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Introduction: Re-thinking Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching in the Face of Neo-Nationalism

Kyle McIntosh

Confession: This is a chapter that I never imagined I would write in a volume that I never thought would need to be published. Until a few years ago, the idea of neo-nationalism emerging as a formidable global force seemed to me the stuff of dystopian fiction. Granted, I have lived and worked in the United States, South Korea, and the People's Republic of China where, over the past two decades, I have witnessed firsthand—and through the news media—nationalist sentiments rising up at different times in different places (e.g., post-9/11 saber-rattling in the U.S., protests in Korea and China over the whitewashing of wartime atrocities in Japanese history books). My general sense, however, was that most countries were trending toward a more interconnected, interdependent future in which multilingualism and multiculturalism would be viewed as norms rather than exceptions. I drew this conclusion not

K. McIntosh (✉)
Department of English and Writing,
University of Tampa, Tampa, FL, USA
e-mail: kmcintosh@ut.edu

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only from my personal experiences but also from reading and conducting research in applied linguistics and language teaching.

So, when I went to bed on June 23, 2016 at an Airbnb in Ann Arbor, Michigan, following the first day of the International Writing Across the Curriculum (IWAC) Conference, I fully expected to wake up the next morning in a world largely unchanged from the one in which I had fallen asleep. Instead, when I opened my eyes, grabbed my iPhone, and looked at my newsfeed, I saw this headline from *The New York Times*: "British Stun the World with Decision to Leave the E.U." I was, in fact, stunned. Although it was known that the vote would be close, few polls had predicted this outcome. Apparently, rising Euroscepticism triggered by frustration with the fiscal policies coming out of Brussels, along with low turnout among younger voters, had been enough to push through the referendum. Suddenly, I had a sinking feeling in my stomach that, come November, Donald Trump would be riding a similar wave of economic dissatisfaction and burgeoning neo-nationalism into the White House. Never before in my life had I so wished to be wrong.

The trade-protectionist and anti-immigrant stances associated with neo-nationalism, which Eger and Valdez (2015) posited as something of a hybrid between the far left's "anti-establishment populism" and the far right's "desire for a return to traditional values and an emphasis on law and order" (p. 127), did not begin with Brexit or the election of Donald Trump. For years prior to 2016, neo-nationalist movements had been gaining ground across Europe, propelling figures like Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Polish President Andrzej Duda into power. Similar movements were springing up around leaders in other parts of the world: Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalism in India, Recep Erdoğan's Ottoman revival in Turkey, and Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream," to name a few. Nevertheless, the shift toward neo-nationalism by what had hitherto been the two strongest proponents of neoliberal globalization sent a clear signal that the world was, in fact, starting to bend in a new direction. If the United Kingdom and the United States—the very countries that advanced English as an international language to serve their own political and economic interests—were withdrawing from trade deals, tightening their borders, and inciting violence against immigrants, then how long before other nations began to rethink educational policies and practices

that, for decades, had touted learning English as a key to entering the global marketplace? Would the rise of neo-nationalism across the world, fueled in part by xenophobia, lead to a backlash against the teaching of foreign languages in general?

Nationalism, Language, and Education

For many, the word "nationalism" conjures up dramatic images, like Adolf Hitler screaming maniacally into a microphone before legions of saluting Nazis shouting "Sieg Heil" in return or perhaps, more recently, the bombed-out cities of the Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001). While such extreme forms have led to interethnic conflict and genocide, nationalism has also been mobilized to drive out colonizers or resist other outside aggressors, as was the case with Vietnam's defeat of France and the United States, respectively, in the First and Second Indochina Wars (see Bao & Phan, Chapter 6 in this volume). Most everyday manifestations of nationalism, however, fall under what Billig (1995) categorized as "banal" and are therefore easier to overlook: the face of a country's founder placed on its currency or the national anthem being played before a sporting event. Nationalism is even embedded in the words that we use to talk about ourselves and others: native, foreigner, compatriot, expatriate, immigrant, alien.

The very idea of the nation, which Anderson (1983) called "an imagined political community" (p. 6), depends heavily on the establishment of a common language—or languages—to create a sense of shared identity among people who are unlikely to meet face-to-face and who may experience very different linguistic realities on a day-to-day basis. China, with its hundreds of often mutually unintelligible regional and local "dialects," provides a striking example of how an officially-mandated "common speech" (*putonghua*, or standard Mandarin) and a relatively uniform writing system work to construct the idea of a single national language: Chinese. Other countries, like Singapore and Switzerland, recognize multiple national languages to reflect their linguistic diversity, but striking a balance between these languages remains challenging. In Cameroon and the United Arab Emirates, for instance, official status

may not be enough to protect languages spoken by a minority of the population, and the fear of this loss can spur ethnolinguistic nationalism and conflict (see Ngala, Chapter 3 in this volume; Esseili, Chapter 4 in this volume).

