The Decolonial Option in English Teaching: Can the Subaltern Act?

B. KUMARAVADIVELU
San José State University
San José, California, United States

In this reflective article that straddles the personal and the professional, the author shares his critical thoughts on the impact of the steady stream of discourse on the native speaker/nonnative speaker (NS/NNS) inequity in the field of TESOL. His contention is that more than a quarter century of the discoursal output has not in any significant way altered the ground reality of NNS subordination. Therefore, he further contends, it is legitimate to ask what the discourse has achieved, where it has fallen short, why it has fallen short, and what needs to be done. Drawing insights from the works of Gramsci (1971) on hegemony and subalternity, and Mignolo (2010) on decoloniality, the author characterizes the NNS community as a subaltern community and argues that, if it wishes to effectively disrupt the hegemonic power structure, the only option open to it is a decolonial option which demands result-oriented action, not just "intellectual elaboration." Accordingly, he presents the contours of a five-point plan of action for the consideration of the subaltern community. He claims that only a collective, concerted, and coordinated set of actions carries the potential to shake the foundation of the hegemonic power structure and move the subaltern community forward.
doi: 10.1002/tesq.202

The year was 1986. Soon after I graduated from the University of Michigan with a doctoral degree, I had a chance to go to a neighboring state and meet with a well-known U.S.-based Indian scholar in applied linguistics. During our conversation, he asked me about my area of research interest, and what would be the focus of my long-term scholarship and publication. "English language teaching methods," I said enthusiastically, expecting his approval and appreciation. He looked at me the way only a wiser and more experienced person would look at a novice, and said in a benign, fatherly tone, "They will never let a nonnative speaker get established in the areas of methods and materials." He did not tell me who *they* were, nor did I ask him.

He advised me to turn instead to aspects of sociolinguistics that intersect Tamil (my mother tongue) and Indian English. He said I could easily make a mark in that area. Not wishing to give up my genuine interest in methods, I ignored his advice.

The real meaning and the value of his warning hit me hard a dozen years later. In 1998, after following the usual procedures (i.e., book proposal, sample chapters, feedback, and revision) and after receiving the editorial green signal to go ahead, I submitted the full manuscript of my first book, *Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching* (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), to a preeminent, internationally renowned press in our field. I waited and waited and waited. My periodic enquiries about the status of my manuscript yielded bland responses. Nearly two years later, I called their acquisition editor and demanded a quick resolution. She was very friendly and polite, promising to look into the matter and get back to me within a week. She promptly did so, and offered me a novel explanation for the delay: The press moved the office of the section related to language education to another floor in their building and in the process my manuscript got misplaced. Now that they had retrieved and reviewed it, they decided not to publish it because it did not fit in with their changed publication agenda. The response puzzled me because the press had continued to publish a rich collection of books of a similar kind written by native-speaking professionals. The delay, the explanation, and the decision made me suspicious about the press's motive.

My suspicion was strengthened when, in April 2002, I went to Salt Lake City, Utah, to participate in the 36th annual TESOL convention. I was browsing through books in the book exhibits section set up by the press that had rejected my manuscript. The spacious stalls, the abundance of books, and the many staff waiting to serve visitors bore testimony to the importance of the press. A well-known U.S. scholar, who at that time was the general editor of a series published by a private publishing company, approached me, greeted me warmly, and said, "I enjoyed your IATEFL talk very much." He was referring to a plenary talk titled "Method, Antimethod, Postmethod" that I had delivered at the 36th annual conference of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) conference held at the University of York, England, just a month before the TESOL convention. The IATEFL conference participants were informed that my talk was based on my book *Beyond Methods* soon to be published by Yale University Press. The U.S. scholar said he was there as a consultant. He continued, pointing to the press logo we were surrounded with: "It's a good thing you went to Yale. Mainstream publishers like this one wouldn't have published your book." At that moment, I realized that I could not function as a free man in my own chosen field

and that my life as a nonnative professional was being managed and manipulated by subtly invisible, and seemingly invincible, forces.

In many different ways, I continued, and still continue, to encounter the power of the forces undermining my professional aims and activities. Nothing bothers me more than my never-ending and ever-losing battle that has been adversely affecting my MATESOL students as well. When I joined San José State University in 1991, I was distressed to find that the students, nearly 40% of whom are nonnative speakers, were not allowed to practice-teach at the campus-based intensive English program, which is a constituent unit of our own university. To fulfill their mandatory practice teaching, they have been going to local adult education centers or church-related voluntary organizations, bravely putting up with untold inconveniences involving long commutes and disrupted classes. Teachers at these places do yeoman service helping recent immigrants develop much-needed survival skills in English. However, they do not have adequate professional preparation to mentor MATESOL students effectively. The irony of the situation is that my department had been chaired for nearly a decade by someone very active in the international TESOL organization who, deservedly, went on to become its president. In addition, a specialist in World Englishes who gained his professional visibility writing and speaking about nonnative varieties and nonnative speakers was on our faculty. Sadly, their eminent presence did not make any difference. Whenever I bring up the issue of student practice teaching for discussion (and I do so with irritating persistence), I am treated to an abundance of politically correct words and an avoidance of professionally correct deeds. Clearly, I have been failing, and failing miserably.

