

Decolonial Subversions

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Strategizing Decolonial Subversion: A Dialogue

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Special Issue *Decolonising the university and the role of linguistic diversity*

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Suresh: I am glad we can have this conversation on the complex issues behind your special topic issue in *Decolonial Subversions*, Victoria and Gillian. My life experiences comment relevantly on your thematic concerns. I first came to United States for graduate studies from the small South Asian island of Sri Lanka. After my doctorate in Applied Linguistics, I went back to my regional university in the north of the island, University of Jaffna, as I was interested in contributing educationally to my local community. However, the ethnic conflict and civil war there drove me away to seek refuge for my young family. Though I have been working in the United States since 1994, I have been shuttling between diverse communities in the Global South and my American academic home to develop more inclusive scholarly exchanges. Among the countries I have visited to teach, speak, or mentor are Kenya, Rwanda, India, Iran, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Turkey, Lebanon, and Cyprus. These engagements have educated me richly on the challenges in global knowledge production.

Democratizing academic communication and knowledge construction has been a lifelong concern of mine because I personally experienced the inequalities when I was studying and working in Sri Lanka. My first article on this question was published 1996 in *Written Communication*, very soon after I arrived in the US for work, because I felt that this inequality had to be addressed urgently. When I later published my book *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), some of the publishers I solicited were not convinced that a meta project of “publishing on publishing” was a worthy academic enterprise. As academic publishing is central to all fields and yet not problematized in any field, they were not sure which field my book falls into. I wish to respond to your questions from my personal experiences.

Victoria: *One theme emerging from the Special Issue is the continued dominance of English-only policies and practices in many universities. It's a theme present across several contributions to the Special Issue, that I had not anticipated would emerge quite so powerfully. It relates to how language use intersects with race, indigeneity and White supremacy. In what ways, if at all, do you think that it is possible to decolonise universities without tackling the dominance of English?*

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Suresh: The dominance of English is important, but we have to tackle this resistance in relation to a few other related and more important considerations. I come from a former British colony, where we “hijacked” English and changed it for our purposes in our own image. As we inherit very embodied orientations to language, we embedded English into our diverse local semiotic resources—such as multiple local languages, gestures, tools, land, and other ecological resources. Thus we used English critically in relation to our local identities, interests, and values. However, it is true that we were discriminated against in translocal spaces, including higher education, for deviating from privileged norms. When I sent manuscripts for consideration in American journals, reviewers were always quick to point to deviations from their native speaker usage to reject my paper. Ironically, at times, American reviewers even treated my British English spelling as a sign of bad editing (since they assumed US spelling as the only norm available or they knew about).

So it is important to combine the concern about the medium of knowledge construction and dissemination with considerations relating to ontology and epistemology. That is, what is the status of language in life, and how does it represent knowledge? Walter Mignolo says in one of his publications that English promotes an ideology that it is superior to other languages by enforcing the ontological assumption that it is a thing (i.e., it is out there as an objective and natural reality) and that it contains within itself superior knowledge and reasoning capacity destined to advance any community that uses this language. This is exactly the argument put forward by Thomas Macaulay the British education officer in 1855 when he wrote a report to London on why English should be made the medium of education in South Asia.

Ironically, we can adopt the same ontological assumptions to our own local languages as well. That will limit us in our mission to democratize knowledge. So if I think of Tamil as a pure language that works autonomously to represent more logical and reasoned knowledge than any other language, I am adopting the same limiting ontological assumptions to my heritage language. It will limit me in my ability to undertake transformative scholarship and engage with scholars from other language groups in constructing inclusive knowledge. So it is important not to get too obsessed with which language to use for education. We have to also decolonize the ontological and epistemological orientations towards language and knowledge.

Besides, what will replace English when we succeed in overthrowing it from the seats of power in academia? Demographers like David Graddol have forecast that Chinese might take over English around 2050. But does that satisfy our transformative and progressive agendas for knowledge construction when another global language takes over the place of English?

One might say that the ideal is where all of us can talk simultaneously in our various languages and we are all understood with transparent and shared meanings. That’s the vision presented by the event of Pentecost in the bible. It is not impossible. In South Asia, we talk of practices like “polyglot dialogue” whereby multiple people use their own languages in a single conversation without translations effectively. However, meaning making takes

work. We exercise values of relationality to engage with others by adopting diverse nonlinguistic resources (such as gestures and other ecological resources). And meaning is not transparent or guaranteed, as there is a give-and-take in meaning negotiations, with compromises and sacrifices when we face challenges in intelligibility. And yet, to get to that stage, there have to be a lot of changes in our language ideologies and habitus. We have to gradually train all of us to treat communication in simultaneous multiple languages as resourceful, develop relational ethics to collaborate with each other, and negotiate meanings as always mediated and not transparent.

