Towards cultural diversification in sociolinguistics

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Abstract: This paper takes as its point of departure the fact that the loci of many sociolinguistic theories originate from Western, industrial, and ideologically monolingual (and often Anglophone) societies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and many of the European nation states. This fact leads to a theoretical bias. After an explanation of the problem, this paper proposes ways to decolonise biases in sociolinguistics in practical terms. In general, it is suggested that researchers reach out and collaborate in all kinds of ways. Specific solutions suggested include, amongst others, redetermining what 'good' academic English and research constitute, using translation as a tool, proactively soliciting manuscripts, stimulating writing and research cooperation between authors with various backgrounds, making introductions to sociolinguistics broader in their cultural/linguistic focus, providing writing help, and diversifying editorial boards of journals.

Key words: sociolinguistics; inequalities; publishing; Human Development Index; theoretical bias; solutions

Naar culturele diversificatie in de sociolinguïstiek

Samenvatting: Dit artikel neemt als uitgangspunt het feit dat de loci van veel sociolinguïstische theorieën afkomstig zijn uit Westerse, industriële en ideologisch eentalige (en vaak Engelstalige) samenlevingen, zoals de Verenigde Staten, het Verenigd Koninkrijk en veel van de Europese natiestaten. Dit feit leidt tot een theoretisch kleuring. Na een uitleg van het probleem biedt dit artikel praktische handreikingen om vooroordelen in de sociolinguïstiek te dekoloniseren. De aangeboden handreikingen omvatten onder meer het gebruik van vertaling als hulpmiddel, het proactief benaderen van potentiële auteurs, het stimuleren van samenwerking tussen auteurs met verschillende achtergronden, het bieden van schrijfhulp en redacties van tijdschriften meer divers maken.

Trefwoorden: sociolinguïstiek; ongelijkheid; publiceren; Human Development Index; theoretische kleuring; oplossingen

The situation

Ever since the mid-1960s, the field known as 'sociolinguistics' has developed a number of theoretical and methodological frameworks in order to better understand how language functions in society. These frameworks in turn have illustrated, for example, how social status or gender affect language use, how politeness is reflected in language use, and how individuals adjust their language to the social setting and their interlocutor, to

name a few. Such frameworks have significantly advanced our understanding of language in society albeit in epistemologically confined ways. It cannot be ignored that the loci of many of these theories has been Western, industrial, and predominantly ideologically monolingual (and often Anglophone) societies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and many of the European nation states. As has been emphasised in recent and less recent works (Coulmas 2013; Creary 2012; Hira 2012; Hountondji 1990; Hutchings & Morgan 2016; Meyerhoff & Nagy 2008; Mihesuah 1998; Smakman 2015; Smakman & Barasa 2016; Smith 1999; Thiong'o 1986), this means that to some degree, sociolinguistics suffers from a bias. While this is not through any malintent, Western epistemology is omnipresent in sociolinguistic theory and method, and this results from Western scholarship having dominated the field.

As a result, scholars are equipped with a broad tool box for conducting sociolinguistic analysis, but these tools were created with Western contexts in mind. For example, we tend to understand and define language vitality in ways familiar to the West, relying upon modernist ideas of language standardisation (Smakman 2012; Smakman & Barasa 2016), literacy, unmarked monolingualism, and power structures familiar to the formation of European nation states (Evans 1996; UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages 2003). We tend to understand language and gender in Western epistemological frames of what gender even amounts to and the salience of gender difference (Cameron 2000; Silverstein 1985), and our current preoccupation with critical sociolinguistics is a direct product of the Frankfurt School and broader European critical theory with its concerns with European class structures (Horkheimer 1982). Nonetheless, sociolinguists tend to apply these theories not only in the West, but wherever a sociolinguistic situation is worth investigating. Arguably, we are even compelled to do this if we are to pass our PhD examinations, to get published, to get funded and therefore pursue academic careers in sociolinguistics. These are, after all, the available tools and the criteria that carry most weight. As a result, local world views, theories of sociolinguistics, culturally-rooted methodologies and other non-Western approaches to sociolinguistics are at best marginalised, and at worst seen as not validly contributing to contemporary scholarship. These may, however, be the tools to understanding sociolinguistic life outside the West. That is to say, theories that are the hallmarks of sociolinguistic thought may actually have much narrower applicability than is often presupposed.

It is therefore clear to our minds that a holistic shift should take place in our field. On the one hand, this shift is a moral one akin to the critical and postmodern turns that sociolinguistics itself has taken. Sociolinguistics has become increasingly concerned with researching and exposing power relations and inequalities between speakers and languages (cf. Blackledge 2000; Duchêne & Heller 2012; Mesthrie 2000), with decentring narratives away from traditional sources of authority, and with questioning grand narratives (cf. Canagarajah 2005; Pennycook 2006; Stroud 2003). It therefore stands to reason that as a field we ought to address power structures and inequalities between research epistemologies and culturally-contextualised theories, as well as decentre academic authority away from the West and cast a sceptical eye on its epistemological assumptions. Doing so amounts to the decolonisation of research theory and method. That is, naturally,

a longer-term project for the field and an endeavour that requires a thorough qualitative analysis of researcher, editor and publisher biases and experiences vis-à-vis the new neoliberal norm of academia. In the meantime, however, we can as a field take practical steps to facilitate that decolonisation in structural if not yet ideological terms.

This paper therefore aims to discuss and propose ways to decolonise biases in academia in practical terms. It is worth noting that these proposals are non-exhaustive, which is not surprising, given that decolonisation cannot be achieved instantly, but in a process over generations. Our main focus is on decolonisation and deconstruction of inexpedient Western biases related to expectations of academic publishing 'standards'. This includes the reliance on Western resources, the bias towards Western research methodologies and theoretical frameworks in the publishing process (Barnes 2018; Smith 1999), standard language use in communication (Smakman & Barasa 2016), and intercultural adaptation to academic writing genre (Beier 2005; Smakman & Barasa 2016).

