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## Afterword: Towards a Nation-Conscious Applied Linguistics Practice

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The wide-ranging and illuminating chapters in this volume tell a variety of stories about the interconnectedness of language and nationalism or neo-nationalism, about the sweeping ways our understandings of nation actualize themselves through language, and about the consequences of our language practices and policies for our ideas about nation, and consequently for our social, political, and economic systems. One conclusion is clear: exciting and promising possibilities exist for language professionals to be agentic and, in fact, powerful in affecting vital change through nation-conscious practice, as becomes evident through the accounts shared in these chapters. Another message shines through even more urgently, if less perceptibly: lasting change, including a reversal of damage done through recent swings towards populist and racist movements globally, will not happen incidentally and in the accidental wake of everyday language education. Rather, such change will necessitate explicit

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critical pedagogical engagement with nationalism and the concept of nation, an engagement I will refer to here as *nation-conscious applied linguistics practice*, including what Kasztalska and Swatek (Chapter 8) term “anti-nationalist language pedagogies” (p. 192). In addition, the chapters in this volume point to a need for a nation-conscious applied linguistics practice to equally explicitly take on the linkages between nation and race, empire, monolingualism, White settler colonialism, and related concepts. In doing so, they herald a promising and transformative future for applied linguistics.

This collection also offers a clear and expansive understanding of nationalism as an integral and inevitable, if sometimes invisible, part of language teaching, learning, and use. Together, the authors reveal a great deal about the work that we as language scholars and practitioners are doing unconsciously, about the work we might take up, and about how we might re-conceive of our responsibilities as applied linguists in light of armed conflict, the ongoing erasure of land theft in the name of nation, government suppression of speech, and such reactionary trends as travel bans, trade wars, media censorship, tariffs, and declining global cooperation. One needs only to look at the experience of Bernard Ndzi Ngala, the author of Chapter 3, to understand the stakes for language professionals. A university professor, Ngala was kidnapped from his campus in Cameroon by three armed men and berated for teaching French, which they condemned as the language of the oppressor (“Crise anglophone,” 2018).

In other instances, the connections between national identity and language may be less obvious. For instance, Meadows (Chapter 2) demonstrates how arguments in favor of structured English immersion programs can be presented as based in pedagogical necessity, with their connections to nationalist ideologies often obscured. As Gulliver (Chapter 10) points out, not all nationalism is blatantly patriotic or jingoistic. Certainly, the images that spring to my mind when I think of the word “nationalism” are of, for instance, vicious Nazis and White supremacists marching two years ago in Charlottesville, Virginia, or of violent attacks by rioting Sri Lankan nationalists on the minority Tamil ethnic group in Colombo, which includes my family. However, as we consider how we position ourselves towards nationalism, it is helpful to

consider the distinction between what Billig (1995, as cited in Gulliver, this volume) terms “hot” fervent nationalism and cooler or “banal,” everyday, and largely uncontested nationalism, a delineation that is not glibly cut-and-dry.

A further question that becomes important concerns what neo-nationalism looks like in the context of superdiverse communities and in nations in which citizens are such a minority that their language rights and national identity are threatened. Esseilli (Chapter 4) offers one such example with the United Arab Emirates, where Emirati citizens make up only about 11% of the population and live surrounded by negative stereotypes about the group’s labor practices, suitability as workers, language affinity, and skill levels. In this context, the United Arab Emirates government has employed nationalism in a program specifically designed to preserve national identity, develop and promote representations of Emirati nationalism as plurilingual and tolerant, and create a sense of citizenship and belonging. In some instances, nationalism is designed to support antiracism and social justice rather than wearing its more customary attire of intolerance and bigotry. Nationalism can therefore be implicated simultaneously in the tension between a global rise of Islamophobia and in an affirmation of Emirati religious identity. Similarly, Bao and Phan (Chapter 6) noted instances of nationalism on the social platform *Quora Digest* being put into the service of Vietnamese national unity, harmony and solidarity, which leads to the question: How might a nation-conscious applied linguistics practice support practitioners who are seeking to make sense of seemingly conflicting goals and outcomes of nationalism?

