with, and potentially growth through, intellectually challenging experiences. When higher education offers foundational education that can promote a broader and more critical understanding of the world, students may be better prepared to engage in meaningful dialogue with peers and address complex societal challenges in collaboration (Lee 2005). Cultural and social awareness development through intercultural experiences reinforces the aim of education to have a positive impact on society beyond the classroom.

Despite the importance of such goals for the student, neoliberalism, as will be explained later, has provoked a categorical shift as to the purpose of higher education. Since 'neoliberalism in education policy tends to engender a technical rationalist approach to knowledge and its value' (Patrick 2013: 2), institutions of higher education tend to prioritize skills that contribute to material wealth, thereby emphasizing the worker, rather than citizen, facet of a student's identity. With higher education now being embedded in the international and no longer only the national context, the goals of critical thinking and intercultural awareness have experienced an ideological reassignment in that their importance and role are judged based on the economy (Peters 2003). Since the future success of the economy depends on the student-worker, the shaping of students to become good workers materializes through (higher) education focusing on 'developing human capital and economic growth' (Patrick 2013: 2).

### **Internationalization of Higher Education and of the Curriculum**

The internationalization of higher education refers to the process by which institutions of higher learning become increasingly more connected and engaged with the global community. To achieve an internationalized profile, universities and colleges draw on different strategies aimed at promoting cross-border collaboration, international mobility, and a more global perspective in education through changes to curriculum, pedagogy, and other academic activities. A recent definition of internationalization is given as 'the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff' while also making 'a meaningful contribution to society' (de Wit et al. 2015: 29). As such, to internationalize is to promote positive changes for all involved, on an individual as well as global level.

In terms of mobility, internationalization has contributed to a more diverse student body on academic campuses. On a spectrum of studying abroad ranging from a few weeks to a full degree, internationalization as a far-reaching phenomenon has materialized efforts to promote student diversity even for institutions located in small towns or rural areas that have not traditionally been a part of the international scene (Harder 2010). The mobility of students in particular has helped to expand the languages and cultures represented in institutions, although English largely remains the language of instruction in the Anglophone Global North. However, a welcoming and inclusive environment for international students and faculty remains an essential element of internationalization. This includes providing adequate and culturally responsive support services in terms of both quality and quantity in accordance with the vast numbers of international students now on university and college campuses, which are expected to reach eight million by 2025 (UNESCO, 2015).

Within the process of internationalization, a branching focus has been placed on the curriculum. Leask (2015: 10) argued that an internationalized curriculum needs to 'engage students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity,' and also 'purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens'. Thus,

internationalization of the curriculum should be anchored in diversity and interculturality, thereby functioning as a locus of inclusion of not only varied international perspectives on a topic locally relevant but also of international topics in themselves. When the curriculum is internationalized, international students may find more cultural representativity that aligns with their past experiences and overall perspectives on a given topic. This point of convergence in the curriculum between the local and the global has the potential to make international students feel appreciated and ‘seen’ in their courses (Tavares 2021).

In spite of its global scope and international orientation, internationalization has remained overwhelmingly a Western-based vision for higher education. Guzmán-Valenzuela (2023: 1) has spoken of the three narratives of internationalization: a normative and two critical versions. The critical ones have typically included challenging internationalization as a ‘hegemonic market-based force’ and the ‘colonial legacies’ of Western education, though this goal has not yet entered the ‘mainstream’ for many institutions. As the author argues, internationalization informed by economic imperatives has neglected a number of important ethical aspects, such as including and representing minoritized populations in the ‘international’ imaginary, in addition to offering strategies for global issues. For instance, the voices of Indigenous communities remain largely absent from internationalization frameworks and internationalized curricula in the Global North. A connection between internationalization and neoliberalism specifically will be presented later in this chapter.