Of course, not all forms of nationalism are the same. In the current political climate, we can hear differences in the voices of those promoting a particular imagined community, whether it be a far-right ethno-religious state or a more left-leaning civically-minded nation, but we may also detect similar interests in maintaining borders or opposing global markets, although likely for different reasons and through different means (Svitych, 2018). As Blommaert (1996) noted:

> The way in which language is symbolised may cohere with the general set-up of the particular nationalism; its ideological construction may be guided by similar underlying assumptions, viewpoints and visions of the desired 'ideal society' which nationalists are trying to build. Closer attention to language-ideological issues may thus contribute to a better understanding of the conceptual, 'deep' structure of various nationalisms [...]. (p. 236)

We find these idealized visions of the nation regularly reproduced in political speeches and media coverage of events, in documentaries and other historical accounts, and in language textbooks and citizenship guides (see Gulliver, Chapter 10 in this volume). Studying the ways that people in different places and with different political orientations speak and write about the idea of the nation can help us to understand why nationalism is on the rise again and how it may be contributing to the formation of new alliances and oppositions across old ideological lines.

Just as nationalism has long been tied to language, so too is it tied to language education, in policy if not in practice. Decisions as to which languages can be spoken, written, taught and tested in schools are often enshrined in law (Wright, 2016). Governments are involved in how students from other countries with different immigration or residency statuses are classified within education systems. Sometimes, countries even establish public organizations, like the British Council or Confucius Institute, to affect how national languages—official or de facto—are taught in other countries. To Phillipson (1992), the entire enterprise of

English language teaching (ELT) was a form of "linguistic imperialism," through which Anglo-American power could continue to be exerted in a post-colonial world by perpetuating the specious argument that English is "a vehicle of the entire developing human tradition, well adapted for change and development, not ethnic or ideological, the world's first truly global language, of universal interest" (p. 276). Today, we see this same argument put forward not only by Anglophone nations but also by multinational corporations that promote English, and perhaps a handful of other lingua francas (e.g., Arabic, French, Mandarin), as vital components of individual success in a globalized world.

Neoliberalism and Applied Linguistics

In 1990, when Alastair Pennycook proposed adopting a more critical approach to applied linguistics, the Berlin Wall had just fallen and the Soviet Union was a year away from collapsing, but he was prescient in calling for new ways of thinking about the roles that language and education play in perpetuating inequalities in a world where few alternatives to American-led free-market capitalism (i.e., neoliberalism) would soon remain. Taking his cue from post-structuralist philosophers like Michel Foucault, Pennycook (1990) reminded us that knowledge is never neutral and that, as a field, we must repeatedly examine the ideological basis/biases of our work by interrogating foundational concepts and accepted research methods to uncover who or what is being excluded from the conversation. Only then, he argued, can we truly understand the power that language has to limit, as well as expand, the ways in which we view our world and one another.

Around the same time, the number of so-called "non-native" speakers of English began to outpace the number of "native" speakers, prompting scholars to wonder if such a division still had meaning, if it ever did (e.g., Davies, 1991; Phillipson, 1992). Yet, despite bodies of research on the unique characteristics of World Englishes (see Kachru, 1997) and the cognitive benefits of bilingualism (see Bialystock, 2011), monolingual models of education have persisted and even spread, especially in places where speaking a dominant or prestige language continues

to be viewed as a means of improving one's socioeconomic status (see Meadows, Chapter 2 in this volume).

The social turn in applied linguistics, which emphasized the effects of context and interpersonal relations on language learning and use, has helped us to challenge such monolingual ideologies and to reposition multilingualism as the global norm. Likewise, the dynamic turn in ELT has sought to connect classroom practices to students' experiences with language in the world. While these goals are laudable, they also happen to align with what Flores (2013) called the "commodification of language in service of transnational corporations" (p. 515). In other words, companies are happy to promote linguistic and cultural diversity, as long as the languages and cultures possess some degree of capital, in the Bourdieuan sense. Thus, learning a new language becomes a form of "job training," and workers are transformed into lifelong learners who must continually adapt to changing conditions as they move from one "gig" to the next.

We reinforce such sentiments when, even with the best of intentions, we tell our students that learning another language will increase their employment prospects after graduation. Flores (2013) encouraged teachers to push back against such "universalizing" narratives by guiding students to see how different languages can be used to experiment with identities and positionalities that challenge the tacit assumptions of both neoliberalism and neo-nationalism. While I find this suggestion promising, recent scholarship in applied linguistics has done a far better job of critiquing the former, while giving less attention to the latter in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. This oversight was likely because, until fairly recently, the nation-state appeared to be in decline, with free-trade agreements, high-speed communication, and affordable travel making borders seem more permeable and barriers more surmountable than ever before.