The perspectives of the authors of this article are affected by their own background. Three of the authors are native speakers of English, and all have been active at Anglo-western institutes mainly. One of the authors was educated mainly at an African university.

The West

It should be noted that denotations like 'West' or qualifications like 'Western' are not representative of definable entities and represent mainly historical approaches to the topic at hand. Current socio-political situations are bringing to light in particular the divisions within the traditional 'West'. It is safe to say that currently a certain alienation is taking place between the Inner Circle and the rest of the West, in particular certain European regions (mostly Western European). Sociolinguistically, the division can be qualified as 'comfortably monolingual' (Inner Circle) and 'uncomfortably multilingual' (mostly Western European regions). While these European regions seem to be soldiering on towards finding unity in diversity in an area that now includes countries that did not used to be qualified as 'West', the UK and US are nowadays emphasising internal unity, national independence, and self-sufficiency from neighbouring countries and countries that are historically their allies. This increasing divide in general outlook, including the Inner Circle unofficial but strongly felt tendency towards the exclusive use of English by all inhabitants and visitors, versus the increasing multilingualism (acquiring a higher number of first and second languages) in Europe makes it unrealistic to lump the two areas together as 'West'. For lack of a better term, we will nevertheless use this and related terms and consider them a way to refer to an outlook that is influenced by European-based Christian principles of morality rather than sociolinguistic sameness. Kurth (2003) took a similar approach. In the same vein, Bhatt et al. (2022) in their text on the social disparities between the West and other geo-cultural contexts explained their use of terminology as follows: "We use Western or the West to refer to the regions, nations & states consisting of Europe, the U.S., Canada, and Australasia, and their shared norms, values, customs, religious beliefs, & political systems."

The term ‘Anglowestern’ broadly coincides with ‘Western’ but emphasises the English-speaking part of the West. In this article, we refer to a broad consensus of what Western or Anglowestern is or represents, without committing strictly to one of the many definitions hereof. Hall (1996) explained how terms like “Western” and “West” represent multifaceted ideas and have no straightforward meaning that all will agree on. Rather than these words being a reference to geography, they refer to, amongst others, a society type and a level of development. The West, however, is no longer a reference to only Europe, and it does not refer to all of Europe. Like Hall did in 1996, this article approaches “the West” as a historical construct and not a geographical one; “Western” then refers to a society type, namely one that is modern, secular, capitalist, urbanised and industrialised. Hall (1996) indicated that any society that shares these characteristics can be said to belong to “the West”.

An important note to make here is that any geographically based definition is at odds with the fact that in areas traditionally classified as ‘West’ live populations, often referred to as ‘indigenous’ (see below), whose claim to the land in question is as old as or older than the more dominant society that they live amongst. Examples of such peoples are the original inhabitants of Scandinavia, New Zealand, Australia, and Northern America.

Also, when referring to a large and linguistically and culturally rich area such as ‘Europe’, it should be noted that the notions of ‘Europe’ and ‘European’ should not simply be taken to denote geographical area. In a recent text, Kontra, Sloboda, Nekvapil, and Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak (2023) explained how regions within Europe are definable on the basis of different criteria, and they thus remind us that Europe cannot be taken as a geographical or cultural entity, let alone as a homogenous sociolinguistic one. They remind us that the Central Europe region is a concept of shared history while the reasons for referring to other parts of Europe are different. The Ottoman Empire, Imperial Russia, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Islam determined the cultural cohesion within Eastern Europe. France and Britain, at the Western edges of Europe, were important in the establishment of the concept of Western Europe. The former Iron Curtain division has intensified cultural divides within the region. References to ‘Europe’ within the realm of the ‘Western gaze’ (Bhatt et al. 2022; Kurth 2003; Malik et al. 2022) tend to refer to the latter only, while the Eastern European outlook in particular is one of being European but also having a mixed allegiance because of their situation. Feelings of belonging to Europe and the West are mixed in Eastern and Central Europe.

It is also noteworthy that non-Anglophone regions, including those in the West, are also marginalised by the Anglowestern mainstream. As an illustration, Kontra et al. (2023) explain how in central European university programmes offering Slovak Studies courses on Sociolinguistics revert to a type of teachers’ guide, written in Slovak (see Tóth 2019), rather than a proper introduction to Slovak Sociolinguistics, to complement Anglowestern mainstream introductions to the field, in order to provide a complete picture. In a country like the Netherlands, this is also the case. The large Anglowestern introductions fail to represent languages and cultures equally and explicitly foreground English and the peoples that use it in its many forms. They refer to languages with millions of speakers, like Dutch (20 million) and Slovak (5 million), with equal urgency as extinct languages and

small sociolects. The responsibility to produce high-quality local introductions lies with the various regions in the world, but the responsibility of equal representation lies with the larger, mainstream publications. Examples of best practice publications should come from many regions. A broad range of writing and research traditions should appear in these introductions, and their quality should not be based on Anglowestern perceptions of 'good' and be stimulated by how interesting sociolinguistic situations are. This sometimes requires some explanation from those from these cultures.