### **Neoliberalism: From an Economic Policy to a Global Framework**

Neoliberalism may be considered a revival of classical liberal ideas of the 19th century that emphasized limited government intervention, free markets, and individual liberty. Such ideas gained traction in the 20th century through the economic and political philosophies of European liberal thinkers, especially after the Great Depression and World War II, when many European nations, but also others in different contexts, engaged in efforts to rebuild their economies and societies (Morningstar 2020). One prominent facet of neoliberalism, put in simple terms, entails a shift in the purpose of the government: from protecting individual rights and interests to privileging market imperatives (Wrenn 2014). Privatization of domestic services and goods has played a central role in the success and continuity of neoliberal economic ideas since the late 20th century. Nevertheless, in an increasingly globalized and interconnected society, neoliberalism has, including by privatizing education, become an intricate, ingrained, and widespread framework of governance on both domestic and international levels.

Connell and Dados (2014: 117) maintain that ‘neoliberal power and market-dominated society have become practical reality for much of the world’s population’. In other words, neoliberalism has become so deeply naturalized that its modes of operation, as well as the outcomes which they produce, remain difficult to identify and disentangle in most, if not all, domains of human experience. As critics have argued, one of the most consequential outcomes of neoliberalism on a societal level has been the exacerbation of economic inequality (Harvey 2007). Neoliberal policies often prioritize the interests of corporations and the wealthy, leading to further income and wealth disparities between the classes. Though these policies vary in scope and extent across nations, tax cuts for the rich and reduced social safety nets, such as through cut-backs to welfare, unemployment, and healthcare budgets, have directly contributed to this trend (Morningstar 2020). Since these issues now affect all societies, neoliberalism has been described as a world system (Morningstar 2020).

### **Neoliberalism in Higher Education: Insights on the Student**

Higher education is a domain of contemporary society that has been not only substantially affected by neoliberalism, but also one which reproduces it. The commodification of education has contributed to conceptually shifting the perception of students to one in which they are consumers of educational services (Patrick 2013). When students are viewed as consumers, universities and colleges prioritize the development and delivery of education from a customer satisfaction stance. As a result, the focus may not actually be on education *per se*, but rather on amenities, campus aesthetics, and non-academic services so as to attract and retain students in competition with other institutions through branding and marketing. In terms of actual education, however, institutions may tailor their curricula to meet perceived market demands, often emphasizing career-oriented, job-ready skills (Zepke 2017), which also affects instructors as they must reinvent their teaching and expertise in order to remain relevant. The focus on keeping students satisfied can overshadow the importance of traditional humanistic educational goals, such as critical thinking, liberal arts education, and personal growth.

The neoliberal model of education can place unwarranted weight on student evaluations to determine the quality of education. If quality assessment is not multifactorial and balanced out through other instruments in addition to student evaluations, the performance of instructors and the continuance of courses become directly compromised. Under the imperative to prioritize student satisfaction, instructors may feel pressured to inflate students' grades and make decisions on assessment methods and approaches, course structure, and interpersonal interaction under fear and vigilance of administration (Kahl Jr. 2020). Higher education as an individual investment instrumentalizes tuition fees as a form of contract that enables students to influence the provision of education. Moreover, if investing in higher education is tied to earning potential post-graduation, students (and their families) may make decisions about education based on expected return on investment (Chen 2008), rather than on their personal interest in an academic subject.

Although neoliberal education empowers students as consumers, it also places a growing burden on them through interpersonal competition. As higher education is intimately joined with market drives, students must stand out from their peers—seen as competitors rather than collaborators—by outperforming them in education and through the acquisition of educational credentials (Tavares 2022). However, entry into the English-medium workplace often requires 'native' (or 'near-native') proficiency in English (Tavares 2023a). As such, multilingual international students who use English as an additional language, especially those considered to have a real or perceived accent, remain disadvantaged in relation to their local-born, 'native speaker' peers, generally because the label 'non-native speaker', as an ideological site, is enough to prevent access to the workplace by typically not considering individual difference (Creese 2010). Furthermore, competition exacerbates individualism, which may result in students' feeling increasingly isolated in higher education, despite physically close contact with other students on a frequent basis (Tavares 2022). A more individualistic student may invest less in social relationships with others if these are perceived as threats to one's success (Wrenn and Waller 2017).

