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Special Issue

Critical Perspectives on Neoliberalism in Second/Foreign Language Education

Introduction

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WHY NEOLIBERALISM?

Our specific interest in the topic of this issue, *Critical Perspectives on Neoliberalism in Second/Foreign Language Education*, has arisen from our collective lived experiences as language teachers, as researchers, and as early career scholars. Within our field of applied linguistics, we have seen colleagues steered toward dissertation topics that were “marketable” and away from equally worthy ones with less job-earning potential. We have observed that, across the U.S., foreign language departments have had to work to drum up “business” and to defend the value of their “product” or risk serious cuts justified by the economic downturn and slow recovery of the past eight years. We have noticed trends of privatization and free-market competition in K-12 contexts, visible in the increasing public interest in charter schools, in school choice, and in finding ways to measure the value of classes, teachers, and students.

The motivation for this issue comes from changes we saw in how knowledge about language learning is produced through research; in the ways languages are understood and taught; in how learners and teachers are constructed; and in the perceived goals of language study within a larger framework of the increased privatization of education. We saw a pattern: competition between schools for parents’ business, competition between languages for students’ business, even competition between research fields and contexts for scholars’ business.

We came to realize how much neoliberal discourse—the discourse of the marketplace—has seeped into these various practices as well as how much it has influenced our own constructions of ourselves, of our learners, and of knowledge itself. It occurred to us that a critical engagement with neoliberalism could help us to examine the changes we were living and to understand our concerns with these experiences. This special issue, then, represents a step in this exploration.

There are many who should be acknowledged for their support and encouragement of this project. We are, first and foremost, grateful to our graduate advisor and the Editor-in-chief of the *L2 Journal*, Claire Kramersch (UC Berkeley), who supported our endeavor to collectively engage with this topic through a special issue with five guest editors. We are also grateful to the editorial board of the *L2 Journal*, in particular Richard Kern (UC Berkeley) and Robert Blake (UC Davis), who together with Claire supported our proposal for the issue. We want to acknowledge all of the educators and researchers who submitted proposals, far more than we could accept in one special issue; their voices demonstrated to us the urgency and the importance of the questions we were asking. We are also indebted to the authors of the manuscripts contained herein, for their patience and hard work as well as for pushing this discussion forward in ways that we had never imagined. Finally, we wish to thank the reviewers for their critical engagement and generous feedback. We have learned much in this process, and we hope that this special issue continues the dialogue and provokes future inquiries.

Throughout the process of preparing this special issue, we received numerous questions from colleagues: *What is neoliberalism? What does neoliberalism have to do with education, and specifically, with second/foreign language education? Why are we taking a critical perspective and what does this look like?* While the issue as a whole is a response to these questions, we also address these questions here in the Introduction by situating them within previous research and in dialogue with the articles in this issue. We begin by defining neoliberalism and articulating our goals for this special issue; next, we delve into how these manuscripts intersect with previous research. We conclude with an outline of the manuscripts that comprise the issue and an examination of the paradoxes and contradictions brought to light—as well as the critical spaces opened up—by the special issue as a whole.

WHAT IS NEOLIBERALISM AND WHY USE IT TO FRAME THIS ISSUE?

Neoliberalism can mean different things to different people. In this special issue, we take as our starting point Harvey's definition of neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (2005, p. 2). Harvey's account of neoliberalism begins in Chile, after the United States-backed military coup in 1973, when a group of economists known as the "Chicago boys" were charged with restructuring the Chilean economy. This restructuring was based on free market principles: public assets were privatized, natural resources were made available for private exploitation, and foreign direct investment and free trade were promoted and protected. The result, Harvey argues, was not a redistribution of wealth that would spur economic regeneration, but the solidification of class power and capital in the hands of the elite (2005).