In spite of my unsavory encounters with the formidable forces of my profession, I consider myself blessed compared to the struggles some of my graduating students face in their own countries. Just a couple of years ago, May 2012 to be exact, one of my students from a Southeast Asian nation came to my office on the day of her graduation. On a day when she should be full of joy and laughter, she was crying. Instead of rejoicing at the completion of her studies, she was regretting it because she realized that the time had come for her to go home and face the ground reality there. She was one of my best students, full of potential, but still was afraid to return home because English language teaching in her country is the proud privilege of expatriates from the United Kingdom and the United States. According to her, it is difficult for even well-qualified citizens with foreign degrees to compete with expatriates, and if they do manage to get a job at an institution of their liking, their salary and service conditions are not on par with those of the expatriates, nor do they enjoy the same respect and recognition accorded to native speakers. They are treated as second-class citizens in

their native land. I fully understood what my student was saying about her country because, just a few months before her graduation, I was in her country to give a keynote address at a conference. On the first day, just before my talk, there was a function to inaugurate the conference. Sharing the stage with me and other invited speakers were nearly half a dozen office bearers of the association that organized the conference. I looked around—all expatriates, not a single local professional on the stage. The nonnatives were, of course, sitting in the audience. It was apparent that they were not running the show in their own country. I considered their condition pitiful until, not long after that visit, I had a chance to go to my country of birth for a professional visit and witnessed something similar.

In March 2013, I was in Hyderabad, India, to give a keynote address in a conference jointly organized by the British Council (India) and the English and Foreign Languages University (formerly Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages [CIEFL]). At the inaugural function, officials from both made it a point to highlight their "partnership" that has been, according to them, immensely beneficial to English language teaching (ELT) in India. What I saw at the conference, however, was more a proprietorship on the part of the Council than a partnership between the two. Clearly, it was the Council that managed the aims and activities of the conference. In fact, all my correspondence pertaining to the conference was with the Council and not with the university. I also came to know that the Council has been playing a significant role in shaping the policies and programs of several state-level, government-controlled institutes of English in India. What I saw and heard surprised and saddened me because, when I was teaching at CIEFL during the early 1980s, my senior and highly respected colleagues took justifiable pride in saying that they had successfully wrested the Indian ELT initiatives from the clutches of the Council and that it was they at CIEFL and other Indian scholars at regional institutes of English who were shaping Indian ELT. But now, Indian ELT exhibits a clear case of the return of the native. I left the conference wondering whether Indians have ceased to be the masters in their own ELT house.

The vignettes I have narrated above represent only a fragment of my personal and professional experience. There is nothing new or unique about any of them. I am sure many other nonnative professionals around the world have experienced something similar. I narrate these rather familiar stories to make a point. And that is: These stories span more than a quarter of a century, and it is precisely during this period that the discourse on the marginalization of nonnative speakers in our field has become increasingly pronounced, yet it is precisely during this period that the practice of marginalization has

continued to thrive. It is therefore legitimate to ask what the native speaker/nonnative speaker (NS/NNS) discourse has achieved, where it has fallen short, why it has fallen short, and what needs to be done.

THE MARGINALITY OF THE MAJORITY

In the past quarter of a century or so, there has been a spate of well-intentioned institutional as well as individual attempts to confront NNS marginalization in our field. In 1991, the international TESOL association adopted a "Statement on Nonnative Speakers of English and Hiring Practices," placing on record its opposition to discriminatory practices (TESOL, 1992). In 1998, following the initiative taken by a committed group of NNS professionals led by George Braine, the organization officially established an NNEST Caucus with the primary goal of creating "a nondiscriminatory professional environment for all TESOL members regardless of native language and place of birth." The official newsletter of the Caucus, the *NNEST Newsletter*, published twice a year since 1999, has been "providing resources for understanding and addressing NNEST issues in ethical, effective, and informed ways." Fully 15 years after its initial resolution, the TESOL association recognized the fact that the discriminatory practices continued unabated, and so decided to reiterate its opposition, this time in the form of a "Position Statement Against Discrimination of Nonnative Speakers of English in the Field of TESOL" (TESOL, 2006). Two years later, in 2008, the organization upgraded the NNEST Caucus to an Interest Section, thus giving it improved status and enhanced visibility. (See Selvi, 2014, for a detailed essay on the NNEST movement.)

Complementing the organizational efforts are individuals—both NS and NNS—who have been relentlessly addressing NS/NNS-related issues in "ethical, effective, and informed ways." And they have also been doing this for nearly a quarter of a century now. The 1990s witnessed pioneering contributions by Phillipson (1992), who foregrounded the imperialistic nature of ELT as a field; by Pennycook (1998), who historicized the colonial character that still adheres to it; and by Canagarajah (1999), who documented the English language learners' resistance to it. The end of the decade marked the publication of an anthology—the first of its kind—in which 15 nonnative professionals presented autobiographical narratives articulating their concerns about the place of nonnatives under the TESOL sun. Significantly, the editor dedicated the volume to all his coauthors "for their courage and perseverance" (Braine, 1999). The next decade saw variations of the same theme, with the publication of four more notable anthologies, one narrating nonnative professionals' experience in learning and teaching

English (Kamhi-Stein, 2004), another highlighting their challenges and contributions (Llurda, 2006), yet another recording their professional growth (Braine, 2010), and one more providing a lens to see the profession through the work of nonnative professionals (Mahboob, 2010). During the same period, Holliday (2005) showed us how a pervasive ideology he called *native speakerism* has been privileging native speakers and marginalizing nonnative speakers in matters related to language use, language learning, and language teaching.