Problem definition

Bias

An in-depth discussion of the degree and nature of the Anglowestern bias in sociolinguistic theory-making is described in Coulmas (2013), Meyerhoff and Nagy (2008), and Smakman (2015). These works discuss in detail how sociolinguistic categories, such as class, oftentimes appear to be drawn from theories of Western industrial societies, and how the Anglowestern bias often manifests in giving prevalence to socio-economic factors and to the nation state and its typical social groups as important entities. This fact is underscored by the fact that mainstream introductions – like Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) and Meyerhoff (2019) – to the field tend to contain a chapter that departs from 'social class' rather than 'language and status' or 'social status groups' – like Smakman (2018) – and does not start with 'class' or give it prominence over, e.g., 'tribe'. As further described in Smakman, Nekvapil, and Fedorova (2022), Smakman (2018), and Smakman and Heinrich (2015), however, different social categories and subdivisions of social categories are often prevalent outside the bounds of Western Anglophone societies. The approach to individuals and groups in the Anglowestern realm is therefore not necessarily universal.

Smakman (2015) made an effort to bring to light the realities underlying the inequalities in the field. For one, the most well-known sociolinguists (in many cases authors of introductions into the field) are in most cases native speakers of English. Editorial boards of the most well-known journals in the field are strongly overrepresented by academics from universities in the Anglophone area. Academics from universities in countries where English is the main native tongue of the inhabitants are strongly overrepresented in publications in these journals. As a result, areas outside the Western realm that are described sociolinguistically and that are discussed in mainstream journals are in a relatively high number of cases investigated by academics from Anglowestern universities. By far most authors from the articles are from universities in countries classified as "very high" on the Human Development Index,[1] which categorises countries on the basis of key dimensions of human development, the most important one being standard of living through economic success.

[1] See https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI.

In an explicit effort to visualise the failure of mainstream theories to capture certain specific phenomena, Smakman and Heinrich (2015) collected examples of situations in which this was the case. In a chapter on North Saami, for instance, the authors talk about the absence of a standardised language, the high social status of certain dialects over majority languages, and knowledge of dialect and tradition as a determinant of social status. The Saami authors present a two-dimensional pattern of language variation in which each dialect of North Saami can potentially be classified on the basis of both its traditional regional features and the type of majority-language induced contact influence it displays (Aikio, Arola & Kunnas 2015). Another interesting example is the importance of dance as part of communication in Yugtun as spoken in Toksook Bay in South Central Alaska – dance is a vehicle of inter-generational information continuation in this community (John 2015). The transmission and construction of the Yup'ik indigenous knowledge system requires socially mediated cooperative participation and learning. As a final example, Van Engelenhoven and Van Naerssen (2015) explain how the phenomenon of language concealment appears to be used as a strategy of maintaining the Austronesian language of Makuva, as spoken in Timor-Leste. This language is not extinct, as is often claimed, but rather "in coma" (p. 75), and thus serves as an example of speakers not publicly displaying this language in order to protect its existence. Such phenomena are not always easy to fit into mainstream theoretical paradigms, according to the authors of these texts. Instead, the volume observes that authors describing such situations make efforts to fit their language situation in internationally well-known theoretical paradigms that are often interpreted as universally applicable, in order to be understood by a wider reader audience.

The named bias is part of a broader issue. As emphasised in Elizabeth Lanza's plenary address at the International Symposium on Bilingualism, this Anglowestern bias is not limited to variationist sociolinguistics (for whom social categories are the primary foci), but also in diverse areas of fields such as the newly-emergent subfield referred to as 'Family Language Policy' (Lanza 2017). As Lanza points out (and which is echoed in Smith-Christmas 2017), the bulk of Family Language Policy published research has focused on middle-class families in Western, industrialised societies, which thus constrains what researchers can actually say about the realities of the relationship between the family, language, and society. As also pointed out by Pavlenko (2017) at the same conference, the Western bias also means that some key 'linguistic hotspots' may be overlooked.

High-status institutes and their theories

Indeed, the Anglowestern tendency in theory-making is hard to combat. In fact, it is a self-supporting mechanism that is highly successful and therefore hesitant and seemingly unable to reinvent itself for the good of those not part of it.

For one, there is the high quality of theories from the Anglowestern sphere, which at some level is reflective of the fact that high-status universities are located in Anglowestern areas and thus have attracted the best and brightest minds. Colonial and neo-colonial

processes have privileged the West, often at the expense of the non-West, and this goes for universities as well. Outside this Western sphere, theories have been proposed but often have failed to reach large audiences due to several interlinked factors. First, because of the afore-mentioned concentration of well-established, high-status universities in the Western industrialised world, theories tend to be in circulation in Western spheres before their non-Western counterparts. Thus, theories are sometimes accepted simply because they are the best available at a particular time; and once a particular theory becomes more or less accepted, it becomes harder to challenge, and it runs the risk of becoming a default theory for lack of an alternative from a culturally different sphere. Further, the prestige of the Western universities means that the theories proposed by academics at these institutions are likely to carry more weight than a theory proposed by an academic at a non-Western institution. Finally, the economic asymmetry between much of the Western and non-Western world means that academics from Western universities are more likely to have the funding to attend conferences and formulate collegial networks in which formative theories circulate. They are also more likely to obtain crucial monetary support for their research through national research councils, which may only be open to academics working in that particular country. Other reasons why Anglowestern theories have proven hard to challenge relate to the role of academic research traditions in certain cultures and to the language used in publications (a language other than English), as well as various other socio-economic factors relating to the Western/non-Western disparity. Smakman (2015) explained and illustrated these and other factors in some detail, using information on sociolinguistic journal publications and their authors since the 1970s. This text showed that there have been few noteworthy improvements in the past decades.

Tradition of 'othering'

The issue of Western biases in academic contexts is not a new concern. A classic example, and one that is especially familiar to anthropologists, is of 'non-indigenous' researchers having in the past collected, (mis)interpreted, and (mis)represented data from indigenous communities through Western paradigms for Western purposes (Hutchings & Morgan 2016). The term 'indigenous' in this context refers to original inhabitants of areas, including their customs and tradition (United Nations, 2009).