While the neoliberal restructuring in Chile represents the core of other subsequent implementations (e.g., the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the U.S. and the U.K., respectively), neoliberal policies have interacted with other processes including globalization, colonialism, and imperialism over the past three decades. As such, neoliberalism has not taken the same form everywhere (Fairclough, 2002; Harvey, 2005). That said, neoliberalism has nevertheless become ubiquitous around the world, and the market has become the organizing principle for political, economic, and social domains (Harvey, 2005).

This marketization has led to several things. First, new markets have been created through the privatization of public assets such as health care, social security, and education (Harvey, 2005). As Giroux aptly stated, “under neo-liberalism, everything either is for sale or is plundered for profit” (2005, p. 3). In addition, the expansion of the market to these domains has propagated consumer values and encouraged the development of an entrepreneurial spirit, including an emphasis on competition as the path to better outcomes. This is evident in the current accountability and assessment regimes imposed through federal education reforms in the U.S., such as the Common Core Standards, Race to the Top, and No Child Left Behind (Hursh, 2007). Under these policies, students, teachers, and schools compete against one another for profit, in the form of school funding and teacher pay based on their performances, and low-performing schools are assigned new management or are closed. Ironically, then, while its founding fathers emphasized the importance of individual liberty and freedom as the basis of civilization (Harvey, 2005), neoliberalism has brought about more restrictions on these liberties and freedoms.

A further impact of neoliberalism and the extension of market mentality has been an emphasis on individual responsibility. Within neoliberal and meritocratic thinking, individuals also “deserve” what they have, since they have made the choices that brought them there. Yet, by focusing only on individuals, this thinking ignores the drastic differences in the choices available to begin with for, say, a white, upper class child of a multinational corporate executive versus a child of an uneducated immigrant to South Korea or to a black man growing up in Baltimore, Maryland. This rhetoric justifies harsh consequences for those who “make the wrong choices,” making it possible to write off, for instance, the recent spate of police brutality against African-Americans in Ferguson, North Charleston, and New York as the consequence of poor decisions on the part of Walter Scott, who should not have run, Eric Garner, who should not have been selling loose cigarettes, or Michael Brown, who should not have shoplifted.

Individual responsibility, meritocracy, and free-market competition are not the only ways to organize society, however; Harvey (2007) points out that:

Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse and has pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practices to the point where it has become incorporated into the commonsense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world. (p. 23)

Social scientists, critical pedagogues, and political theorists have explored how this process of naturalization has taken place, and they have detailed its destructive consequences (Harvey, 2007; Macrine, forthcoming). Some have considered its alternatives, citing education as a key site of resistance (Giroux, 2002, 2004; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010). Giroux (2004), for example has emphasized the role of formal spheres of learning, calling for a public pedagogy that would “provide citizens with those critical capacities, modes of

literacy, knowledge and skills that enable them to both read the world critically and participate in shaping and governing it” (p. 498).

We place language and second/foreign language education at the center of this call for a public pedagogy because language has become both a target and an instrument of neoliberalization. At the same time, language education offers the possibility to develop the critical capacities of our students as they learn to read the world and to use language to shape and govern it. Thus, our goals for this special issue are twofold:

1. To contribute to the growing body of research within applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, second language acquisition, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) that investigates neoliberalism’s impact on language education, seeking to denaturalize neoliberal processes and uncover their influences (i.e., Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012; Holborow, 2007).
2. To create a space for critical perspectives that situate second/foreign language education as a site of potential struggle against the naturalization of neoliberalism, thereby opening the possibility for resistance and change.

WHAT HAS NEOLIBERALISM MEANT FOR SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION?

Before diving into how this special issue engages with these goals, it is important to interrogate how neoliberalism has intersected with second/foreign language education. As neoliberalism permeates every social sector, it manifests through the propagation of neoliberal keywords such as *accountability*, *competitiveness*, *efficiency*, and *profit* (Holborow, 2012). While it is not surprising to hear these terms in corporate offices around the world, we find it slightly alarming to hear them in reference to schools, teachers, and students. According to Macrine, “formal and informal education on a global scale has become the major force in producing subjectivities, desires, and modes of identification necessary for the legitimation and functioning of a neoliberal society” (forthcoming, p. 4). Second/foreign language education, like education more broadly, has not only been influenced by neoliberalism; it has been responsible for reproducing many of its discourses. The coercive impact of neoliberalism for second/foreign language education is readily observable at multiple levels:

1. Language as a technicized skill
2. Culture as a commodity
3. Language teachers as expendable and replaceable knowledge workers
4. Language learners as entrepreneurs and consumers
5. The creation of a global language teaching industry
6. The emergence of new linguistic markets: Global English

We address each in turn.