We are finalizing this project on a planet that has completely changed since this book was first conceptualized. At the time of this writing, COVID-19 is spreading around the globe, one of the first U.S. deaths having occurred at a retirement community a few blocks from my home, which, like my nearby university campus, sits on unceded ancestral lands of the Dx<sup>w</sup>dəwʔabš (Duwamish) people. The relevance of the construct of nation has been pushed into the foreground throughout this pandemic. Since the international community first became aware of the virus, emotions, desires, and allegiances in relation to national identities have been surging and subsiding around the planet in response

to media discourses, communications with each other, and the actions of our leaders. While the emergence of this virus has underscored the degree to which we are all deeply interconnected, with our lives and well-being tied up in those of our neighbors near and far, the response of many around the globe has been to blame, whether directly or in more subtle terms, migratory practices, borders that are too open, and globalization in general. In one example, Italy's far-right former interior minister abruptly argued against allowing 276 African asylum seekers on the rescue ship *Ocean Viking* to dock in Sicily after a two-week quarantine, although only one case had been diagnosed on the entire continent of Africa at the time, in Egypt (Tondo, 2020). Nationalism and xenophobia have undergirded much of the response of White House officials, with the U.S. president fueling racism by referring insistently to a "foreign virus" and a "Chinese virus," and rebuking the European Union for the openness of its own borders (Marquardt & Hansler, 2020). In March 2020, members of the G7 were unable to issue a joint statement on COVID-19 because the U.S. State Department refused to sign onto any draft that didn't label the illness the "Wuhan virus," languaging that constructs the sense of an imported, racialized threat and the very integrity of borders at risk.

These and similar discourses around the globe have fueled an increase in violence and discrimination against Asians and those perceived to be Asian. *Le Courrier Picard*, a French newspaper, referred to COVID-19 with the headlines "Alerte jaune" (Yellow alert) and "Le peril jaune?" (Yellow peril?) ("À Propos de Notre," 2020), and reports are surfacing of businesses around the world, including in Phuket and Rome (Gostanian, Ciechalski, & Abdelkader, 2020), publicly refusing to serve visitors from China. The Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council reported 1600 hate crimes in the United States in the four weeks since March 19th (Park Hong, 2020). The spread of COVID-19 has further exposed deep racial and gender inequalities, magnifying long-standing racial inequalities in healthcare, housing (including access to handwashing facilities), employment, and income and relatedly between nations, making clear connections between nation and race on a planet still struggling to come to terms with the persistent legacy of European colonialism, the Atlantic slave trade, and settler colonialism. Disputes, bidding wars, and even

piracy between nations, including China, France, Brazil, Germany and the United States, over scarce protective personal equipment (PPE) and medical supplies (Toosi, 2020) draw our attention and humanitarian concern to how a sense of inter-lateral competitiveness is manufactured at a time when global cooperation could instead support, for instance, the sharing of medical resources, the coordination of travel advisories, and the mitigation of trade and financial instability through multilateral response to swings on financial markets.

As we think about the stakes of nationalism, a generative starting point is to consider what purposes the concepts of nation and territoriality are serving. When we live on a planet upon which so many of us, myself included, live on stolen land, and do so largely unconsciously, part of the work of our everyday practices becomes preserving not only the falsehood that we live on land that we have a right to, but also the fiction that humans can even have a right to land ownership. In order to maintain this narrative over centuries, our everyday practices continually renew both the legitimacy of land ownership for capital accumulation and the erasure of indigeneity (McCoy, Tuck, & McKenzie, 2016), with language serving as an important vehicle in this repeated renewal. Language plays a crucial role in determining which lives are included and excluded from the formation of nations in question. Under all of these questions about who belongs and who does not needs to remain a critique of the very notion of nation and the work that it does to preserve the narrative of territoriality and land ownership. At the root of a nation-conscious applied linguistics practice are questions about how identities of place have been constructed, how people come to be identified with a place, and the politics of renaming lands and maintaining the displacement of indigenous peoples (Calderon, 2014).

An important further line of questioning relates to empire. Particularly for applied linguists educated through practices of the Global North, whose understanding of applied linguistics is therefore complicit with White supremacy, capitalism and colonialism (Motha, 2020), what would a nation-conscious applied linguistics practice look like that was informed by Southern theory, drawing on the knowledge of “people, places, and ideas that have been left out of the grand metanarrative of modernity” (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020, p. 1). How could such a

practice further our understandings of nation, and therefore about race, community, and belonging?

## Nationalism and Race

The chapters in the book emphasize the degree to which language is never about only language. Layers of capital, class, gender, race, religion, and ability intertwine, whether obviously or less perceptibly so, throughout the discussions of nationalism. In particular, while not always explicitly obvious, race and racial identity are always active in shaping the way language functions to create nation, and so a nation-conscious applied linguistics practice is a pressing part of working against White supremacy and racism (Motha, 2014, 2020). Ena Lee (2015) warned us about how a reliance on fixed nation-state identities inevitably produces static cultural and racial borders. In her discussion of nation, Eve Haque (2012) similarly explained just how imperative it is that we understand the crucial role being played by language, cultural, and racial lines: “[D]ivisions in language are about the distinctive differences between races and civilizations, and they set boundaries between human beings; thus they become justification for colonization and genocide” (p. 18).