A consumer-oriented approach to higher education undermines the intrinsic value of education, as described previously. Knowledge in its own right and personal growth become devalued while neoliberalism strengthens higher education as a transactional experience that reflects market needs and student preferences (Patrick 2013). The concept of students as consumers has led to a more utilitarian approach to higher education, where the emphasis is on meeting specific career and economic goals in ways that amplify individualism and competition (Tavares 2021). Simultaneously,

neoliberal education dismisses the need to prepare students to become ‘thoughtfully and actively engaged as citizens with critical awareness, compassion and a willingness to act in the world to achieve social justice’ (Zepke 2018: 438–439). The ingrained nature of neoliberal economic principles in higher education raises questions about two important, interconnected educational aspects: the broader societal and intellectual purposes of higher education, and whether it now adequately serves the diverse needs and aspirations of individual students. Despite this theorization over the impact of neoliberalism on the positioning of students, it is important to view students as agentic individuals who resist and transform the politics of higher education.

### **Neoliberal Diversity: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**

The phrase ‘equity, diversity and inclusion’ (EDI) now comprises an essential component of the universal vocabulary of English-medium institutions of higher education. The concept behind the phrase is meant to examine structural barriers for minoritized groups in colleges and universities, recognize various forms of diversity (e.g., linguistic, cultural, ethnic, national, gender) and identify ways to challenge and overcome barriers (Tamtik and Guenter 2019). Considering multilingual international students may be minoritized on the basis of the intersection of any of such sociological aspects, but particularly nationality, language, and race, this multifaceted strategy becomes both timely and important. Despite its potential, critical engagement with initiatives conceptually branded as or grounded in EDI has consistently revealed the strategy’s shortcomings and led scholars to question its emergence as largely performative (Tamtik and Guenter 2019; Tavares 2024).

Critique directed towards the shortcomings includes the superficial reach of this strategy in higher education contexts. By not engaging with structural changes that would require redesigning the fabric of higher education as a system of not only education but also governance and research, EDI may thus be viewed as a product of neoliberal diversity. This means that efforts to promote cultural and linguistic diversity undermine the importance of true diversity while simultaneously reproducing ideologies of language and culture (Kubota 2016). In this sense, diversity is acknowledged and even valued, but the organization of cultures, languages, and knowledges—and thus of groups of people—remains hierarchical, rather than horizontal. One instance in which neoliberal diversity operates at the expense of multilingual international students’ cultures and languages entails ‘ethnic’ events where they are invited to display, share, or sell their ethnic foods and traditions, thereby reinforcing what some have discussed to be the commodification of minority cultures through neoliberalism (Alenuma-Nimoh 2016).

To make matters worse, many EDI statements by colleges and universities do not even mention international students. Gupta and Gomez (2023) argue that ‘the disregarding of international students in terms of equity issues translates into real-life harms of social exclusion, discrimination and racism experienced by international students in the classroom, in the campus life and in their interactions with domestic students’ (78). Multilingual international students therefore become a part, rather discretely, of *internationalization* frameworks, which emerged overwhelmingly for their potential to generate revenue, harmonize budgets, and promote intercultural engagement on the terms of the Global North. Without the categorical integration of multilingual international students as an EDI-seeking group into EDI plans, as well as a decolonial reconstruction of internationalization frameworks, issues of discrimination that affect multilingual international students will remain intact.

### **Internationalization of Higher Education from a Neoliberal Perspective**

Neoliberalism may be viewed as an ideological ‘force’ that has encouraged institutions of higher education to internationalize. However, neoliberal internationalization is enveloped largely by economic imperatives. As such, the global movement of students, faculty, and staff, along with the redesign of academic programs and institutions for internationalization, have been, concomitantly, both drivers and experiencers of neoliberalism (Plumb 2020). To begin with, the recruitment of international students is now a locus of competition and source of revenue. In fact, international students are of utmost importance in enabling institutions of higher education to offset budget cuts resulting from reduced public funding (Beck 2023). However, this practice is vastly one-sided: Global North recruiters promote, through direct travelling or third-party agencies, higher education to students in the Global South, who often must pay considerably higher tuition fees (Bolsmann and Miller 2008). Higher tuition fees do not necessarily equate to better education, nevertheless, as recruited students tend to encounter a very different version of the idealized international student experience advertised by recruitment agents and agencies (Tavares 2021).