The *othering* of indigenous peoples and cultures through the Western gaze (Bhatt et al. 2022; Kurth 2003; Malik et al. 2022) saw indigenous ways of being and it saw world views being documented through non-indigenous lenses, which in postcolonial scholarship is seen as the colonisation of indigenous truths, rather than through any input or cooperation with indigenous scholars or epistemologies (Smith 1999). Instead, so Smith explained, indigenous issues have been "represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to the colonized" (p. 1–2). As Smith (1999) also explains, the term 'research' is therefore in itself "inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (p. 1). This serves to remind us of our theories and methods not only being culturally informed, but also onerously powerful in the eyes of those we

apply them to. While the classic example above is drawn from indigenous scholarship, it is by no means difficult to see its broader relevance in other non-Western societies.

Financing and visibility

In more practical terms, another example is of non-Western scholars necessarily relying on resources and facilities from the West due to financial constraints in the home country. They may call on Western universities for philanthropic access to laboratories and libraries. By extrapolation, of course, these laboratories and libraries in the West may harbour Western research perspectives and priorities. In the face of scarce funds, however, non-Western scholarship can come to rely on these Western resources and frameworks (Hountondji 1990). Similarly, according to Martin (2016), non-Western scholars are generally faced with challenges to make their work visible because most non-Western journals are rarely cited internationally. In other words, what the field perceives as top, ground-breaking journals are necessarily from the West, headed by Western or Western-inspired scholars aided by Western or Western-inspired editorial boards, familiar with traditional Western approaches to theory, method and indeed composition. This means that non-Western scholars find themselves targeting, and adapting to, Western journals and publishers for visibility. In order to make their work promising and improve the chances of being published, these scholars must use a strategy to win a Western audience by wrapping their work around intellectual concepts that are valued in the West.

Writing in one's L1

We also add here that many non-Western scientists may be authorities in their field, but nonetheless are not afforded the opportunity to share with the rest of the world due to language issues. This standpoint is similar to Wiredu (2002), who encourages African scholars to enforce decolonisation by thinking and reflecting in their own vernaculars; otherwise, their thoughts and frameworks are inclined to lose or change nuances and suggestiveness and attitudes when translated to foreign languages leading to misrepresentation over time. In addition, writing in vernacular is more natural and enjoyable. Wiredu continues by citing fields like Anthropology and Religious Studies, whereby Western scholars collect, analyse and interpret non-Western data through their Western "conceptual lenses", and then send back the findings as theories to the indigenous non-Western students who have to accept and apply them in academic contexts. This trend is an example of academic colonisation and should be remedied by promoting equity in academia as proposed hereafter. As it stands, however, non-Western scholars also are required to adapt their writing style to the Western style if they are to be published in Western journals. These journals are, after all, the ones considered to be of highest quality if impact factors are a measurement of such quality. This has made non-Western scholars to be what Hountondji (1990) referred to as 'academic tourists', i.e. to produce quality work and get published in a high impact factor (Western) journal, one needs substantial support from Western countries, ranging from facilities to language (Ali 2010).

Decolonisation as theory

Breaking out of the Western bias in scholarship – whether it be through the greater acceptance and promulgation of non-Western theories, or by pursuing balanced cultural and ethnic representation in the academy – amounts to *decolonisation*. The term decolonisation was first introduced in 1955 in the *Bandung conference* with delegates from 29 African, Asian and South American countries. In terms of its definition, Barnes (2018) acknowledges that the term is viewed differently by various groups. He explains that:

> "For some, decolonisation is a call to purge a discipline of Western thought and replace it with 'indigenous' knowledge systems; for others, to include local and indigenous knowledge alongside Western knowledge; and for others, it is to give voice to the marginalised. For others, it is a passing fad, a recycled set of ideas that have very little critical bearing on the critical work that needs to be done." (Barnes 2018: 382)

Many studies have used the term 'decolonisation' interchangeably with 'de-Westernisation'. However, Mignolo (2012) clarifies that even though the terms refer to the same concept, de-Westernisation also refers to countries that were not directly colonised, e.g., Russia.

A pioneering voice in the decolonisation of the humanities more generally has been that of Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith (1999, 2007), professor of indigenous education at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. As noted above, she propounds that research by non-indigenous scholars is in essence "research through imperial eyes" and it has not only marginalised that of the indigenous researchers, but it is also presented as universal truth. The universal truths are cemented even more because they are easily published – given their form in the Western native language which requires less editing. This brought her to her seminal work on decolonisation theory and method. Her core decolonisation argument is that research on indigenous peoples and societies must give voice to indigenous values and ways of being in political, social, spiritual, and psychological spheres. Indigenous Australian scholar Rigney (1999) echoes this, explaining that researchers of non-Western issues must "think critically about their research processes and outcomes, bearing in mind that indigenous peoples' interests, experiences and knowledge must be at the centre of research methodologies and the construction of knowledge concerning indigenous peoples" (p. 119). Kuokkanen (2000) also argues that researching indigenous perspectives requires a paradigm that is "a culturally specific discourse based on indigenous peoples' premises, values and world view" (p. 413).