In addition to scholarly expositions, there have been numerous studies on many aspects of nonnative teachers' professional preparation, their language proficiency, and their teaching performance as well as the perceptions of their employers, administrators, and learners about them. In a state-of-the-art article, Moussu and Llurda (2008) document what they call an impressive array of studies that follow varied theoretical frameworks and research designs covering surveys, interviews, classroom observations, critical reflections, and personal narratives. These studies have been reported in anthologies, books, articles, theses, and dissertations. Since then, even more studies on the performance and perspectives of nonnative teachers have appeared from different parts of the world (see relevant chapters in volumes edited by Alsagoff, McKay, Hu, & Renandya, 2012; Ben Said & Zhang, 2013; Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2013). All these efforts, without any doubt, have created a much-needed awareness about the condition of the NNS community.

SIGNS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

One would think that the impressive volume and variety of research and publications outlined above must have reshaped various aspects of the NS/NNS inequity in a significant way. That does not seem to be the case. Instead, what I see is a schizophrenic tendency on the part of the profession. On the one hand, there is a noticeable acknowledgment of the remarkable work done by the NNS community toward knowledge production in our field. Going by citation indices, it is fair to say that the profession has received well, and has benefited from, the NNS community's scholarly contributions on several important topics, including culture and context in language teaching, local knowledge and translingual practices, the bilingual mind, the English–vernacular divide, race and identity, cross-cultural aspects of contrastive rhetoric, and second language writers' composing processes and practices—to name a few. Clearly, insights and interpretations from NNS scholars have expanded the knowledge base of our discipline. In addition, the profession has rewarded deserving NNS professionals with leadership of professional organizations and editorship of flagship

journals. Several NNS professionals are also well known in international conference circuits.

There is, however, another, less flattering, side to the NS/NNS inequity. In spite of the fact that the NNS "community of professionals has done a lot to articulate the concerns of nonnative professionals, develop a body of knowledge on our teaching experiences, and educate the professional organization on the myths of native speakerism" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 276), the resulting impact on the NS/NNS inequity presents a dismal picture. In addition to the experiential vignettes presented in the prologue of this article, consider also the writings of some of the prominent leaders from the NNEST Interest Section (IS), including some that appeared in the recent issues of its official organ, *NNEST Newsletter*. A former chair of the IS observes, "At the 2011 convention in New Orleans, a few native speakers stopped by our booth and when they saw the name of our IS, they turned and left, saying that the interest section was not for them" (I. Lee, 2012). "The problem," according to another author, "is that the conversation about discrimination has remained in NNEST circles, which means that NES teachers have had limited access or interest in the careful scholarship that NNEST movement has developed in regard to issues of inequity in the field" (Coma, 2012). In the March 2014 *NNEST Newsletter*, Doan (2014) reports that, according to a market survey conducted by the officials of the local government in Ho Chi Minh City, the capital of Vietnam, native-speaker teachers from Britain were paid US$10,000 per month, native-speaker teachers from Australia were paid US$5,000 per month, but nonnative teachers from the Philippines were paid US$2,000 per month—for doing the same job.

Clearly, a quarter of a century of deafening discourse on the marginality of the majority has not changed the ground reality much. If anything, the forces of domination seem to be getting even more entrenched. Critically reflecting on the currently prevailing conditions, Phillipson (2012), two decades after his initial work, declares that linguistic imperialism is still "alive and kicking." What has been happening is a textbook case of cultural hegemony as theorized by Antonio Gramsci (1971) whereby dominant political, cultural, and linguistic forces maintain their aggressive domination and expansion by exercising power in an abstract and invisible manner, not openly attached to any one individual or a group of individuals. More on this, later.

METHODS AND MATERIALS OF MARGINALITY

The hegemonic forces in our field keep themselves "alive and kicking" through various aspects of English language education: curricular

plans, materials design, teaching methods, standardized tests, and teacher preparation. But it is primarily through center-based methods and center-produced materials that the marginality of the majority is managed and maintained. They are the engine that propels the hegemonic power structure. As I type these lines, I pause to think: How many scholarly books on methods that are used as foundational texts for a core course in TESOL methods for graduate students are actually written by nonnative professionals? How many ESL/EFL textbooks manufactured and marketed worldwide by "mainstream" presses in our field are actually written by nonnative professionals? Not many. Why is that?

The reasons are not far to seek. Method is the most crucial and consequential area where hegemonic forces find it necessary and beneficial to exercise the greatest control, because method functions as an operating principle shaping all other aspects of language education: curriculum, materials, testing, and training. It is not without reason that our profession "has seen one method after another roll out of Western universities and through Western publishing houses to spread out all over the world. On each occasion, teachers in other countries and other cultures have been assured that this one is the correct one, and that their role is to adapt it to their learners, or their learners to it" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 20). All the center-based methods are clearly linked to native speakerism. That is, they promote the native speaker's presumed language competence, learning styles, communication patterns, conversational maxims, cultural beliefs, and even accent as the norm to be learned and taught. The popular communicative language teaching (CLT) is a good example.