The pursuit of revenue through multilingual international student recruitment has shed light on the links between student objectification and diverse forms of discrimination. The common discourse in the Anglophone Global North has positioned international students as ‘cash cows’ (Stein and Andreotti 2016), thereby reducing the whole student to a customer position for whom support is often partial, inadequate, or unavailable. As ‘foreign’ students, a position which is marked in comparison to the local student, multilingual international students, particularly of a racialized background, can encounter open forms of discrimination, such as bullying and racism, to micro-aggressions both in campus life and within the classroom (Houshmand et al. 2014; Wei and Bunjun 2021). In Canada, internationalization has entailed the government ‘getting out of the way’ (Plumb 2020: 331) when it comes to controlling international student tuition and the uniformity of support provision. Consequently, Canadian colleges and universities will employ their own mechanisms of support for international students, leading to great variance in how the students experience academic life due to the potential for unequal treatment and support.

At the curricular level, neoliberalism tends to lead to superficial changes to the curriculum that, despite evoking signs of diversity, are not implemented ethically or inclusively. Reporting from the Canadian context, Guo and Guo (2017) revealed a number of discrepancies between the internationalization discourse at their university and multilingual international students’ experiences. Many of the students interviewed reported that cultural perspectives originating from their home countries were not broadly included in teaching materials or lectures, and that when they were, cultures were at times presented negatively, as backward or stereotyped. There are also times when issues of cultural ‘localism’ intersect with language. As Houshmand et al. (2014) have demonstrated, including literature that is a part of the Global North, Anglophone canon assumes all students should have previous knowledge of the subject, but for multilingual international students who do not, an internationalized curriculum would have taken such an issue into account. A multilingual international student of a racialized background exemplified the issue by saying:

In that class, I cannot understand the lecture at the beginning because he [the professor] was talking about very traditional Western classic novels I had not read before. Most of my classmates I feel like they have ... read those before when they were small so I cannot understand in the beginning. I contact the professor and say, “Could you please slow down a little bit because I am an international student? Could you sometimes write some of the keywords



when you're talking?" ... His feedback is, "You can go to international student center and get help." That did not help me.

(Houshmand et al. 2014: 382)

### **English and Internationalization: Two Inseparable Forces**

Internationalization has strengthened the dominance of English as a global language and as a language of international higher education. As nations become more interconnected economically, culturally, and politically, there is a growing demand for higher education institutions to offer programs and courses that can attract students and faculty from around the world within an internationally competitive market of education. To this end, English, functioning as a lingua franca, facilitates communication and collaboration among diverse stakeholders in higher education as well as the international mobility of students, faculty, and staff, for both temporary and permanent movement. In the context of the academic classroom, internationalization through English helps to promote a more globalized learning environment that can enrich the educational experience for all students and prepare them for a society where intercultural contact becomes the norm (Baker and Fang 2022). Despite the important role English plays in such an environment, both the language and current internationalization frameworks remain sources of academic and social difference for multilingual international students, both globally and in local contexts.

The use of English as a lingua franca has helped to maintain English-speaking countries from the Global North as top destinations for multilingual international students. These countries offer a wide range of programs taught in English, which attracts students from non-English-speaking countries who seek to pursue higher education abroad. Proficiency in English is often a requirement for admission, with different academic programs and levels (i.e., bachelor's, master's, and PhD) varying in terms of language requirement. Standardized tests such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) are commonly used for assessment. Nevertheless, many colleges and universities have established their own English language centers for multilingual international students. These places offer academic pathway programs for international students through which they may develop the proficiency expected through institution-specific assessment methods, which expedites the students' process of admission as international language tests may no longer be required. From a neoliberal perspective, replacing international language tests with local forms of assessment can be seen as a response to inter-institution competition for international students as institutions attempt to eliminate 'barriers' to international student admission (Bolsmann and Miller 2008).