1. Language as a Technicized Skill

One effect of neoliberalism has been in the framing of language as a commodified, technicized skill (Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Heller, 2010) and of individuals as human capital,

developed through the acquisition of skills. Thus, in the ideology that Kubota (2011) refers to as “linguistic instrumentalism,” language skills lead to social mobility and economic development, and language becomes essential in order to compete in the global economy. Since this view transforms language into monetary or symbolic value, decisions about which languages to teach and to learn; when, where, and to whom languages are taught; and how to teach them depend on the market. Language programs thus become an easy target in the face of budget cuts (e.g., Foderaro, 2010; Hu, 2009) because some languages are evaluated as less useful or unprofitable whereas others give learners distinctions. Kubota (2011), however, problematizes the discourse of linguistic instrumentalism by showing that these touted “benefits” don’t always translate to material advantages but contribute instead to increased social stratification, a finding that will be echoed in several papers in this issue.

2. Culture as a Commodity

As language becomes a job skill, akin to knowledge of spreadsheets or word processing, culture is increasingly mythologized (Barthes, 1972) as an ahistorical and frozen product used to market nation-states and to encourage learners to cultivate desires to consume. For example, the Eiffel Tower becomes the symbol of Paris that denotes the romantic atmosphere of the city. Food such as pasta, tacos, sushi, and kimchi are introduced as the representation of authentic, traditional culture. Natural environments including mountains and beaches are not simply to be appreciated but to be viewed as commodities to be developed, advertised, and sold. This conceptualization of culture implements a tourist gaze (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015; Urry, 2002; Vinall, 2012) in the classroom and reinforces global power hierarchies.

3. Language Teachers as Expendable and Replaceable Knowledge Workers

With changes to how language and culture are perceived under the influences of neoliberalism, the teacher’s role has changed as well. Teachers are no longer salaried professionals who cultivate learners psychologically, socially, and intellectually and who help them to become more mature individuals. Rather, teachers are increasingly contract workers paid by the class who are responsible for generating learners with language skills and for playing a role as tour guide (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015). This converts them into expendable and replaceable knowledge workers, as demonstrated by the increasing reliance on part-time adjuncts in language classes and in higher education in general (Ellis, 2013; Machado, 2015; Schmidt, 2015).

4. Language Learners as Entrepreneurs and Consumers

Rather than following their desires to learn new languages and cultures, learners are pushed to choose languages that will make them more competitive, as what language one speaks and what culture he/she embodies demonstrates how marketable the person is. Thus choosing and learning a language becomes an act of investment in itself. Within the classroom, though, students also practice participation in the market. Textbooks emphasize routinized, truncated dimensions of language used in a particular setting (e.g., travelling, business interaction) and stereotyped/essentialized culture. This process trains learners to reason through social phenomena as transactions and to become good buyers and shoppers

(Williams, 2010). Ultimately, by managing their “enterprising-self” (Rose, 1998), learners are heartened to maximize their self-interests (Stigler, 1981) and contribute to the global economy with their language skills.