The marketing of CLT around the world, in Asia in particular, is at once so strident and subtle that I was able to discern a common misconception in countries that I have recently visited: China, Indonesia, South Korea, and Taiwan. Policymakers and their advisors in these countries appear to have decided to adopt CLT mainly because of the label *communicative,* which (mis)led them to believe that by using this method they will be able to help learners develop much-needed communicative abilities. That is how the method was introduced to them.

As a case in point, consider China, currently the largest ELT market in the world. In 2001, China adopted a sweeping educational reform aimed at shifting the overall emphasis from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach as well as from a knowledge transmission to a knowledge construction model (Ministry of Education, 2001, 2011). As part of the new English curriculum, the Ministry of Education decided to make English a compulsory subject from Grade 3 in rural

areas and even earlier in cities such as Beijing, Dalian, and Shanghai. Moreover, in order to develop in learners effective communication skills that are needed to thrive in the globalized and globalizing economy, the Ministry decided to accelerate the use of CLT (originally introduced in the 1990s) in schools and colleges.

These measures, however, have not produced the expected results. Research by Chinese scholars reveals that in metropolitan areas a mix of grammar-translation, audiolingual, and CLT is used, while in semi-urban and rural areas only grammar-translation and audiolingual are used (Luo, 2007). A more recent study by F. Zhang and Liu (2014) shows that, nearly a decade after the introduction of the new English curriculum, the teachers continue to live in their own "comfort zone," happily following "such traditional beliefs and practices as teacher-centered and textbook based instruction, focus on grammar and language form, recitation and imitation, drill and practice, and teacher authority" (p. 200). According to the authors, teachers' inadequate speaking skills, learners' low language proficiency, lack of proper teacher training, and cultural dispositions are among the factors that constrain any effective implementation of CLT. In spite of these unmistakable shortcomings, CLT continues to be vigorously promoted from within and without, and remains, as Littlewood (2013) correctly points out, "the dominant model for official language teaching policies and a central pillar of government rhetoric in (respectively) the Asia-Pacific region and East Asia" (p. 4).

Closely connected to the imposition of methods are materials that are produced and promoted by center-based publishing industries. Textbooks are the vehicles that carry the theoretical principles and teaching techniques that are associated with a particular method. Accordingly, the textbooks that are currently recommended and used in different parts of the world promote the current professional orthodoxy in the form of CLT or its variant, task-based language teaching. Again, consider China. In a significant departure from the past, the Ministry of Education–initiated educational reform mentioned above gave necessary authority to regional institutions and experts to write, publish, and distribute textbooks in compliance with the basic requirements set forth in the new English curriculum. One would expect that such an empowerment of local professionals and publishing centers would have significantly altered the textbook preparation and production in the country. Not so. China did witness "the development of wide-ranging materials *to supplement the textbooks,* such as teachers' guides, multimedia resources, internet materials, wall charts, maps, and so on" (J. F. Lee, 2010, p. 146, italics added). However, with very few exceptions, primary textbooks themselves continue to be produced by center-based publishing industries or their subsidiaries

located in China. In other words, the official policy of decentralization of the textbook market has not resulted in the devolution of power and authority to the peripheral ELT community. The dominating agency of the center-based publishing industry is too powerful to overcome.

Cognizant of the political and cultural awareness that has been created by the ongoing processes of economic and cultural globalization, the center-based textbook industry has been taking certain tactical measures aimed at maintaining its domination. They are now producing global textbooks with a variety of add-ons to meet the demand for a local fit (see Gray, 2002, for details). Creative strategies and innovative marketing techniques cleverly mask the fact that centrally produced global textbooks continue to preserve and promote native speakerism.

It has been said that any possible ideological and cultural damage caused by center-produced textbooks is actually mitigated by teachers and learners in periphery communities who have recourse to resistance. We have been assured that "research confirms that oppositional readings do occur and that teachers and students can seek to subvert specific ideological content" (Gray, 2010, p. 714). We have also been told that "teachers and learners are more critical than they are given credit for and often resist the commodity they are being asked to consume" (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 165). I am amused by these arguments because I do not see how "oppositional readings" or marginal doodles can make any difference to the commercial bonanza or the ideological agenda or the dominating agency of center-based textbook industries. After all, even if they are put to subversive use, textbooks have to be prescribed by teachers and bought by learners in the first place. When they do that, it is "mission accomplished" for the publication industry. Besides, and more alarmingly, celebrations of sterile forms of resistance can only lull the marginalized into a false sense of liberation. It would be naïve to think that the passive tactics of the weak can deter the aggressive strategies of the strong.

Although both the center and periphery communities have to work together to disrupt the hegemonic forces, the latter bears a greater share of responsibility, because, as Holliday (2005) observes, "it cannot be denied that 'Centre' researchers trying to empower 'Periphery' communities to which they do not belong may in the end only strengthen the discourses of the 'Centre'" (p. ix). I believe that in order to assume a greater and meaningful responsibility, the periphery communities must seriously engage in critical self-reflection, asking a probing question that Jacques Derrida (1994) asked in a different context and for a different purpose: "What now must be thought and thought otherwise?" (p. 59).