Gulliver (Chapter 10) describes the transmission through textbooks for newcomers of numerous narratives of commonsense “Canadianness,” necessarily an idealized set of narratives. One of these in particular provides a helpful and accessible example: the textbooks most frequently downplayed the Canadianness of Canadians of color, using words other than “Canadian” to describe them, while referring to White-identified Canadians as “Canadians.” In preserving a sense of non-Whiteness as external to Canada, these textbooks reinforce the notion of Canada as White. The language specialists who developed the textbooks unwittingly agreed to work uncritically with limited systems of race- and language-based affiliation, concealing not only Canada’s multiracial composition but also its history of White settler appropriation. One form of nation-conscious applied linguistics practice that interrupts the racism, nationalism, and White settler colonialism inherent in these Language

Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) materials is the type of interrogation, modelled by Gulliver, of the ways that our language practices, including textbook development, become a part of a White supremacist and White settler project.

Similarly, a nation-conscious applied linguistics practice can help to counter the detrimental racist stereotypes about Emiratis' competence, efficiency, commitment, and skill (Esseilli, Chapter 4). It can shine a light on connections among race, language, and nationalism playing themselves out when language professionals observe students mocking certain racialized forms of English (Kasztalska & Swatak, Chapter 8), as students encounter questions about whether atrocities within a racial or national group are more shocking than across groups (McPherron & McIntosh, Chapter 9), or social media users blaming terrorist attacks on refugee policies (Kreis, Chapter 7). It supports applied linguists' understandings that Official English laws, English Only movements, monolingual English instructional models, and monolingual ideologies are efforts that are all molded from the same clay and all move us in the direction of less permeable national border walls and more homogenous, assimilated populations. With these connections more visible, language professionals are better equipped to resist nationalism and assimilatory influences, to tear down walls. When it is revealed that arguments that seem grounded in commonsense, for instance arguments about unifying or honoring a common thread among people, are actually specifically about nation, then xenophobia sheds its invisibility and applied linguists are better prepared to work against it. Nation-conscious applied linguistics practice equips applied linguists to recognize instances of language identity standing in for national identity, for instance when the term "American" is used only to describe monolingual English speakers, as Meadows described for us (Chapter 2).

## Nationalism and English

The English language in particular carries a great deal of global power, and the chapters in this volume highlight the need for language specialists to pay special attention to the role that English plays in shaping

formations of all nations, including those whose official or dominant languages do not include English. Across several chapters, questions arose about the possibility of English being deployed for particular purposes without interloping into constructions of national identities or threatening to supplant local languages. English has come to carry commonsense associations with a range of qualities. Around the world, English is associated with cultural capital, and in Colombia it has become an important tool in deploying national images of “self-motivated entrepreneurship” (Valencia & Tejada Sánchez, Chapter 8, p. 105). The material consequences of these representations are important on not only an individual but also a national level, with individuals being encouraged to devote themselves to English proficiency in order to contribute not only to their individual livelihood but also to the ability of a nation to attract investment from foreign and especially transnational companies as part of a global ideology that English proficiency is necessary for participation on a globalized economy (Holborow, 2015). Many of the discourses surrounding representations of English are offered as power-neutral, with an assumption that anyone working hard at learning English can be successful. These discourses have a way of erasing how differential access to English instruction underscores and exacerbates inequalities already present, and also disregard the consequences of English dominance, including the loss or depreciation of local languages and related epistemologies. In a nation with a population that is as internationally composed as the UAE, for instance, English is widely used, and carries with it suggestions of economic opportunity, Judeo Christian values, Westernness, and Whiteness. As Esseilli (Chapter 4) discussed, Emiratis are concerned about Arabic being nudged out not only in use but also in status.

In China, English has been viewed as a means of connecting China to international commerce and promoting China on the world stage. Again, through McPherron and McIntosh’s (Chapter 9) analysis, we see questions about the possibility of appropriating English for its economic value while resisting threats to Chinese national identity, the possibility of finding, as McPherron and McIntosh explained, a balance between *ti* (body or essence) and *yong* (utility or function) in learners’ positioning



of themselves towards the language. Similarly, ontologies inhabit pedagogical positionings, and English teaching has come to be associated with critical thinking, communicative language teaching, and learner autonomy, which transmit ideas about individualism, extroversion, and relational familiarity as idealized ways of being. As we think about how these language teaching efforts shape performances of national identity, McPherron and McIntosh's (Chapter 9) pursuit of possibilities for "pedagogical interventions that may help to balance the country's nationalist and internationalist desires" (p. 218) open up an important line of questioning for applied linguists in China and around the world.