Nevertheless, research has consistently illustrated that such language preparatory programs and tests, whether international or local, may not adequately prepare multilingual international students for the linguistic demands of academic study. Many multilingual international students report encountering linguistic challenges in their attempts to understand lectures (Mesidor and Sly 2016), communicate with peers (Tavares 2021), express themselves in group presentations (Kim 2006), and although not tied to academic language, participate in social activities with 'native speakers' in which cultural and everyday forms of English are used (Kuo 2011). In their attempts to socialize with local peers who acquired English as a first language, multilingual international students may experience frustration and anxiety from not understanding idiomatic expressions, jokes, and the like, considering the academic language-oriented preparation they received through their language-focused admission programs. As a result, some may self-isolate and avoid social activities where 'native speaker' peers are present for fear of embarrassment.

## **Language Ideologies and Norms**

Language ideologies refer to the beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that individuals and communities hold about (a particular) language and therefore its speakers. Kroskrity (2000: 192) explained language ideologies as ‘beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states’. Language ideologies shape how people perceive, value, and use languages in social, cultural, and political contexts on a global level, assigning unequal value to languages, varieties, dialects, and accents. Manifesting through either explicit or implicit mechanisms, language ideologies can influence language and higher education policy, as well as government decisions in terms of funding and investment. Language ideologies cannot be understood apart from power relations between groups of speakers (Fairclough 2010), especially in language minority contexts.

To understand the impact of language ideologies on multilingual international students’ experiences in higher education, this chapter will focus on native-speakerism, monolingual norms, and raciolinguistic ideologies. As research demonstrates, these ideologies and norms are known to cause feelings of exclusion and marginalization for multilingual international students on campuses (Lee and Rice 2007), particularly racialized multilingual international students. Houshmand and colleagues (2014) reported that East and South Asian multilingual international students in Canada, for instance, experienced micro-aggressions stemming from different types of racist attitudes, including in the linguistic domain, leading the international students in the study to feel avoided, ridiculed, and invisible. These ideologies and norms, along with their impact, are further contextualized below.

### ***Native-speakerism***

Native-speakerism refers to the belief that ‘native speakers’ are culturally and linguistically superior on the basis of having acquired the language early in life (Holliday 2005). As a widespread ideology, native-speakerism affects ‘non-native speakers’ professionally, educationally, and socially as their language proficiency is compared to that of an *imagined* speaker of the language whose linguistic repertoire has remained static across the lifespan. In English-medium higher education, this ideology affects multilingual international students in how they perceive not only themselves as students and speakers, but also the development of their proficiency in English (Tavares 2022). In the first area (i.e., self-perception), multilingual international students may be influenced to believe that ‘native speakers’ of English are better students because they speak English as a first language, which is erroneously equated to knowing the educational system better by nature, and thus being better suited to succeed academically (Tavares 2023b).

Native-speakerism can also blur multilingual international students’ perceptions and attitudes towards their instructors in colleges and universities. Pacek (2005: 244) explained that ‘the prevailing conviction among language learners, their parents, or even people directly involved in language education, is that the best teacher of a language is a NS [native speaker]’. Multilingual international students tend to feel better socially and emotionally understood by instructors who are also multilingual and ‘non-native’, but prefer ‘native-speaking’ instructors when the aim is linguistic, like learning ‘accent-free’ pronunciation (Huo 2020). However, these preferences reflect and reproduce linguistic stereotypes, in addition to having implications for the hiring of ‘non-native instructors’. From a neoliberal perspective, the presence of ‘native-speaking’ instructors keeps international students satisfied as customers.