NNS PROFESSIONALS AS SUBALTERN INTELECTUALS

A fruitful way to begin to think "otherwise" is by invoking Gramsci's work on hegemony and subalternity. Hegemony is political, economic, social, cultural, linguistic, or ideological control exercised by one group or nation over another. According to Gramsci (1971), the hegemony of the dominant group is predicated upon

> the "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (p. 118)

This relationship between the dominant and the dominated is also characterized by subalternity. Gramsci borrows the term *subaltern* from the military, where it refers to noncommissioned troops who are subordinated to the authority of commissioned officers of various ranks. He extends the term to all social groups that are excluded from the hegemonic power structure. It is now used in that sense in fields such as anthropology, cultural studies, history, political science, and sociology.

To put it briefly, according to Gramsci, the hegemonic power structure subordinates the subalterns through an ensemble of political, social, cultural, economic relations that weaken their will to exercise their agency. The process of subordination operates mainly through coercion and cooptation, that is, through the process of marginalization on the part of the dominating forces, and the practice of self-marginalization on the part of the dominated groups. As a Gramscian scholar explains, "in basic terms, hegemony is protected by coercion and coercion is protected by hegemony, and they both protect the dominant group's political and economic positions" (Green, 2002, p. 7). The self-marginalizing subalterns can begin to exercise their agency to transform their subordinate status by challenging and changing the ensemble of relations that marginalize them. The solution, however, cannot come from the dominating power; it has to come from the subalterns themselves. It can come, asserts Gramsci, only when the subalterns achieve critical consciousness and the collective will to act.

Critical consciousness and the will to act can be achieved through education. "Every relationship of hegemony," says Gramsci (1971), "is necessarily an educational relationship" (p. 44). Therefore, the role of the intellectual within a subaltern community becomes crucial. In this context, Gramsci makes a distinction between what he calls *traditional* intellectuals and *organic* intellectuals. By and large, traditional intellectuals work within the confines of the institutions of the existing

hegemonic order and are only superficially interested in uplifting the less fortunate members of the subaltern communities. Organic intellectuals, on the other hand, are deeply connected to, and strive for, the fundamental transformation of subaltern communities. The two categories of intellectuals can be distinguished by looking at "the direction in which their specific professional activity is weighted, whether toward intellectual elaboration or toward muscular-nervous effort" (p. 115). The function of the new, organic intellectual lies in the historicization and conceptualization of the condition of subalternity, in the identification of the hegemonic systems that sustain the marginalization of the subaltern, in the organization and representation of subaltern groups, and in the formulation of counter-hegemonic ideas and practices that have the potential to transform subaltern communities. Mere "intellectual elaboration" or copious production of discourses of dissent, however eloquent, is inadequate. "The mode of being the new intellectual," observes Gramsci, "can no longer consist in eloquence which is an exterior or momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life" (p. 116). The "muscular-nervous effort" that Gramsci calls for entails result-oriented action that can transform relations of subordination and domination.

Gramsci identifies several impediments that subaltern intellectuals face, and need to overcome, in order for them to effectively challenge hegemonic forces. Among them is the language of intellectual activity. The dominant power defines and imposes particular linguistic expressions intended to create a specific conception of the world that suits them. Instead of taking part "in a conception of the world imposed by the external environment," Gramsci (1971) urges subaltern intellectuals "to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world" (p. 323; for a detailed treatment of his view of the connection between subalternity and language, see Green & Ives, 2009). Using biased terminologies will inhibit the subaltern from doing so. Notice how the terms *native* and *nonnative* evoke a particular world view in our field. We have only an idealized version of who a *native speaker* is or what constitutes *native speaker competence*. And yet, these terms have a firm hold on the knowledge systems dictating several aspects of English language learning and teaching. Similarly, the term *nonnative speaker*, with all its negative connotations, has taken on a stubborn quality resisting any attempt to replace it with a neutral term such as *expert speaker* (Rampton, 1990). The subaltern community has implicitly accepted it, continues to use it, and is hence complicit in its own marginalization.

From the Gramscian perspective, the construction and imposition of interested terminologies serves yet another purpose: to instill and

reinforce inferiority complex in the minds of the subaltern. This situation ensures self-marginalization on the part of the subaltern even in the face of their noteworthy accomplishment. One can see such a mindset playing out among the subaltern professionals again and again. For instance, in his message as chair-elect of the NNEST Interest Section, L. Zhang (2012) proudly and justifiably asserts that NNS colleagues "have invigorated our academic and professional activity with new theoretical perspectives in recent years." But later, in his message as the outgoing chair, he prods his colleagues to "contribute to the profession in ways that we are able to show that as teachers we teach well. . . . Only when we show we are good, as professionals and academics, and as social beings, do we deserve the respect from colleagues" (L. Zhang, 2013). I wonder how many NS professionals are working, or are asked to work, under a similar mindset. I find it rather paradoxical that, whereas many NNS professionals feel the need to carry out experimental research to prove that they can successfully do what they are trained to do, there are some NS teachers who go around the world confidently doing what they are not trained to do. To be fair, the NS community has not, to my knowledge, openly demanded that NNS professionals prove that they can "teach well." This is a task NNS professionals seem to have taken upon themselves. Thereby hangs a colonial tale.