In homogenous Poland, too, where less than 1% of the population are foreign residents with work permits, Kasztalska and Swatak (Chapter 8) relayed how English users ask questions about the feasibility of accessing English for instrumental purposes without also taking on associated epistemologies, ideas, and images that are understood to stand in conflict with Polish nationalism, for instance cultural celebrations or values which are perceived to be incompatible with Catholicism such as Halloween celebrations or LGBT rights. Paradoxically, even intercultural communicative methods might be understood to be contrary to Polish patriotism and therefore interests. A nation-conscious applied linguistics practice offers language specialists and users a space in which to question the practicality and desirability of using English for instrumental purposes while attempting to reject some of the values associated with it.

Throughout all of these critiques of nationalism in English language teaching, a nation-conscious applied linguistics practice needs to consider the degree to which those of us who are educated in English-dominant nations are misusing our disproportionate global power and taking an imperialistic stance when we dismiss the nationalistic commitments of others and promote plurilingualism, openness to diversity, communicative pedagogies, learner autonomy, and other ideologies associated with the Global North. The privilege of being able to use English professionally makes, for instance, openness to diversity less threatening. We can afford to be open to diversity when our language is not in danger of being swallowed alive, when what we perceive to be "our culture" is desired by many and propagated through the most widespread and powerful of media.

## Teacher Education and Other Higher Education

For those of us whose practice is steeped in teacher education, several of the chapters, including those by Valencia and Tejada Sánchez (Chapter 5) and Windle and Morgan (Chapter 11), highlight the crucial role that nation-conscious applied-linguistics practice and thoughtful teacher education can play, offering glimpses into how teacher educators can support students in unpacking and questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in images and discourses about nation and language. Some government programs, for instance, present the learning of English as furthering the interests of a nation, so that English fluency becomes somehow paired with good citizenship, as we saw in Valencia and Tejada Sánchez (Chapter 5) or as part of a national modernization and internationalization project (McPherron & McIntosh, Chapter 9). Language teacher education can play an important role in ensuring critical questioning of how languages operate in relation to each other and how desires for English are manipulated to intensify the commodification of English and amplify the economic power of the English language teaching industry (Motha & Lin, 2014), and furthermore in supporting questioning about whether English is actually delivering on its promises.

The chapters in this volume suggest that the conception of “language teaching” that we have employed historically may be too narrow for the type of work that applied linguists are carrying out in their contemporary higher education classrooms. Critical analysis of language teaching spaces can stand in opposition to censorship practices, so part of language teacher education needs to be nation-conscious support of how teacher candidates make effectual and prudent decisions about how to position themselves in relation to silencing or censorship by school systems, governments, or other forces (see Ngala, Chapter 3; Kasztalska & Swatek, Chapter 8; McPherron & McIntosh, Chapter 9).

Some of the chapters, including Bao and Phan (Chapter 6), Kreis (Chapter 7), and Windle and Morgan (Chapter 11) are reminders of how important it is for the preparation of students of applied linguistics

and language teacher education to include critical analysis of discursive spaces, especially new media spaces, in which nationalism and neo-nationalism are engendered and propagated, to develop an understanding of how language ideologies become deployed and naturalized in social media, strategies for deciding whether resistance is called for, and support in deciding how to trouble discourses encountered. In their chapter, Bao and Phan drew our attention to the power of “social collaborative means” (p. 156), in this case in the shape of the social platform *Quora Digest* to preserve language, reinforce authenticity of use, and support language awareness. Through Windle and Morgan’s (Chapter 11) analysis, it becomes clear that the literacy repertoires that teachers have conventionally thought of as comprising English language teaching need to be expanded. Language teacher education takes on a much broader lens when it encompasses the type of nation-conscious applied linguistics practice implemented by Joel Windle, using popular media to make explicit connections among sociolinguistic variation, nation, social inclusion, and other related concepts, or that of Brian Morgan as he supported his students in using analysis of visual design to connect mainstream media, such as spoof ads, to critical citizenship. As was similarly evident in Gulliver’s chapter, democracy and citizenship are an inevitable part of English language teaching, whether visibly or less obviously, and ELT classrooms can play a powerful role in mediating students’ interactions with the media and semiotic spaces they encounter in their everyday lives. These chapters underscore the importance of applied linguistics students being prepared to analyze the relationships between nation and language and to judiciously examine the veracity of claims they read, to analyze power dynamics, and to understand the important work that the concept of nation does in relation to colonialism and race.

