

WORKING TOWARDS DECOLONIAL APPROACHES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE PHILIPPINES

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1. INTRODUCTION

The theme of my set tonight will be colonialism which is why I will be speaking only in English

- Hari Kondabolu (as cited in Hsu, 2017)

A significant factor contributing to the Philippine economy's positive growth trajectory are the steady remittances from Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and the stable revenues from Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) (Miraflor, 2018). In fact, New York Times declared the Philippines as the “new capital of call centres” in 2011 following the country's dethroning of India as having the most number of outsourced call centre agents (Bajaj, 2011). While the BPO industry provides local employment prospects, the OFW system has afforded Filipinos with international employment for decades.

The opportunity for Filipinos to participate in these local and global economies is made possible largely by the dominance of English as a global language. More precisely, the Philippines' historical relationship with the English language as a consequence of US colonialism. However, despite these comparative economic advantages, the Philippines has continually been positioned as a site for cheap labour (Hsu, 2015). In addition, the OFW system has perpetuated dependency on other countries for survival. Learning English, consequently, has become what Agana (1998) calls a new

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form of economic servitude and new type of colonialism whereby poorer Filipinos (or countries, for that matter) who don't have access to channels of English instruction are alienated or 'othered'.

It is this 'othering', which is fundamentally entrenched in the English instruction, which has concerned many professionals involved in teaching the language. Despite this long historical relationship between English language teaching and the colonial project, only recently have the fields of education and language studies given it critical thought. While literature addressing the tension between teaching English and its colonial roots offers growing theoretical support, educators in the classroom are left with many challenges due to the all-pervading colonial context and its manifestation in English teaching.

Thus, it is essential to discuss current teaching practices in the Philippines and its potential implications on the worldviews of student learners. As Phillipson (1992) puts it, the wealth that English provides to Third World Countries is very inequitably distributed. In this framework, the system of power perpetuates long after the colonial reign and the successful assimilation, teaching and learning of English. For example, call centre agents in the Philippines, most of whom have earned their university degrees (Gonzales, 2016), are expected to speak in 'standard' American English to be considered acceptable employees. Although understandable within capitalist market-based economies, this practice has negative impacts on local knowledge systems and language diversity.

This paper aims to examine the current education practices and curricula of teaching English in the Philippines through the lens of coloniality. Arising from the long, protracted and multiple periods of colonization, coloniality refers to a pattern of power that emerged as by-product of modern colonialism. Its concept involves the way through which knowledge, work, authority, and intersubjective relations are interwoven in the world-capitalist market and in the idea of race and its derivations (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Having presented some of the implications of persistent coloniality, we discuss alternative models that offer possible pathways to reconcile the complexities of maintaining local linguistic and cultural diversity while teaching English in Filipino classrooms. Although contexts vary, these alternative models may also be suitable in many English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms in other pedagogical practices outside of the Philippines.