Extending the Gramscian notion of subaltern inferiority, South Asian postcolonial scholars have problematized the capacity of the postcolonial subalterns to engage in the critical inquiry needed for effective action. Foremost among them is Gayatri Spivak (1988), who asks the question *Can the subaltern speak?* and answers it in the negative. One of her main arguments, extended to subaltern intellectuals, is that, because of the colonial "epistemic violence" perpetrated against "the margins" (p. 283), the method of intellectual discourse that is available to, and followed by, the subaltern intellectuals is Eurocentric to the core. Consequently, the subaltern intellectuals have no choice but to conform to the Western ways of knowing and the Western ways of languaging. They may have access to Western knowledge systems, but they are unable to exercise their own subject position. "Their privilege," she says, "is their loss" (p. 287), because they have to rely on the Western narrative in order to validate their own work. Their voice is the voice of the ventriloquist. And it is in this sense that Spivak claims that the subaltern cannot speak.

How, then, can the subaltern intellectuals untangle themselves from the colonial matrix of power, method, and discourse? This question has been explored extensively by postcolonial scholars from Latin America. Dissatisfied with the prevailing postcolonial rhetoric that has spawned only scholarly output (cf. Gramsci's *intellectual elaboration*),

they take as their point of departure a crucial distinction between colonialism and coloniality.

> Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration.

> (Maldonado-Torres, 2010, p. 97)

These scholars show how coloniality has survived colonialism not only in the economic, social, and cultural arena but also in academia—in books, in the criteria for academic performance, and in the self-image of subaltern intellectuals. To counter the pervasive effect of coloniality, they advocate what they call a *decolonial option* that incorporates action-oriented counter-hegemonic strategies. Accordingly, they explore intellectual tools and social practices that can result in "a gradual epistemic decolonization, understood as a long-term process of re-signification and re/construction towards words and knowledges otherwise" (Escobar, 2010, p. 397). They also emphasize that it is necessary to approach the decolonial option "from below and from within" (Escobar, 2010, p. 393).

One approach to the decolonial option, according to Walter Mignolo (2010), is to adopt the process of *delinking* from "Eurocentric categories of thought which carries both the seed of emancipation and the seed of regulation and oppression" (p. 313). Delinking entails a sustained struggle "to change the terms and not just the content of the conversation" (p. 313). That is to say, producing, organizing, and distributing knowledge under the terms and conditions set by hegemonic forces will only imprison the subalterns within the logic of coloniality. Such efforts will not lead to effective decolonization. What is needed is the *unfreezing* of the subaltern's potential for *thinking otherwise.* It is of the utmost importance to recognize that the hegemonic forces have created a condition by which the subalterns are persuaded to think that the logic of coloniality is normal and natural. Therefore, the task before the subalterns is to "de-naturalize concepts and conceptual fields" (p. 313) imposed on them by vested interests and to "remove the anchor in which the 'normalcy effect' has been produced" (p. 352). This must be followed by the creation of what Mignolo calls a *grammar of decoloniality* based on the subjectivities of the subaltern that have been denied all along. The grammar of decoloniality, therefore, is a framework for strategic plans drawn by subalterns deriving from their own lived experiences and hence will vary from context to context.

A DECOLONIAL OPTION FOR THE SUBALTERN PROFESSIONAL IN TESOL

The vignettes presented in the prologue that are drawn from my personal and professional life, as well as the lived experiences of many other professionals in our field, clearly show several signs of the subalternity and coloniality discussed above. Both the hegemonic forces and the subaltern professionals have been playing a persistent role in the processes of marginalization and in the practices of self-marginalization, respectively. As mentioned earlier, through an ensemble of political, social, cultural, economic, and educational relations, the hegemonic power structure has managed to keep the subalterns in a subordinate position. In the educational arena, the control has been exercised mainly through the propagation of methodological orthodoxy and through the publication and distribution of related instructional materials.

To all this, the subaltern intellectuals in our field have responded in a way that was predicted by theorists of subalternity and coloniality. By working largely within the confines of the logic of coloniality, and by playing the role of "traditional intellectuals" rather than that of "organic intellectuals," the subaltern intellectuals have all along engaged in "intellectual elaboration" through scholarly expositions and experimental studies, without fully realizing that "intellectual elaboration" is a necessary but not sufficient response to hegemonic control. In addition, knowingly or unknowingly, members of the subaltern community, by being complicit in the propagation of professional orthodoxy, have been allowing themselves to be co-opted by hegemonic forces. Sadly, they have been "buying into what was offered by the dominant stakeholders, dismissing their own expertise and indigenous knowledge, engaging in the practice of self-marginalisation" (Widin, 2010, p. 60). By doing so, they have constituted a second line of "imperial troopers" who perform the unspoken role of "facilitating the consent that hegemony requires so that the fist can be returned to the glove" (Edge, 2003, p. 703).