As multilingual international students prepare for the workplace through higher education, native-speakerism can also constrain their perceived career choices. In a study at a Canadian university, Tavares (2023b) reported on the experience of a student who believed she could not become a psychologist because she was not a ‘native speaker’ of English. She believed certain careers were only attainable by and available for ‘native speakers’. In response, the student made several changes to her bachelor’s program coursework in order to follow a path she believed was suitable for her as a ‘non-native’ speaker. In a similar vein, another multilingual international student in Canada who sought to enter the labor market enrolled in numerous English language courses so she could sound more ‘native-like’, as she felt judged on her accent in job interviews, all of which were unsuccessful. Because the same student was a ‘native speaker’ of Portuguese, she ended up in a job in Canada for which she was hired on the basis of being a ‘native speaker’ of the same language, despite the job not being what she desired professionally or linguistically (Tavares 2023a).

When it comes to understanding one’s own linguistic development, native-speakerism creates a false sense that ‘native speakers’ of English are the best peers with whom to develop proficiency in English. Some multilingual international students may believe that investing more in friendships with ‘native-speaking’ students than with fellow multilingual international students is more linguistically advantageous (Tavares 2021). A key aspect here is the desire to learn and replicate a ‘standard’ accent of English, for which socialization with ‘native speakers’ is considered unique, while socialization with fellow multilingual international peers is assumed to not afford the same benefits (Zeng et al. 2022). However, the impact of such a belief can be significant for how a multilingual international student may continue to view their own cultural and linguistic heritages (Tavares 2022). This language ideology can permeate into other domains and lead multilingual international students to avoid participation in social activities connected to their heritage languages and cultures, thus expanding the hierarchical status of (the English) language to the cultural domain.

### ***Monolingual Norms***

Despite increasing linguistic diversity due to international mobility, monolingual norms have remained prevalent worldwide. When viewed as an ideology, monolingualism may be understood as (the preference for) the use of only one language and therefore the legitimization of the association between one language, place, and people (Grover 2023). Monolingualism has been a strong mechanism advocated by European nations in the early modern times to consolidate nationalism and the borders between nation states or regions. Institutions of higher education depend on monolingualism to consolidate their institutional identity, and as some have argued, ‘the monolingual mindset has been shown to be a characteristic of higher education even in countries that have societal multilingualism with more than one official languages’ (Bodis 2021: 370). On such basis, the more monolingual a university, the stronger the sense of identity it may propagate. Thus, monolingualism serves as a branding strategy in neoliberal education.

Monolingualism can impact decisions about the language(s) used as the medium of instruction in higher education. Beliefs such as that of not using students’ multiple languages becomes justified in numerous ways, including the fact that entire education systems in Anglophone nations have been designed on the assumption that all students will only use English and that literacy in other languages is an interference (Slaughter and Cross 2021). A monolingual mindset favors those who speak the language of instruction, while resisting the integration of other languages into pedagogy. Consequently, multilingual international students, in the context of English-medium higher

education, would remain on the cultural and linguistic periphery. Since using other languages is considered problematic, instructors may look with suspicion at multilingual international students who resort to their shared language in order to not only communicate among themselves (Tavares 2021) but also use it as a pedagogical means to make sense of the content in focus (i.e., translanguaging).

Tavares (2021) provided an example of a multilingual international student who felt continuously disadvantaged in one of his courses at his Canadian university. This was because the instructor would deliver the content with the imagined local, monolingual student in mind, making assumptions about all students in the course in terms of their previous knowledge of English. In a lesson focused on phonetics, the multilingual international student could not correctly transcribe the words given in writing by the instructor using the phonetic alphabet because he had never seen or heard some of those words before. Contrary to a monolingual student who would have supposedly spent their entire early life learning and speaking only English, the international multilingual student had acquired English as an additional language and later in life. As such, he could not draw on previous knowledge to decide how to transcribe the words, which local, monolingual, English-speaking students could.