I don't know what a translingual university will look like. What I am focused on is the struggle at hand. Since English has become the language for knowledge construction and dissemination, I am working from within that language to democratize it. It involves all the things we did to English in my country two centuries ago: embedding it in our own languages and cultures, embodying it with the diverse ecological resources in relevant settings, and transforming English for our own linguistic, cultural, and material conditions—while promoting local languages in education and publishing. My desire is not to hate English or other languages in favor of the exclusive use of my own language. I aim to engage with all languages while drawing from the strengths of my vernacular. This is a humble way to start moving towards the translingual Pentecost in global higher education!

Gillian: *Particular genres of writing are inebriated in the dominance of particular languages in higher education. What can be done to foster the development of genres which enable students who are speakers of minoritised languages to 'speak back', by drawing on the knowledge and linguistic repertoires central to their identities?*

Suresh: I am glad you frame your question this way. You remind all of us that there are existing communicative conventions and practices we cannot ignore--though we all dream of a world where we can talk in all contexts in any language or genre we want. It is because of existing genre conventions that "speaking back" involves "speaking to." That is, even to speak back relevantly, we have to frame our conversations with relevance to the specific genre conventions and languages of that conversation. "Back" assumes that there is already a conversation taking place. If we don't relate our speech to that conversation, it will not be heard in that interaction. It will be mistaken for a different conversation for a different circle or different genre.

So, the genre of "research articles" (given the acronym RA by the famous analyst of academic genres, John Swales) is considered the sine qua non for knowledge production. This genre refers to double blinded referred articles published in academic journals. And this genre has some conventions that have evolved over time, and modeled as the IMRD (Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion)—though Swales himself concedes that this archetype refers to the structure of articles in natural sciences and will differ variably for other fields. But we can generally assume that RAs in all disciplines come with the presumption of being data driven (however broadly we define "data") and explicit about the assumptions and claims so that other scholars can verify them or analyze them for validity. While this is a very focused and high-stakes genre, there are other broader genres in

academia. “Academic writing” or “academic literacy” has been used to discuss other genres, and can refer to a range of other texts that include RA but extends to book monographs, chapters for collections, conference proceedings, classroom essays, and even professional newsletters and essays. As we know, the genre conventions for these texts are not as rigid as the IMRD structure. At an even wider scale, we can talk about “academic communication” as a meta genre—and this can include diverse oral and multimodal genres such as symposia, colloquia, conference presentations, and classroom lectures, with some genre conventions much closer to everyday conversation. Though all these genres are knowledge producing and intellectual, it is unwise to treat them as equal in status or structure to RA. Under the current conditions it is difficult to publish a conference paper or book chapter through an impersonal double blinded peer review in a high impact factor research journal. The submission might earn an immediate desk rejection as the editor might say that it is not “talking back” relevantly to the ongoing conversations in that journal. So talking back doesn’t mean the ability to write anything we like in any genre or language for any context.

It is for this reason that I would consider this very collaborative text (reflecting a genre that is dialogical and narrative) as part of “academic communication” but not an RA. It is (hopefully!) eminently intellectual and scholarly, but not suitable for a double blinded refereed journal. However, this doesn’t mean that we cannot gradually expand and democratize the conventions of RA and other genres. But that has to involve the careful and strategic work of bringing our voices and diversities to bear on the dominant current conventions and conversations. That is precisely the definition of “talking back.” So, many scholars are now bringing diversified languages, tones, and discourse structures *into* RAs to gradually make spaces for Southern knowledge-making traditions and vernaculars. But this is a slow process because we have to gain uptake. That is, the readers, editors, and reviewers of that journal have to be taught to understand such articles, recognize them as academic, and revise their assumptions of how RA works. If we go too fast, our writing will be treated as a different genre for different context, and not an RA. So resisting dominant genres is a careful, cautious, and strategic activity.