If the professional community is serious about disrupting, if not dismantling, the hegemonic power structure, it must resolve not only to think *otherwise* but also to act *otherwise*. What is required is no less than what Mignolo (2010) has called an *epistemic decolonization* or what Foucault (1972) earlier, in a broader context, called an *epistemic break* (see Kumaravadivelu, 2012a, for a detailed discussion on the epistemic break in ELT). In other words, merely tinkering with the existing hegemonic system will not work; only a fundamental epistemological rupture will. In order to begin to effect this rupture, the subaltern

community has to unfreeze and activate its latent agentive capacity, and strive to derive a set of concerted, coordinated, and collective actions based not on the logic of coloniality but on a *grammar of decoloniality.*

A grammar of decoloniality, if it is to be useful and useable, has to be formulated and implemented by local players who are knowledgeable about, and sensitive to, local conditions. They can, of course, be guided by a broader framework. The contours of such a framework must necessarily involve the following:

- Discontinuing experimental studies that are carried out to prove that the members of the subaltern community know how to "teach well," and instead redirecting the available time and energy toward result-oriented strategic actions. This also entails discontinuing comparative studies about who teaches what aspect of the English language better. If we assume, as we must, that a professionally trained teacher is competent to teach all aspects of language, then who can teach pronunciation better is a moot point, particularly in a profession that claims to celebrate World Englishes that focus on intelligibility rather than accent.

- Designing context-specific instructional strategies that take into account the local historical, political, social, cultural, and educational exigencies. This entails a recognition, and a will to act on that recognition, that a center-based method is a failed top-down exercise which has been functioning as the prime element of professional orthodoxy that is imposed on the subaltern community.

- Preparing teaching materials that are not only suited to the goals and objectives of learning and teaching in a specific context, but also responsive to the instructional strategies designed by local professionals. This entails a recognition that center-produced ESL/EFL textbooks are the instruments that propagate the principles of center-based methods. Designing teaching materials is not as challenging a task as it seems. Many teachers already prepare supplementary materials. All they have to do is to learn to do it more systematically and for a larger purpose. The required knowledge and skill can be imparted through a core course on materials production for preservice teachers and hands-on workshops for in-service teachers.

- Restructuring the existing teacher education programs so that prospective teachers are helped to develop the knowledge, skill, and disposition necessary to become producers, not just consumers, of pedagogic knowledge and pedagogic materials (see

Kumaravadivelu, 2012b, for a possible pathway). This also involves developing the capacity in them to systematically monitor their own teaching acts in order to ensure continuous professional self-development.

- Doing proactive, rather than reactive, research with the view to reducing exhaustive and exclusive dependency on center-based knowledge systems. Unlike reactive research that is mostly limited to testing and applying the received wisdom, proactive research involves paying attention to the local exigencies of learning and teaching, identifying researchable questions, producing original knowledge, and subjecting it to further verification.

These actionable plans are complex and long-term, but if taken seriously, they have the potential to help the subaltern community move forward. Constructing and actualizing a grammar of decoloniality is not an easy task, nor is it the task of one individual, or even a group of individuals. It is indeed the task of the collectivity. It is only the collective consciousness of the professional community that can create the conditions necessary for individuals and groups to initiate and sustain the plan of action sketched above.

A SOBERING CONCLUSION

A critical appraisal of nearly a quarter of a century of discourse on the NS/NNS inequity in our field leads me to a sobering conclusion: Seldom in the annals of an academic discipline have so many people toiled so hard, for so long, and achieved so little in their avowed attempt at disrupting the insidious structure of inequality in their chosen profession. In countering hegemonic forces, the subaltern intellectuals have so far proved to be no more than ineffectual angels beating their wings in the void, to paraphrase the poetic words of Shelley. As my continuing failure in as routine a matter as facilitating my graduate students' practice teaching in my own university shows, one individual, contrary to the common lore, cannot make a difference. The forces arrayed against the individual in this case are formidable. Only a collective, concerted, and coordinated set of result-oriented actions carries the potential to shake the foundation of the hegemonic structure.

The only meaningful option open to the subaltern community is the decolonial option. The option demands action. Without action, the discourse is reduced to banality. There is ample evidence in our disciplinary literature: The subaltern can speak; the subaltern can write. The question is: Can the subaltern act?

THE AUTHOR

B. Kumaravadivelu teaches at San José State University, in California. His research interests include language teaching methods, teacher education, postmethod pedagogy, and cultural globalization.

REFERENCES

Alsagoff, L., McKay, S. L., Hu, G., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2012). *Principles and practices for teaching English as an international language.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Ben Said, S., & Zhang, L. (Eds.). (2013). *Language teachers and teaching: Global perspectives, local initiatives.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Braine, G. (Ed.). (1999). *Nonnative educators in English language teaching.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Braine, G. (2010). *Nonnative speaker English teachers: Research, pedagogy, and professional growth.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Canagarajah, A. S. (2012). Teacher development in a global profession: An auto-ethnography. *TESOL Quarterly, 46,* 258–279. doi:10.1002/tesq.18

Coma, B. (2012, September). Working together to end discrimination: Professional equity workshop. *NNEST Newsletter.*

Derrida, J. (1994). *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international* (P. Kamuf, Trans.). New York. NY: Routledge.