5. The Creation of a Global Language Teaching Industry

While language and culture teachers are treated as expendable and replaceable knowledge workers, paradoxically, language teaching has become highly profitable and increasingly privatized. The global language teaching industry presents language in prepackaged, standardized forms in response to the needs of the free market. Rosetta Stone, for instance, advertises that they teach more than 30 languages around the world online (or through a CD) and that one can be fluent in a language in three months. In addition to these corporations, nation-states, including Mainland China (through the Confucius Institute), Germany (through the Goethe Institut), France (through the Alliance Française), and the United States continue to invest large amounts of resources to promote their languages and cultures globally. Ragan and Jones (2013) estimate that in 2012 alone, the global English Language Teaching (ELT) industry was worth over \$63 billion. Pennycook (1998) argues that the ELT industry, which makes huge profits through the production of teaching materials and tests, continues to be linked to colonialism in both theory and practice.

6. The Emergence of New Linguistic Markets: Global English

The five previous categories contribute to the creation of a linguistic hierarchy in which particular languages become invested with greater power, value, and influence. This is exemplified by the current status of English as *the* global lingua franca. Yet the global expansion of English is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Some scholars take the perspective that the spread of English has been a neutral, and even positive, process, simply a consequence of being “in the right place at the right time” (Crystal, 2003, p. 10). In this view, English is seen as liberating and empowering; a democratizing force in the world (i.e., Friedman, 2000); and a way of evening the playing field by providing greater access to knowledge and opportunities to all those it reaches. Language learners see English as a key to a better life and imagine that by learning English they will gain social mobility and greater opportunities. Here English is framed in largely instrumental terms, as a technical skill that can “open doors.”

Yet, as May (2011) points out, “the argument for English as a neutral, beneficial, and freely chosen language rests specifically upon a synchronic, or ahistorical, view of it” (p. 212). A more critical perspective on the global spread of English sees it as intimately tied to and developing from histories of colonialism (Pennycook, 1998), linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1998, 2009), and complex processes of globalization (Gray, 2002). From this view, there is an inherent contradiction between democracy and the imposition of a neoliberal economic or political order, which ends up privileging elites (Sonntag, 2003) and leading to further social stratification (Phillipson, 1998) and linguistic as well as cultural homogenization. This, in turn, results in cultural loss (Sonntag, 2003) and threatens the vitality and survival of local languages (Nettle & Romaine, 2000; Pennycook, 1994).

May (2011) argues that English is ideologically linked with modernity and modernization and is supposed to facilitate a type of global citizenship, which he calls, in scare quotes, “cosmopolitanism.” Yet these ideologies “fail to address the relationship between English

and wider inequitable distributions and flows of wealth, resources, culture and knowledge—especially, in an increasingly globalized world” (May, 2011, p. 213). This is exemplified in the experience of individuals who learn English in hopes of moving to an English-speaking country like the U.S. and are not granted access. Niño-Murcia (2003) writes that the “irony is that the rhetoric of free trade, global market and capital flow comes together with tightening frontiers to prevent human flow” (as quoted in McKay, 2010, p. 96). Ultimately, the question of whether and to what extent the global spread of English is democratic or hegemonic, whether and where it liberates or oppresses, and how much and under what circumstances it empowers or threatens has different answers depending on who is being asked.

Many of these paradoxes and contradictions are taken up or highlighted by the authors within this special issue as they reflect on the ways in which neoliberalism has affected not only English language education, but second/foreign language education more broadly. We move now to an overview of the scope and sequence of the manuscripts themselves before concluding with a consideration of the paradoxes and contradictions that they bring to light.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The papers in this special issue approach neoliberalism and second/foreign language education from a range of perspectives and places. The issue includes research from Mainland China, Nepal, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, Canada, and the United States, thus documenting neoliberalism’s uneven historical and geographic development at a global level. The manuscripts also consider language education in a variety of contexts, from public schooling to adult community learning programs to study abroad. These educational contexts are analyzed in relationship not only to local political and historical realities, but also to global processes of colonialism and imperialism. Finally, the articles all assume a critical stance, privileging local knowledges, values, and experiences as well as considering how these might represent possibilities for denaturalizing neoliberalism and open new avenues of resistance.