The decolonisation theme is being increasingly applied in sociolinguistic thinking, not just to examine unequal power relations with indigenous people, but to emphasise and legitimise epistemological, theoretical and methodological diversity that exists outside the West. Canagarajah (2005) has called for postmodern scepticism of grand narratives from the West in explaining local sociolinguistic narratives – even those that reside within the West. His argument is decolonial in that he sees academia as having bestowed upon itself the authority to determine truths and sociolinguistic facts. The problem lies in cases when this fact-making is erroneous, is absolute and does not account for divergent world views, or does not include local narratives and belief systems that give shape to sociolinguistic realities in day-to-day lives. Albury (2017a) has therefore argued that

a folk-linguistic approach to sociolinguistic research – one that in broad terms places local knowledge paradigms at the centre of analysis – is well-placed to voice and legitimise non-Western epistemologies and experiences of language and, in turn, inspire non-Western theory-making. This comes in large part from findings outside the Anglowestern centre that challenge the universal applicability of key sociolinguistic theories. In Māori New Zealand, for example, he found an epistemology of language that prizes the authenticity of oratory tradition over literacy development, and that does not correlate Māori language with Māori ethnic identity. Both these phenomena challenge core assumptions in language revitalization theory (Albury 2016; Fishman 2000; Romaine 2006). In Malaysia, on the other hand, identities and the notion of a mother tongue – as a genetic rather than linguistic characteristic – are intensely correlated. This means that the West's current scepticism of mother tongues with a preference to speak of languaging as behaviour radically displace local Malaysian senses of self and citizenship (Albury 2017b).

In addition to the decolonisation framework, our proposed solutions in this paper are also grounded in the Equity in Education framework presented in a policy brief for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Field, Kuczera & Pont 2007). This framework advocates for fairness and inclusion in allocation of academic opportunities, such that "personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential" (p. 13). This paper translates this framework to the context of academia. Therefore, every researcher, regardless of their socio-economic circumstance – e.g., background, location, research field, etc. – should access equal opportunities and resources to achieve their potential as proposed hereafter.

Solutions

It is, as we have explained, difficult to achieve rapid attitudinal shift and a broader project on decolonising sociolinguistics lends itself to a qualitative investigation of stakeholder experiences and interests. This publication as well as others – most notably Meyerhoff and Nagy (2008) – illustrate that there may be practical solutions to this issue. The solutions do not involve a reduction of the high-quality Anglowestern theoretical output that keeps being generated. Instead, it involves giving additional prevalence to researchers and their ideas from outside the Anglowestern traditions. These solutions can be divided into three main strands: changing attitudes, critically considering the reviewing process, and exploring opportunities regarding future grant and publication cooperation.

Attitude/cultural shift

Above all, an overall awareness of the urgency of the issue needs to develop, which could lead to an attitude shift. An argument that can be made is that sociolinguistics is oftentimes synonymous with critical sociolinguistics. Themes such as power and inequality have become subjects of concern for academics in the field. In our practices, however, we seem to ignore this by applying Western theories to non-Western lives.

Postmodernism, decentring authority, and efforts to lay bare inequalities do not seem to be broadly applied in publishing practices. We continue to duplicate the critical power relations that we seek to combat in our sociolinguistics work.

Minoritised people may do successful work based in local theories, but the mainstream is hesitant to reach out and is not eager to accept these theories. Changing the mind-set of the mainstream to accept (and even use) more theories is necessary. A link can be made here to the evolution of Anthropology away from 'explaining the other in one's own terms' to taking an ethnographic approach. Making an effort to add to sociological theory besides linguistic theory might open eyes. It is remarkable how sociolinguistics, as a field that generates behavioural data (language choices, language behaviour) does little to provide productive new vantage points to understand language as seen through sociological theories. Part of such theories would be to discuss and even support less solidaristic versus more conflict-oriented premises in approaches to venerable phenomena. Taking a broader socio-cultural approach is essential to achieve such a vantage point.

Re-evaluation of language quality

Phillipson (2012) explained how English is in a way at the top of the hierarchy of languages used in the world, due to its history, and that the effects of this hierarchy can still be felt today. One of the implicit or explicit selection criteria for articles and book chapters is the quality of the English in which they are written. Traditionally, it is native speakers of English who determine norms regarding what constitutes correct English (Jenkins 2000, 2009). Not only do native speakers write grammatically high-level sentences, but their texts also come with a certain order of information presentation and general rhetorical style (Smakman & Duda-Osiewacz 2014). This style too is an aspect of the norm language use as tacitly required by journals. When writing in English, non-native speakers inevitably apply a style that is influenced by their native language and culture. This style may go against expectations and creates a power imbalance. That is to say, sociolinguistics as a field has created implicit and explicit language policies that bias the existing competencies of advanced users of English above others, irrespective of academic content.

This means, in essence, that the field is interested in the uniqueness of rhetorical patterns in various languages and cultures, as first pointed out by Kaplan (1966), but may still be seen as hegemonic in what it expects from its own scholars. An example of this is on Elsevier Publishing Company's blog where they list "Top language mistakes for rejection" (Elsevier 2023). Specifically focus in on researchers trying to get their work published in international journals. In the same academic writing context, Ali (2010) talks about "[i]mproper formatting and language, grammatical lapses, and typographic errors" (p. 6). On the one hand, these could be construed as well-meant, innocent, and practical instructions, but they also denote a rejection of styles not suitable for the journals and other publications that they refer to. In that respect, they tacitly serve as a warning, because proper English guidelines can easily be found elsewhere. Such instructions thus highlight the fact that within the realm of English language style the publishing firm in addition has even more strict rules.

Kaplan explained, for example, that authors apply their own culture's writing style when writing in English. Research (Duszak 1998; Smakman & Duda-Osiewacz 2014) has shown that Kaplan's suggestions are indeed borne out when investigating actual L2 academic English texts. At a very subtle rhetorical level, non-native authors write differently from native ones. They often provide the same information but in a different order than what is expected by the average native speaker of English. Indeed, according to the categorisation of cultures by E. T. Hall (1976), English and a majority of northern Anglowestern languages are based on cultures that are described as low-context. These cultures tend to be relatively direct and explicit in their communication, which is reminiscent of what Bernstein (1971) referred to as Elaborated Code. In contrast, some languages, especially from southern Europe, Asia, and Africa, are from high-context cultures and are likely to be active as communication tools through a more implicit style. Not giving detailed background information or direct aims and objectives is oftentimes part of that style – similar to what Bernstein referred to as Restricted Code. An assessment of a typical writing from a high-context/restricted code culture by a low-context/elaborated code culture reader may likely lead to an assessment of ambiguity and incompleteness, and even as being less systematic. Scholars who speak Western languages as their second language face a similar challenge as they can adapt the language to suit their needs. According to Beier (2005), this means that they freely, naturally and subconsciously incorporate their culture in forms of "speech rhythms, metaphors and images derived from their own languages" (p. 22), without being aware.