Understandably then, much of the research in applied linguistics and language teaching in the early 2000s has focused on how to go beyond simply paying lip service to multilingualism and multiculturalism in a globalized world to actually finding viable means to ensure that students and workers, regardless of language background, social status, ethnicity, religion or gender, receive the educational support and equitable treatment they deserve. One possible outcome might be the realization of a more transnational, cosmopolitan existence for everyone, and not just

the global elite (see Canagarajah, 2013). Again, while much of the world appeared to be moving in that direction prior to 2016, our view was likely skewed by the places we live, work, and travel to, and by the people who we meet, work with, and teach. Kubota (2016) questioned if, by putting so much emphasis on cosmopolitanism and linguistic hybridity, applied linguists had overlooked the ways in which even the most well-intentioned theories and practices could be used to further marginalize and oppress the poor and undereducated. In other words, how does the notion of translingual fluency, or the ability to move between languages depending on audience, impact the hundreds of millions of people in the world who do not have access to the educational resources needed to learn how to read and write in any language? How might an emphasis on multiculturalism and mobility provoke hostility from those who cannot afford to leave their villages or small towns? What will it mean for foreign and second language teaching, which has undoubtedly benefited from globalization, if more and more countries decide to retreat behind borders and walls?

The End of Neoliberalism and the Rise of Neo-Nationalism?

Even with Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, it is premature to sound the death knell for neoliberalism. Multinational corporations continue to exert undue influence on politics, and stock markets keep hitting record highs. Yet, tensions are also high, both between and within nations. Lee (2017), for example, found that increasing nationalist sentiment in higher education settings in South Africa, as well as in South Korea (Lee, Jon, & Byun, 2016), led to unfair treatment and open hostility against foreign students, especially those from neighboring countries who are seen as competing for jobs and resources. Meanwhile, Ngala (Chapter 3 in this volume) has chronicled the ongoing crisis in Cameroon, where speakers of French and English are locked in a violent conflict over the status of the languages of their former colonizers. To make matters worse, the global outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has shut down borders, disrupted supply chains, and sparked

further instances of ethnic violence, from attacks on Asians in New York City (Chapman, 2020) to discrimination against Africans in Guangzhou (Nyabiage, 2020). The long-term impact of this pandemic on international relations remains to be seen, but it will certainly alter the way we think about our connections to the rest of the world.

Higher education was already experiencing a downturn even before schools were shuttered in the spring of 2020. Three years prior, international enrollments at U.S. universities had decreased by 6.9%, due in part to the hostile political environment, as well as issues with visas, a strong dollar, and competition from regional education hubs like Germany, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates (Baer, 2017). Meanwhile, countries like South Korea and Iran have raised the age at which students begin studying English in school to protect their own languages and cultures, while China has reduced the importance the English language requirement on its college entrance exam (see McPherron & McIntosh, Chapter 9 in this volume). These developments raise several questions: Should we take declining enthusiasm for learning English as a sign that its status as *the* international language is coming to an end? Or is this part of a larger turn against multilingualism and multiculturalism in general? Can we support the unfettered movement of people, goods, and ideas without also propping up an economic system on the verge of collapse?

In a 2017 opinion piece in *The New York Times*, Bhaskar Sunkara, former vice chair of the Democratic Socialists of America, presented the metaphor of a runaway train heading toward three possible destinations to represent the directions that countries might take in a post-neoliberal world. He claimed that right-wing populists (i.e., neo-nationalists) long to arrive at "Budapest Station," which is modeled on Orbán's anti-immigration and anti-globalization reforms in Hungary, but first they need to throw the "undesirables" off the train. Meanwhile, most corporatists (i.e., neoliberals) are trying to hit the brakes so that they can get off at "Singapore Station," an authoritarian technocracy that embraces officially-sanctioned multilingualism and prides itself on a cosmopolitan worldview. Given those two choices, the latter would seem like the better option for those working in fields related to the teaching and learning of languages. As DeCosta and Jou (2016) pointed out, however, an

uncritical acceptance of cosmopolitanism can mask serious problems like racism, sexism, and income inequality in what outwardly appears to be a "harmonious" multicultural society.

The third stop, which Sunkara (2017) dubbed "Finland Station," marks a return to pre-Soviet socialist ideals, offering a form of radical democracy where quality education, housing, and healthcare would be guaranteed for all and where linguistic and cultural differences could be negotiated via a more "dialogical" form of cosmopolitanism, similar to what Canagarajah (2013) envisioned. We have seen versions of this appear in Europe and Latin America with varying degrees of longevity and success. We have even seen glimpses of it in the United States with the rise of left-leaning populist politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who invoke a more civic form of nationalism when appealing to working class voters upset about manufacturing jobs being outsourced to China, Mexico, and elsewhere.