In the first paper, Canale examines the ramifications of a political shift in Uruguay in the early 2000s—from a right-wing, neoliberal leadership to a left-wing government—for English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Through detailed discourse analysis of major policy documents, Canale outlines the political struggle for the definition of, rather than the direction or amount of, EFL policies. He shows how left-wing policy makers reframed the motivations behind EFL in terms of “empowerment,” a departure from the market-based, instrumental underpinning of its neoliberal predecessors, but also how left-wing policies continued to draw on those past discourses, indicating the co-presence of both discourses in this on-going struggle.

Sayer hones in on Mexico’s recent implementation of a national English program for public primary schools. Examining data from several studies on this Mexican program as well as situating the project alongside similar regional and global cases, Sayer connects the introduction of a “more and earlier” language policy in Mexico—which transitions English language learning from elite bilingualism to macroacquisition—to neoliberal macro discourses and pressures for reform.

Jang’s article traces the merging of the job market (market, in the traditional sense) and the linguistic market (in the metaphoric, Bourdieusian sense) in South Korea, where English has become *de rigueur* for success in the competitive recruitment process for white collar jobs.

Jang's ethnographic work follows a group of South Korean students who participated in English study abroad in order to distinguish themselves linguistically on the job market with English that is flexible, communicative, and team-oriented. Upon students' return to South Korea, however, they had difficulty fitting their new oral language proficiency into the existing market (in both senses) for job applicants.

Gao and Park theorize the ways that neoliberal ideologies have enabled the commodification of space, so that places themselves come to be seen as more or less valuable in their authenticity—as locales for language learning, for instance—and can compete with one another for “business”—business of tourists, of residents, or, in some cases, of language learners. Gao and Park examine the contexts of Yangshuo, Mainland China, and of Singapore, places marketing themselves as centers for authentic English and thus as desirable destinations for those seeking self-improvement and marketability through language study.

At the intersection of English as a Second Language (ESL) and civics education, López shows how neoliberal discourses are taken up and challenged by adult immigrant students in a New York City English literacy (EL) class. Taking an ethnographic approach, López illustrates how the EL/civics classroom can be at once a space marked by neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility, flexibility, and choice as well as a space of resistance in which students draw on their shared experiences to challenge neoliberal discourses.

Hsu's critical historical analysis of the English language in Puerto Rico and the Philippines connects the English spoken in both locations to the United States' colonial rule. She argues that by bringing English to these colonies through schools—and thus couching it in benevolent promises of education, of an end to racial divisions, and of equality—the United States invisibilized its imperial ties and permitted English to be seen as a neutral system for communication and a natural choice for a global language (under “the right place, right time” rhetoric, e.g., Crystal, 2003). Hsu argues that this invisibilization continues today not through the discourse of benevolent salvation, but through the neoliberal discourse of linguistic instrumentalism, in which English promises participation in a global marketplace, increased job opportunities, and a higher earning potential.

Davis and Phyak's article provides on-the-ground illustrations of how researchers in different contexts can engage in ideological analyses with local populations and institutions to provide counter-discourses in the face of neoliberal and monolingual ideologies. Phyak's work with indigenous youth in Nepal demonstrates how this work might be undertaken from the bottom up by bringing individuals together in a project of collective awareness-raising and of advocacy for multilingual and indigenous language education. Davis' work in Hawaii shows the potential for engagement and multilingual advocacy at the institutional level of schools, school boards, and universities. Their methods of engaged ethnography and of engaged language policy and practice are models for researchers working with, rather than on, local populations.

Finally, Ramírez and Hyslop-Margison's paper introduces critical discourse analysis using systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as a method for lifting the veil from neoliberal discourse. They take the example of three texts in which universities draw on the discourse of “crisis” to justify austerity measures and suppression of free, democratic dissent from faculty. Beyond providing an illustration of the discursive, ideological moves that the universities make in these texts, Ramírez and Hyslop-Margison model the kinds of analyses that stakeholders might undertake to deconstruct and speak back to the hegemonic language

of neoliberalism. They include a guide for beginners at using SFL to conduct critical analysis of one's own in order to understand and, thus, counter similar texts.