So, the articles submitted by non-native speakers suffer from both a higher likelihood of being written in 'less good' – or idiosyncratic – English, but the rhetorical style may also deviate from the policed norm (Phyak 2015). This combination may make it more likely that an article is rejected on the basis of language rather than contribution to academia. This situation may be dealt with if reviewers and editors took a different approach to structures that are not native-like and do not confuse deviation in style with deviation in research quality or relevance of the theme at hand; non-nativeness at the sentence and paragraph/text level as not intrinsically indicative of a lower research quality or low urgency of the topic. Rather than rejecting articles written in 'bad' English, editors could aim at working together with the authors of articles and work towards making them meet international standards more, before subjecting them to review. In terms of practicalities, however, journal editors are busy academics, and being the editor of a high-ranking journal is usually one of their myriad of duties. Thus, to not put all the onus on the editor, one solution would be to set up an international group where academics could work closely with academics from disadvantaged, non-Western areas in preparing their articles for submission. The advantage is that style rules automatically broaden through such cooperations. This of course would rely on the goodwill of busy academics but it would be an important way in which to counter the Western bias in terms of journal articles, as well as have the potential for fostering future collaborations between non-Western and Western researchers. Another solution would be to try and have one foreign reviewer who shares a similar cultural background as the author in order to review the work from a non-native angle.

Journals need to create new policies. A certain leniency and acceptance of rhetorical idiosyncrasies may be adopted, especially if the rhetorical style is internationally understandable and if the given information in texts is simply presented slightly differently. The latter suggestion (i.e., leniency) is perhaps on some level more practically easy than the former (collaboration). Putting together a document that outlines the journal's policy in terms of non-native English (i.e., instructing reviewers to focus more on content rather than the sentence-structural level of the article) to send along with general reviewer guidelines would not be as great an undertaking as working closely with individual academics on their particular articles. Being mentioned in the acknowledgements, or even a co-authorship, might be a way to reward editors.

Translation as a tool

Related to the previous issue is the possibility of having authors write articles in their preferred language and translating these texts in English, with the help of the original author. This effort will give a large audience access to research that is not written in English, including past research. There are numerous examples of relevant pre-1960s sociolinguistic research from, for instance, Russia (Danilov 1929), Argentina (Barrenechea 1951), the Netherlands (Weijnen 1946), and Japan (Tanabe 1936) that cannot be accessed by an international audience because of the fact that these publications are not written in English. Translating these (and republishing them, including the original text) as well as modern publications from such non-Anglophone areas will provide a wide audience with a wealth of relevant material to draw from.

Related to this point, writing journal articles in autochthonous minority languages is usually an integral part of raising the status of the particular minority language. However, the academics who go down this route are often not rewarded for their efforts, as minority language publications are usually not seen in the same light as prestigious English-language publications. This is because in comparison to journals in other languages, especially those in English, autochthonous language journals do not always reach a wide audience. They are thus low in terms of their impact factor ratings (or indeed, they may not have an impact factor rating). Especially in the case of early-career researchers, the need to be published in a journal that is not only accessible to a wide audience but is well-regarded and has a reasonably high impact factor rating may outweigh the importance of publishing in the autochthonous minority language, as so often future employment and funding opportunities are attached to these publications in high impact factor, international peer-reviewed journals. Thus, dedicated translations and re-publications of autochthonous minority language publications may serve not only as a means for autochthonous minority publications to reach a wider audience, but it may also be an important way for autochthonous minority language publications to gain strength and thus contribute to the maintenance of their respective languages.

Bilingual publications could be the aim; one version in an autochthonous language and another in English (or a summary in English). Experiences that one of the authors has with this system have underscored that it helps elevate the status of languages. Authors

from Georgia (country) and Bulgaria for a journal (*Journal of Global Sociolinguistics*, launched by Leiden University in 2024) appreciated the possibility to write in their native tongue for various reasons. Of course, they were able to express themselves better in that language and their text would be readable for peers who were also less capable of reading English. This way, native speakers of the autochthonous language communicated directly with each other, while outsiders could read along if they wished. This itself changed the relative status of the two languages to the speakers of the autochthonous languages and positively changed the narrative in which the autochthonous language was referred to and talked about, from within the group itself to each other and to outsiders. For readers, it shows that both languages are functional and necessary in their own way, and that both contribute to meaning construction independently.

Re-evaluation of cultural interpretations

Research from an area where mainstream sociolinguistic principles do not fit the local situation may be misinterpreted if seen through a mainstream lens. For instance, while socio-economic criteria to determine social status dominate in mainstream circles, a plethora of other criteria are used outside Western cultures. In minority cultures, as an illustration, the concept of status differences is less dominant than in the average nation state (Aikio, Arola & Kunnas 2015; Preston & Niedzielski 2009); in fact, knowledge of local customs (John 2015) and of local dialects (Clark 1988) are important determiners of social status. Such highly deviant uses of criteria to determine status are likely to be dismissed or ignored in a cultural interpretation of research in which socio-economic criteria are the main and default criteria to be used and in which 'class' is the main status denominator (not 'tribe', 'clan', or 'caste'). To understand the validity of these and other argumentations or uses of criteria, it is necessary to study the culture the author is referring to and negotiate with the author on the use of criteria before articles are entered in the reviewing process. A suggestion towards this was made by Gkartzios and Remoundou (2018), who advocated in their Conclusion the use of indigenous and informal narratives of the topic discussed in the article. Rather than viewing unexpected interpretations and the unexpected use of argumentation as signs of weakness, editors and reviewers could work together with authors on finding ways to reformulate ideas such that they become accessible and understandable for a wider audience.