The monolingual mindset in education renders invisible the multilingual practices and literacies of multilingual international students. Zhang-Wu (2022) documented her own experience as an international student from China in the United States to understand the impact of a monolingual mindset in higher education. She explained that feelings of self-doubt and insecurity characterized her entire academic experience for she felt judged only on the basis of how she spoke English, rather than on being an individual with multiple life, literacy, and cultural experiences. Nevertheless, Zhang-Wu maintained that these detrimental moments also served to encourage her to be agentive, as in finding coping strategies to support herself emotionally and professionally. Studies such as this one demonstrate multilingual international students' agency in contextualized ways, which helps to counter discourses of deficit and passivity (Tavares 2021).

### ***Raciolinguistic Ideologies***

This final section explores the impact of raciolinguistic ideologies—those which fuse together hierarchical ideologies of language and race (Alim, 2016)—on multilingual international students. Raciolinguistic ideologies operate, among other ways, by policing whether a person's appearance, name, language, and behavior 'match' normalized images of White 'native speakers'. When a racialized speaker 'deviates' from the 'norm', the consequences may be discrimination and exclusion from employment and educational opportunities (Dovchin and Dryden 2022). In this context, the White 'native speaker' becomes the ideal speaker who all others are supposed to imitate in order to gain legitimacy and (self)acceptance. Race and language are, therefore, sources of inequality for racialized individuals, which include many, if not most, of multilingual international students on Global North, English-medium campuses.

Another facet of Zhang-Wu's (2022) autoethnography entails her encounters with stereotypes based on raciolinguistic attitudes. She explained that she experienced a strong sense of inferiority, as she felt that some of her peers made assumptions about her identity and competency based solely on her name and facial appearance. Simultaneously, as an international student herself, Zhang-Wu also considered her White peers superior to herself: 'their English is so fluent, they are so smart, and they can express their ideas so well' (38). Raciolinguistic ideologies are pervasive in education systems and, as explained by Ricklefs (2021), do not depend on a White person being physically present for them to come into place. As a belief system that shapes people's attitudes

and perceptions, multilingual international students are also vulnerable to raciolinguistic ideologies in both experiencing and replicating them. Multilingual international students may look down upon themselves in comparison to White, ‘native-speaker’ peers solely on the base of language and race.

Indeed, multilingual international students of a racialized background may reshape their behavior and try to ‘de-accent’ their English in order to feel a sense of belonging. Ramjattan (2023: 170) worked with racialized multilingual international students in Canada and reported that many of the students experienced acting and sounding like a White ‘native-speaking’ Canadian as an advantage both in education and the workplace. Ahmad, a pseudonym for one of the students, commented: ‘even though I hate to say it, looking and sounding like a white Canadian will probably help me find a job after university’. Ramjattan (2023: 177) underscored ‘that raciolinguistic ideologies position racially minoritized groups as “phonologically deficient” no matter how they actually sound’. As such, it is imperative that institutions of higher education promote change from within by recognizing how language and race intersect to engender and complexify discrimination.

In addition to education and employment prospects, raciolinguistic ideologies affect multilingual international students’ well-being in complex ways. Dovchin (2020) argued that the psychological damage of linguistic racism based on the ‘native-speaking’ White individual can lead multilingual international students to experience challenges such as social withdrawal, a sense of non-belonging, low self-esteem, fear, and anxiety over speaking English. Linguistic racism can manifest through ethnic accent bullying or racist stereotyping. Raciolinguistic ideologies therefore interfere with the students’ socialization efforts, as they may withdraw from interaction with other peers for fear of sounding ‘stupid’ in public, despite the importance the students may ascribe to speaking English in order to enhance it in interaction (Tavares 2021). Consequently, Dovchin (2020) argued that interventions to support international students in such a context must be holistic and intersectional in order to be effective.

### **Conclusion: Ways Forward and Decolonial Insights**

This chapter focused on delineating the influence of neoliberalism on the social, linguistic, and political aspects of English-medium higher education. Within such a context, the experiences of multilingual international students were critically explored with an attention to native-speakerism, monolingualism, and raciolinguistics, along with their real and perceived impact on the students’ experiences. Considering the prevalence and normalness of neoliberalism as an operating system in higher education today, it is critical that institutions of higher education first work to better support multilingual international students in the positions they are found in. As others have argued (Tavares 2024; Gupta and Gomez 2023), multilingual international students can no longer be viewed simply as ‘international students’, for this label alone obstructs the ways in which neoliberalism and language ideologies affect the students on the basis of their multiple identities, experiences, and needs (Park et al. 2017).