CRITICAL SPACES: PARADOXES AND CONTRADICTIONS

This collection of manuscripts highlights the wide range of ways in which neoliberalism is instantiated in different learning and teaching contexts. The papers also show the commonalities that emerge, across these diverse contexts, when market-based principles are applied to the teaching and learning of language and when language is given the appearance of a neutral commodity or skill, disconnected from culture, history, politics, and power.

First, many of these papers highlight the neoliberal project of the self, in which people are responsible for meeting the demands of new linguistic markets. The adult English literacy learners in López's piece, for instance, drew on the "neoliberal discourses of choice, responsibility, and flexibility" (p. 98) to explain their reasons for learning English, citing the need for hard work and individual responsibility in achieving the American Dream. In both Jang's paper and Gao and Park's paper, we see students traveling hundreds or even thousands of miles to gain linguistic distinction. As Jang points out, young South Koreans are left to bear the brunt of corporations' requirements alone, solely responsible for conforming to what is asked of them. Gao and Park add that perhaps more important than the language skills themselves is what is indexed in picking up and moving oneself or one's family in the name of self-development: that learners are good neoliberal subjects who are willing to acquiesce to the demands of the market. Yet, if a subject's value lies in her willingness to adapt to the marketplace, the neoliberal project of the self is an endless one, as the skills she attains are not the true aim: the project itself is.

This idea is illustrated again and again throughout the special issue, as papers reveal what participants find to be the false promise of learning English (Kubota, 2011) and of language learning more generally. While many of the subjects of these papers had set out to learn English for gains in job opportunities, respect in the workplace, admission to top universities, or participation in the global marketplace, most found that these rewards never materialized. For instance, Jang points out that the South Korean students returning from abroad were still subject to the requirements of the job application process, illustrating another way in which the promised benefits of language learning are deferred, perhaps indefinitely, as the market continues to ask for new or different kinds of capital. Gao and Park show how language learning comes at a cost, namely the cost of mobility, for the Mainland Chinese learners of English who leave jobs and homes to study in Yangshuo and for the South Korean families participating in *jogi yuhak* who divide their families and households, sometimes for years, to send their children to study English abroad. That said, these costs are not usually met with the desired benefits of better jobs, school admissions, increased income, and social mobility.

Hsu also highlights this false promise of learning English, but extends it to note the different valuations of varieties of English around the world. She shows that while the colonial legacy in the Philippines has ensured English language learning there, the Filipinos' English proficiency leads not to wide-open doors of opportunity, but to low-wage jobs in call centers. As Hsu notes, "no level of English proficiency can guarantee an equal footing in the world order that has been, and continues to be, predicated on the hierarchical difference of coloniality (p. 139)." Similarly, the students in López's study arrived in the classroom with the aim of learning English as a path to financial success. The discussions portrayed in

López's class transcripts illustrate the tight causal chain that the teacher and students co-constructed between learning English, getting better jobs, making money, and then enjoying that money with increased leisure time, cars, houses, and vacations. Yet, students' lived experiences contrasted with this English-as-panacea narrative, as they recounted structural barriers—from discrimination to immigration laws—that interfered with their attainment of the “American Dream,” no matter how well they spoke English. These studies make very clear that while “English” is seen as a key to success, not all Englishes are equal. Despite participants learning and speaking English, many of the same social inequalities are reproduced.

Directly tied to this false promise of English is the notion that gains made in one context are not recognized in another, as particular varieties or repertoires of English are valued differently in different markets or fields. Gao and Park point out, for example, that the English learned by young South Koreans living in Singapore is not valued in South Korea, a great disappointment to their mothers who sought standard English for their children only to find that they had come home speaking “Singlish.” Similarly, Jang points out how the communicative skills sought out overseas by South Korean students do not, in the end, trump the TOEIC exam results. South Korean students who return from studying in Canada have difficulty documenting their new skills in ways that are meaningful on the job market, although it was the demands of the job market—for workers who show flexibility, collaboration, and global sensitivity—that sent them to Canada in the first place. Hsu notes that although many Filipinos are native speakers of English and are marketed as such by the Philippine government in its bids to attract corporate call centers to their country, when Filipinos arrive in the United States, they are seen as foreigners and English learners, with incomprehensible accents.