As part of this solution and to educate themselves, non-Western scholars could be encouraged to conduct fieldwork research on their non-Western languages with a specific aim to compare, contrast, and even challenge existing mainstream theories (Barasa 2015; Smakman & Heinrich 2015, 2018; Smakman, Nekvapil & Fedorova 2022). Findings from such studies would encourage non-Western researchers to interpret their data and present their views in an authentic and critical manner, while at the same time act as an eye opener for Anglowestern scholars in their general assumptions. A raised status of publications stemming from non-Anglowestern universities may help in reducing the brain drain to Anglowestern universities, which are often the outcome of inter-university cooperations.

Acquisition

Currently, journals rely on articles being sent to them by researchers. The general hesitation of researchers from outside the mainstream realm to send articles to mainstream journals has as an effect that the available catalogue of research is dominated by work by Western researchers. Smakman (2015) illustrated how while research covers a wide range of cultures and languages across the world, it is still Western-based and Western-inspired researchers who are getting their investigations on non-Western sociolinguistic situations published, more so than locally based researchers do. Authors from Western universities produce about four fifths of all sociolinguistic investigations, and it can be assumed that (not all but) most of these researchers are Western themselves (and that all are Western-based and Western-biased). The data interpretations in these writings is relatively likely done through Western gazing (Smakman 2015).

Instead, researchers from the areas themselves could play a more dominant role in the generation and interpretation of data from their own region. To reach a situation in which researchers from lesser known regions are involved in publications from their region more, journals may proactively invite these researchers to publish their research. Rather than wait for articles to be sent in and selecting the highest-quality ones, editors could decide which articles (which regions/themes) need to be in the next journal edition and invite capable researchers while expressing a preference for the involvement of research from the targeted area in the literature section. If possible, upcoming researchers could be invited to cooperate with more experienced researchers.

An example of an initiative to lower thresholds, stimulate cooperations, and give less prevalence to mainstream stylistic and other norms is the *Journal of Global Sociolinguistics* (JOGS), which was mentioned above. Thematic issues are generated that are constructed by authors themselves, in which authors peer-review each other non-anonymously. One of the authors is also Issue Editor. No strict rules exist as to article length, only quality and readability criteria. The authors may write in any language they like, but translation in English are required if they choose not to write in English. The journal is open access.

Content cooperation

We have already mentioned intercultural collaboration as an important aim that should be proactively and systematically stimulated rather than be dependent on ad hoc initiatives. Studying sociolinguistics in cooperation with native researchers from the areas under investigation may be seen not as optional but conditional. Such cooperation should be encouraged as a form of a symbiosis partnership that would help strengthen the quality of research for both parties. This is important especially amid recent protests that some studies on non-Western languages are not fully reliable because of the poor data collection methods due to lack of inadequate funds and proper resources coupled with short time frames and pressure to publish, especially amongst local researchers. This pressure in some cases results in the use of ‘de-contextualised’ and ‘in situ’ language

data, which is not reliable for drawing any original substantial conclusions. Mainstream and non-mainstream cooperation would ensure more contribution and thus quality.

Budgeting cooperation

The problem of research being dominated by the West also applies to '*what* gets researched,' which in the post-modern world boils down to 'what research gets *funded*.' This problem was identified in a grant evaluation process that one of the authors participated in. The organisation explicitly aims to support grassroots initiatives worldwide; however one trend the author noted was that the highest-scoring applications tended to come from academics from Western (and mostly Anglophone) universities working with grassroots organisations – as opposed to those applications directly from members of grassroots organisations and/or researchers at non-Western universities – primarily due to the Western academics' use of academic English and structuring of grant applications. Not surprisingly, applications that received the highest marks (and therefore funding) were ones in which the applicant was clearly *au fait* with writing grant applications in clear academic English. Again, not surprisingly, these applications tended to be from researchers who were currently at, or had an affiliation with, a Western (and in most cases, Anglophone) university.

It is advisable to select researchers and distribute research funds in different ways than before. A practical solution is for researchers from well-budgeted universities to try and find joint funding for collaboration with researchers from less affluent universities and to combine forces. Universities would need to allow for some of their budget to go to a foreign university's researcher. The intercultural exchange of PhD students is a good approach to join forces and share insights and information. Grant applications written in cooperation with prospective PhD students from the regions one is interested in is a possibility, and PhD students could be given the opportunity to do most of their work and data collection in the region itself. In other parts of the world, similar travel proposals may be available as well. Well-budgeted universities organising conferences outside the Anglowestern regions, finally, is a way of coaxing researchers from less affluent regions to participate in conferences and save money on travel and subsistence expenses. Financially supporting invited speakers from certain regions may become a rule rather than an exception. In Europe, the Erasmus+ programme has been successful in organising mobilities of researchers within the EU. In many cases, a travel grant can be obtained on the basis of an invitation by a scholar from the receiving institution.

Rewriting introductions to sociolinguistics

The most often used introductions to sociolinguistics are written by researchers whose native tongue is English. Examples of famous introductions written by native speakers of English are *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Holmes 2001), *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Romaine 2001), and *Introducing Sociolinguistics* (Meyerhoff 2019). Introductory works from the United States and the United Kingdom

are the most numerous. The authors are generally well known. Authors from the Inner Circle are overrepresented in this group of authors. The native tongue and culture of the authors in itself is not an issue, but it is striking how in these books research about their native tongue receives considerably more attention than research into languages other than English. The reason for this is the quality of research into all kinds of Englishes across the globe as well as the widespread availability of research into this language.