## **Ideologies and Models of Language Education**

A pressing set of questions that surfaced repeatedly concerned the elusive nature of multilingualism, translanguaging, and hybridity woven

throughout social and especially educational institutional spaces: as legitimate conceptual possibilities within language classrooms; as specifically underpinning models of language education around the globe; and in tension with neoliberal multiculturalism. Ngala (Chapter 3) described language practices in Cameroon, the site of almost 300 languages in use, including the two most widely spoken (pidgin English and Camfranglais), which are hybridized languages weaving together multiple others. This rich linguistic terrain, in which multilingualism seems to be a comfortable norm, might be considered a surprising backdrop for the push for sole allegiance to either English or French that has brought parts of the country to the point of crisis. Language specialists might be forgiven for wondering what underpins the need to commit to either English or French in this context. Thinking about the linguistic and sociopolitical conflict in terms of nation, from the perspective of a nation-conscious applied linguistics practice, helps us to understand that fidelity to language in this instance is shaped by much more than language and extends to cultural and ethnic identity, colonial history, economic inequities across regions, and concern about assimilatory influences.

Schools broadly and models of language education more specifically play an important role in positioning individuals and communities towards nationalism. Schools are fundamental sites of formations of nation. As governments make decisions about schooling curricula, they are deciding how to teach local languages and the stories to tell about the foundation, history, current state, and philosophy of a nation. For language educators and applied linguists specifically, because language is often used to stand in for “culture” or “nation” or even “race,” language educators and language policy experts are using language teaching to shape public perceptions of nation. Because they involve bridge building between language communities, language classes by their very definition represent the narrowing of distances between peoples and often nations. This is accomplished differentially depending on education policies at national and local levels, definitions of bilingualism subscribed to (Valencia & Tejada Sánchez, Chapter 5), models of education implemented, and goals, some of which may appear to contradict goals of

bridge-building. Must pluralism and diversity necessarily stand in opposition to the formation and maintenance of a national identity? For instance, in Poland, must language learners choose between a pluralistic stance and commitment to Polish identity? The UAE has tackled this conflict with a creative solution, by embracing “tolerance” as a symbol of their nation.

As applied linguists shine a flashlight on nationalism and through our practice resist the often-chauvinistic effects of border maintenance, it is important to also avoid commodifying the hybridity and class privilege that can characterize multilingualism, translanguaging, and transnationalism. Translanguaging and transnationalism were historically theorized as part of an agenda of social justice and equity, but because of their routine use in the pursuit of capital production and in performing class status, they are now frequently associated with a “neoliberal multiculturalism that celebrates individual cosmopolitanism and plurilingualism for socioeconomic mobility” (Kubota, 2016, p. 475).

## Conclusion

In the days following the 2016 United States general election, supporters of the newly elected president planned a “Build A Wall” rally on the University of Washington campus. My then-11-year-old daughter listened to me brainstorming a response to the rally with other faculty, then offered: “You could rearrange the bricks to build a bridge.” At its heart, this volume responds to the question: “How can applied linguists rearrange bricks that form a wall to instead build a bridge?” The work of language specialists is fundamentally to take spaces of jingoism, impasse, broken-down communication, and language barriers—walls—and to build bridges by opening up and clarifying interaction and increasing mutual understanding, cooperation, and collaboration, ultimately bringing humans closer to each other. As individuals, we can work against the metaphorical national borders and thwart the thrust of xenophobic nationalism, and we can reshape our national leadership through voting, organizing, and participating in democratic processes. As applied linguists, however, we wield a particular type of largely untapped

power, with our practice providing fertile ground for bridge-building. Language is one of the most important ways of not only signaling but actually organizing national identity. According to Haque (2012), “language is a significant and constitutive aspect of nation-building” (p. 9), and yet for many language specialists, this work is performed under the radar. Purposefully foregrounding nation and embracing a nation-focused applied linguistics practice compels us to ask what unseen work the concept of nation is doing, allowing us to make that work visible and available to critique. Focusing specifically on nation in our applied linguistics and language teaching practice is therefore an important step in illuminating the role that we as language specialists can play in rearranging the bricks into a bridge.

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