One of the strengths of these papers, however, is that they avoid painting English-learning, even with its neoliberal, colonial justifications and demands, as unequivocally negative. Rather, these studies highlight the ambiguous or two-sided nature of learning a hegemonic language: students might come to use that language to speak back to the very ideas and institutions that pushed them to learn it in the first place. In López's paper, as adult English literacy students learned English, they also appropriated dominant discourses of personal responsibility, of English as capital for the labor market, and of freedom as the freedom to consume. Yet, at the same time, they used their growing English to resist and challenge these discourses in the classroom space, questioning “the legitimacy of the American Dream and the myth of meritocracy” (p. 114) and pointing out structural barriers to their economic and social well-being. Similarly, Hsu illustrates how leaders in the Philippines used English, a tool of American colonial power, to speak out against that power. The Filipino scholar Renato Constantino utilized English to write scathing critiques of the American education being forced upon Filipino students, and Superintendent Camila Osias used his fluency in English to craft a series of English primers promoting Filipino nationalism as well as to argue before the United States Senate for Filipino independence. Sayer's work illustrates the ambiguous effects of the neoliberally-motivated policy mandating English teaching in elementary schools in Mexico. While this shift toward introducing English “more and earlier” has been at the expense of time for other subjects and languages—particularly, and perhaps tellingly, Mexican history—Sayer also argues that the move has shifted English's status in Mexico from one of elite bilingualism to one of “macroacquisition,” which he proposes can be seen as democratizing access to English.

All three of these studies make the point that policies and practices with neoliberal aims can produce outcomes that are contradictory to those aims. Canale's paper shows how the inverse can also be true: that aims can change without any impact on policies. Canale explores how English education in Uruguay, which was first established for instrumental and economic ends under the neoliberal government of the 90s, came to be defined by the current left-wing government as a tool for genuine critique and for work toward social justice. His paper shows that while the meaning given to English education by different political parties changed, the language policy itself did not. Together, López, Hsu, Sayer, and Canale's papers raise provocative questions around intention versus outcome in language policy: Does it matter that a language policy or practice is neoliberal in its aims if its outcomes are democratic? Or, vice versa, does it matter that democratically-motivated policies and practices might then produce neoliberal or oppressive outcomes? And do motivations matter at all if the policies they produce are the same?

The studies in this issue suggest then that learning a dominant language can be both oppressive and liberatory, empowering and threatening. Learning a language like English involves participation in the hegemonic discourses that circulate around and in that language, yet also contains the potential to speak back to those discourses and to use the language to counter them. Answering Giroux's (2004) call for a public pedagogy, several of the articles propose specific suggestions to counter neoliberal discourses in language education. Hsu, for instance, concludes her article by urging us to include English's colonial history in TESOL teacher education programs and to use English for liberatory education. She points out that while English is never neutral, it is not inherently oppressive and that it wields potential for resistance, liberation, and change if teachers and students are taught to and given space to reflect critically. López suggests a problem-posing approach to adult EL/Civics education in which teachers begin with students' issues and concerns and connect those to larger political and societal issues, which would entail a problematization of the neoliberal definitions of *flexibility*, *choice*, and *opportunity*. The issue concludes with two articles dedicated entirely to modeling approaches to resistance. Davis and Phyak's paper illustrates how researchers in various contexts can work with local populations to make changes in hegemonic language policies and practices. Ramírez and Hyslop-Margison's manuscript provides specific tools for deconstructing texts that draw their authority from hegemonic discourses—in their case, those of crisis and neoliberal austerity. Together, the papers in this special issue move beyond “critique;” they take us toward action, toward alternative discourses, and toward other possibilities for imagining language in education.

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