Thus, any effort to support the students, especially through structural equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives must embody a critical and intersectional approach to begin with. Liu (2017: 77) called ‘for an intersectional approach that considers students’ multiple identities in understanding how race, class, and gender are related in complex and intersecting ways in shaping their experiences’. When compared to their local, ‘native-speaking’, White peers, multilingual international students are institutionally and socially inferiorized particularly through ideologies of language. However, as this chapter demonstrated, language does not operate alone. Without first developing policy to address the intersectional marginalization and otherness multilingual

international students encounter on campuses, the students will remain further vulnerable as colleges and universities continue to compete on the international market for recruitment and revenue.

Nevertheless, language is in itself a site of profound inequality and reproduction of social hierarchies. English-medium institutions need to adopt a more multilingual, international take on English so that all linguistic varieties and identities may be included and appreciated. The linguistic model based on the ‘native speaker’ of English from the Global North has been exclusive of multilingual international students through ideologies that have informed teaching, assessment, and interpersonal interaction. Rose and colleagues (2021) argued that a Global Englishes paradigm is more inclusive and reflective of recent theoretical and empirical developments in English language education. For example, validating multilingualism as the norm, supporting translanguaging for pedagogical purposes, and viewing the speaker through a new lens that does not depart from native-speakerism are some key features of the paradigm. These ethical features can help to powerfully confront the assumptions behind native-speakerism, monolingualism, and raciolinguistics.

Despite the impact of race and language ideologies, it is important to recognize multilingual international students as agentive individuals within their academic communities. Multilingual international students enact agency in contextualized ways in order to cope with and overcome challenges originating from linguicism and neoliberalism (Tavares 2021). Yet, institutions of higher education play the largest and most consequential role in addressing structural issues. As this chapter illustrated, these structural issues lead to (self)exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination toward multilingual international students. Arthur (2017) maintained that the social integration of international students is an ethical imperative, for it contributes positively to the students’ academic success, sense of belonging, and career prospects. As such, multilingual international students and institutions of higher education must work in collaboration to further identify and meet the students’ needs, working to address mechanisms of exclusion within and outside the classroom.

In closing, this chapter calls for a decolonizing mindset toward English-medium higher education. Decolonizing encompasses working within all dimensions of higher education, from the curriculum and the classroom to administration and knowledge construction to achieve equity and inclusion for minoritized groups, in addition to confronting the role of universities in environmental and epistemic coloniality (Joseph Mbembe 2016). While on one side the decolonization of higher education involves challenging the Eurocentric dominance of theory, pedagogy, language, and knowledge, on the other lays ‘an attempt at imagining what the alternative to this [Eurocentric academic] model could look like. This is where a lot remains to be done’ (Joseph Mbembe 2016: 36). Decolonizing the English language in relation to higher education begins with the recognition that English is not ‘owned’ by White ‘native speakers’ in the Global North.

Other insights from a decolonial mindset include the ongoing development of a critical and reflexive awareness in all members of the academic community (understood broadly), but particularly those in privileged positions that have the power to contribute to change on behalf of the Other. Joseph Mbembe (2016: 31) asserted that decolonizing higher education also entails breaking the neoliberal cycle ‘that tends to turn students into customers and consumers’. Breaking this cycle will interrupt colonial traditions in teaching, learning, assessment, and *thinking*. Moreover, a decolonial orientation toward internationalization must make the very inequalities experienced by marginalized and minoritized groups in higher education an object of critical analysis and discussion within internationalization frameworks (Guzmán-Valenzuela 2023), since multilingual international students remain a vulnerable group in higher education. Multilingual international

students' voices need to be systematically included in efforts to redesign internationalization frameworks as an action of and towards decolonization.

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