At this moment in history, it is difficult to predict at which of these three stations the metaphorical train will stop, even in a country like the United States where many people still regard "socialism" as a dirty word. Each country has a unique history and set of present circumstances that will affect the way it deals with the decline of neoliberalism (see Valencia & Tejada Sánchez, Chapter 5 in this volume, for the example of Colombia). Complicating matters further is a growing distrust of any form of government among the working classes who reap few benefits from technology booms or stock market rallies, but who feel disproportionately harmed by economic downturns. This real, if often misdirected, sense of injustice makes them susceptible to radicalization by religious or racist extremists and to disinformation campaigns promoted by foreign governments.

Conspiracy theories are hardly new, but the speed at which rumors, half-truths, and outright lies spread across the Internet is unprecedented (see Kreis, Chapter 7 in this volume, for an account of right-wing discourses on Twitter in the immediate aftermath of the 2016 Berlin terrorist attack). In many ways, these attempts to challenge credible evidence for everything from the dangers of climate change to the safety of vaccines recall earlier postmodern takedowns of the scientific method and the very nature of facts, which led Bruno Latour (2004) to famously

declare that critique had "run out of steam." In a post-truth world, all matters of fact are partial and political. Latour's recommendation, later endorsed in part by Pennycook (2018), is to begin privileging matters of concern instead. In other words, we need to stop falling back on what Latour (2004) called the "fact vs. fairy" positions, which turn everyone into either victims of powerful forces beyond their control or naïve believers who project their desires onto powerless objects. Instead, we need to seek a *fair* position that cultivates "a stubbornly realist attitude" (p. 231) and renewed commitment to empiricism, not necessarily to find answers, but to add more depth to our descriptions of the world.

The main purpose in assembling this volume was to begin thinking about what a fairer applied linguistics and language teaching might look like in a world where neo-nationalist rhetoric continues to propel political candidates into positions of power, in turn emboldening more candidates to employ such rhetoric in their campaigns. As Windle and Morgan (Chapter 11 in this volume) suggest, we can begin by helping our students to observe and critique the ways in which neo-nationalist groups have successfully co-opted postmodern techniques like parody and pastiche to promote jingoism and fear. In countries currently controlled by authoritarian regimes, foreign language teachers may have to adopt other creative classroom practices to resist xenophobic policies and attitudes (see, for example, Kasztalska & Swatek, Chapter 8 in this volume; McPherron & McIntosh, Chapter 9 in this volume). Fortunately, the leaders of most countries are still democratically elected, which means that they can be voted out of office, but there needs to be a clear alternative vision for the future of the nation that speaks to all its citizens, and not only the privileged few, or else these countries risk losing the ability to correct course through democratic means.

As scholars and teachers, we need to think carefully about what constitute matters of concern for applied linguistics and language teaching, and how to better connect with people in other fields, other places, and other walks of life who share these concerns, even—and perhaps especially—when our ways of knowing and speaking differ. As those who study how language is used in various contexts, we are in a unique position to understand and help bridge these gaps. Motha (Chapter 12

in this volume) advocates developing practices that further explore the links between race and empire as a means of revealing the ways in which nationalism continues to reside, often hidden, in our teaching, learning, and use of language. Whenever possible, we need to stand up to injustices, past and present, that have been committed in the name of the nation while remaining mindful of the pitfalls presented by internationalization when driven by competition rather than cooperation.

On a local level, we can work to change our institutional cultures. Over the last few decades, we have seen school districts and universities transformed into global pseudo-corporations, with business leaders and politicians put in charge of budgetary, personnel, and even curricular decisions. I hope that we will not be so complacent if and when those same leaders make alliances with right-wing populists as a bulwark against their shared fear of democratic socialism creeping in from the left. When it comes to our teaching and service responsibilities, we can follow Kubota's (2016) advice to practice what we preach by applying our knowledge of class and identity issues more visibly, not just in our research but in all of our work. We can use appointments to admissions and hiring committees to increase diversity in our schools and departments, while working in other professional capacities to ensure that this commitment is honored in every aspect of academic life. We can use our roles as editors and reviewers to guide more marginalized voices into print or public forums. Last but not least, we can use our positions as teachers and mentors to help students recognize the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that language is used to promote—or obscure—hatred and division, as well as its potential for creating a more inclusive, unified nation.

I end this chapter by echoing Pennycook's (1990) entreaty to "be more humble in the world, listening to the many alternative views of language and learning, rather than preaching our views as the newest and best" (p. 26). As applied linguists and language teachers, we may have a limited impact on the direction of politics beyond our classrooms and local communities, but we have an impact nonetheless. If we wish to improve education and reduce inequality on a local and global scale, then we can begin by forging stronger alliances across boundaries based

on shared matters of concern rather than strict adherence to ideological positions.

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