Now that this language in its many shapes has been described so extensively in introductions, maybe future introductions could be written in which English is prevalent (because it is the mostly spread language) but that pay more attention to less well researched and less extensively researched languages and language settings. A geographical approach in which languages and cultures across the world are systematically represented on the basis of size in introductions to sociolinguistics may be preferred over an approach based on the availability of research and the quality of the research. Another selection method is to compare the Ethnologue site[2] and find places that have been under-researched, despite their highly multilingual situations. Authors from outside the Anglowestern realm could be invited to write or co-author such introduction books.

Editorial boards of journals

Smakman (2015) illustrated that editorial boards of mainstream sociolinguistic journals are mostly from the Inner Circle while to a lesser extent European and Asian editors work for these journals. African and South American researchers in particular are highly underrepresented as editors in these journals. For a field like sociolinguistics, this is an undesirable situation, because of the importance of culture as a factor in research. It is highly necessary to diversify the cultural and language backgrounds of editorial boards of international journals. For journal editors to step outside their personal network and proactively approach authors from certain regions may be key to achieving such diversification. This diversification in editorial representation would follow the example of gender and other diversifications, which are currently broadly promoted.

Article availability

The universities with the highest journal subscription budgets are oftentimes situated in the Anglowestern regions, which means that researchers who work at these universities have easier access to articles. The subscription charges of journals should therefore be looked at critically and could be based on the position on the Human Development Index of the country in which a university resides. Free access could be given to universities is countries that are low on this index. It may also be suggested that the richer universities financially support the transition from subscription-based journals to open-access online journals.

[2] See https://www.ethnologue.com/.

Dissemination

Universities should be more proactive in publicising and disseminating knowledge worldwide. Currently, there are many high-quality Masters and PhD theses on language description that have been safely archived at local libraries and enshrouded in red tape, which makes them inaccessible. Such literature should be easily availed since it would be valuable in the theoretical re-consideration process (Barasa 2015).

As a follow-up to enabling physical access to literature, foreign researchers and their local libraries should purposefully create alerts and notify reputable and prominent Western publishing houses, and other interested parties to document locally published literature, especially those in form of university journals and theses. These alerts could be dispersed via social media networks.

It is commendable that an increasing number of publications (or at least abstracts) are currently accessible online through uploads on academic social networks such as *Research Gate* and *Academia.edu* – although the dissemination of these uploads mainly depends on the number of followers, which may not be sufficient for un-renowned researchers without a big network. To remedy this, online journals should perhaps make an exception and give articles by researchers from less affluent regions open access online to make them free and thus easily accessible for comments and reviews. Such arrangements are useful, especially in debating theoretical frameworks on a global level.

Conclusion

Some of the suggestions made in this article are relatively easy to achieve. The authors are nevertheless aware of the attractiveness and ease of maintaining much of the current situation. In communication with colleagues, at conferences and on the shop floor, a common reaction is to put into perspective the situation and soften the message. For instance, during a talk one of the authors gave on this topic, the general reaction from the audience was that sociolinguistic activity was booming in certain countries, amongst others, China and Brazil, despite the facts hereon that had just been presented to the (largely Anglowestern) audience. What is often overlooked by those producing such criticisms is the fact that a country like China holds about a quarter of the world population and a considerable amount of the global language variation situations, so the contribution to international journals, the number of grants, the contribution to general sociolinguistic theory, the number of PhD students in sociolinguistics, and all the other things mentioned in this article should be representative of that size and that amount of variation. Adjusting this situation will require a pro-active (and not mitigating or relativising) approach by individuals, perhaps especially those from the Anglowest.

Change may be in the air. What happened to the editorial board of the Elsevier journal *Lingua: An International Review of General Linguistics* is exemplary. In 2015, the editors all resigned after the refusal of Elsevier to consider the pricing model and consider open access to readers across the globe. The original *Lingua* editorial board now edits a peer-reviewed open-access journal – *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics* –, which is doing very well. The protests by the original editorial board were supported by

important associations; amongst others, the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Another illustration is the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. The publisher, Taylor & Francis, is allowing free online access to articles on minority languages for the first few months after publication. A final hopeful sign when it comes to open access is that at many universities, amongst others northern European universities, BA-, MA-, and PhD theses are in most cases made available online through a digital repository, unless the authors object.

Another hopeful sign is the initiative by the Foundation for Endangered Languages, which is currently in the process of formulating a partnership programme, whereby FEL members work with applicants from grassroots organisations in non-Western countries in implementing a crowd-funding campaign for their particular endangered language project. This means that not only more endangered language projects can be funded, but it will build a stronger partnership between the foundation and individual endangered language communities. With the growth of crowdfunding initiatives, other organisations could use similar methods in ensuring that more projects from non-Western areas are generated and in building links between Western institutions and organisations and non-Western institutions, organisations, communities, and individuals.

More such initiatives, in the publishing arena, but also outside, might turn around the situation, even if they are not always explicitly aimed at fighting the bias as described in this article. As said, this bias is not necessarily unique to sociolinguistics, and it is therefore hoped that in offering these practical suggestions, academics working in other fields may choose to consider our solutions, so that academia as a whole may become more inclusive and reflective of the multicultural and multilingual world in which we live.

The suggestions to reach out are in this article mainly described as coming from areas typically Anglowestern. This begs the question what researchers and institutes can do who are not from this realm, in order to expand their presence in the international research arena. There are no easy or obvious answers to this question, and it is also not up to authors so strongly connected with the Anglowestern tradition, like the authors of this article, to give advice hereon from their own perspective, as that might come down to advice on how to become more Western in one's approach, which is not what this article wants to promote.

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