Doan, N. (2014, March). Employing expatriate NNS teachers of English in Vietnam: Views from the public. *NNEST Newsletter.*

Edge, J. (2003). Imperial troopers and servants of the Lord: A vision of TESOL for the 21st century. *TESOL Quarterly, 37,* 701–709. doi:10.2307/3588218

Escobar, A. (2010). Afterword. In W. Mignolo & A. Escobar (Eds.), *Globalization and the decolonial option* (pp. 391–399). New York, NY: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archeology of knowledge and the discourse on language* (trans. S. Smith). New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Trans. and Ed.). New York, NY: International Publishers.

Gray, J. (2002). The global coursebook in English language teaching. In D. Block & D. Cameron (Eds.), *Globalization and language teaching* (pp. 151–167). London, England: Routledge.

Gray, J. (2010). The branding of the new capitalism: Representations of the world of work in English language textbooks. *Applied Linguistics, 31,* 714–733.

Green, M. (2002). Gramsci cannot speak: Presentations and interpretations of Gramsci's concept of subaltern. *Rethinking Marxism, 14,* 1–24. doi:10.1080/089356902101242242

Green, M., & Ives, P. (2009). Subalternity and language: Overcoming the fragmentation of common sense. *Historical Materialism, 17,* 3–30. doi:10.1163/156920609X399191

Holliday, A. (2005). *The struggle to teach English as an international language.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Kamhi-Stein, L. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning and teaching from experience: Perspectives on nonnative English-speaking professionals.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). *Beyond methods: Macrostrategies for language teaching*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). Dangerous liaison: Globalization, empire and TESOL. In J. Edge (Ed.), *(Re)locating TESOL in an age of empire* (pp. 1–26). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012a). Individual identity, cultural globalization and teaching English as an international language: The case for an epistemic break. In L. Alsagoff, S. McKay, G. Hu, & W. Renandya (Eds.), *Teaching English as an international language: Principles and practices* (pp. 9–27). New York, NY: Routledge.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012b). *Language teacher education for a global society*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Lee, I. (2012, February). Letter from the chair. *NNEST Newsletter*.

Lee, J. F. (2010). Perceptions of ELT among English language teachers in China. *Education Journal, 37*, 137–154.

Littlewood, W. (2013). Communication-oriented language teaching: Where are we now? Where do we go from here? *Language Teaching, 47*, 1–14. doi:10.1017/S0261444812000134

Llurda, E. (Ed.). (2006). *Nonnative language teachers: Perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession*. London, England: Springer.

Luo, W. (2007). *English language teaching in Chinese universities in the era of the World Trade Organization* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University.

Mahboob, A. (Ed.). (2010). *The NNEST lens: Non native English speakers in TESOL*. New Castle-upon-Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2010). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. In W. Mignolo & A. Escobar (Eds.), *Globalization and the decolonial option* (pp. 94–124). New York, NY: Routledge.

Mignolo, W. (2010). Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. In W. Mignolo & A. Escobar (Eds.), *Globalization and the decolonial option* (pp. 303–368). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ministry of Education. (2001). *English curriculum standards for full time compulsory education and senior middle schools* (Experimental ed.). Beijing, China: People's Education Press.

Ministry of Education. (2011). *English curriculum standards for compulsory education*. Beijing, China: People's Education Press.

Moussu, R., & Llurda, E. (2008). Nonnative English-speaking English language teachers: History and research. *Language Teaching, 41*, 315–348.

Pennycook, A. (1998). *English and the discourses of colonialism*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Phillipson, R. (2012, March 13). Linguistic imperialism alive and kicking. *Guardian Weekly*.

Rampton, B. (1990). Displacing the "native speaker": Expertise, affiliation and inheritance. *ELT Journal, 44*, 97–101. doi:10.1093/elt/44.2.97

Rubdy, R., & Alsagoff, L. (Eds.). (2013). *The global-local interface and hybridity: Exploring language and identity*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Selvi, A. (2014). Myths and misconceptions about the non-native English speakers in TESOL (NNEST) movement. *TESOL Journal, 5*, 573–611. doi:10.1002/tesj.158

Spivak, G. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

TESOL (1992). Statement on nonnative speakers of English and hiring practices. *TESOL Matters, 2*(4), 23.

TESOL. (2006). *Position statement against discrimination of nonnative speakers of English in the field of TESOL.* Retrieved from http://www.tesol.org/docs/pdf/5889. pdf?sfvrsn=2

Tomlinson, B. (2012). Materials development for language learning and teaching. *Language Teaching, 45*, 143–179. doi:10.1017/S0261444811000528

Widin, J. (2010). *Illegitimate practices: Global English language education.* Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Zhang, F., & Liu, Y. (2014). A study of secondary school English teachers' beliefs in the context of curriculum reform in China. *Language Teaching Research, 18*, 187–204.

Zhang, L. (2012, September). Moving beyond the native-nonnative divide: Message from the NNEST Chair. *NNEST Newsletter.*

Zhang, L. (2013, August). Opportunities and challenges for the NNESTs in a globalized world: Message from the outgoing Chair. *NNEST Newsletter.*