Of course, we should all write in diverse genres of scholarly publications (including op-ed pieces in newspapers) as we should not always privilege the credentials of a refereed publication. And we should start alternate academic journals with the intention of publishing diverse genres of academic writing. These platforms can feature creative forms of academic writing and academic communication to promote the cause of decolonizing publishing. It is in this way that *Decolonial Subversions* is playing a valuable role in decolonization. And thanks to journals such as this, our very collaborative text with genre conventions that deviate from RA can be published as an academic article. Also many other articles in this issue, some framed as poems or personal reflections or standup comedy, can be featured as academic articles. I consider *avant garde* journals such as this as promising. Some might find it a limitation that they are treated as lacking the prestige of double blinded refereed research journals. Of course, *avant garde* journals cannot be judged according to impact factor and acceptance rate, as we are against that kind of quantification of

assessment. We are investing valuable time and resources into this writing and these journals because we are convinced that they have a valued readership and contribute immensely to knowledge production—in fact, more so than high impact factor journals.

But are we satisfied with stopping with this kind of writing and these “alternate” journals? Not me! I don’t want to let those so-called high impact factor professional journals go unchallenged. I want to democratize their pages too, so that the readers there will also be challenged by resistant knowledge. We have to “occupy” (or take over) those prestige journals! But I have to adopt a different strategy to publish there, differing from the rhetorical strategies and genre conventions we are adopting here. I have to strategically resist the RA conventions from within. Over time, it is possible that we will not only revise the dominant assumption of what an RA means, but also hopefully develop an ideological openness to treat *Decolonial Subversions* and other alternate journals as no second cousin to *Nature*, *Science*, *Written Communication*, *Modern Language Journal*, or *New Literary History*.

To amplify this position, I like to reproduce a letter I wrote to a colleague who recently called me very conservative for adopting the above position of strategic and gradual resistance. He told me that it is people like me who are sustaining and promoting the dominant norms. He advised me that if I simply refused to conform to the dominant RA genre conventions of prestigious professional journals and started writing in my vernacular, I can bring about change immediately. He said that it is in the hands of all scholars to write differently, use their own languages and voices freely, and reject the genre conventions of prestige journals. He was interested in the use of African American Vernacular in his RAs. I responded as follows:

Dear xxx,

Though I share your concern for change, all communicative contexts have certain conventions on how people in those interactions should discourse. For example, when I was working as a social worker in South Bronx, the young Black children in the neighborhood would laugh at my Sri Lankan accent and academic/formal vocabulary. I couldn’t fit into their “club” there. Some even joked among themselves that my ways and words were “crazy.” There is a convention about “proper” ways of talking in the ‘hood (with a required accent, tone, and vocabulary) that relates to that context and community. Educated black people might also not fit that club in that neighborhood. Such communicative conventions are true of all contexts/genres, whether formal or informal, educated or vernacular. Academic language or genres also work in a similar way as having their own social convention. This point doesn’t make academic language neutral or innocent. The conventional ways of talking in any interaction (i.e., any register or genre) is always partisan (preferring the interests of specific groups of people who dominate that “club”). Such somewhat impersonal and long social and historical processes by which genres and registers evolve need to be acknowledged as we engage in resistance.

For the above reason, I consider the alternative as also a bit more challenging. Change is not fully or solely left in the hands of individuals. Dismantling any register

or genre also takes a long historical, social, and structural process of reconfiguration. Change won't be immediate or even guaranteed. You say that we can refuse to communicate according to the existing norms of academic communication and walk away from important journals and institutions, leading to their demise. Though that is one possible outcome, there are also other possible outcomes. Those privileged journals and institutions that adopt the dominant academic language may not suffer, but continue their power with others propping up those norms. In fact, walking away from those sites of power only serves those institutions better as they can continue to exert their power without the critics there to challenge them. My preferred strategy is to stay working within those institutions and journals to cautiously and gradually "renegotiate" and "rework" the norms. (But I respect those who decide to walk away from academia to write and work in other contexts for other own good reasons.)

Another outcome in the process of genre formation and language enregisterment is that rather than reaching an utopian state of "no norms," other/new norms will evolve to guide the interaction in that context. I don't think we will ever have a situation where ANY AND ALL ways of talking will be acceptable in any social interaction (as in "anything goes"). There will always gradually evolve alternate norms (perhaps accommodating more diversity, but still excluding some communities). We have to therefore conceptualize resistance and transformation as a long struggle of gradual changes, rather than a snap change of all or nothing. *La lucha continuaa*, indeed!

So, I prefer a cautious and relational change of language and discourse whereby I chip away at the power of normative academic language and genre conventions gradually. This way, I continue to engage with the conventions of the academic community, stay inside, and write and publish differently, while continuing to talk back to this community within their own circles and prepare them for alternate language and genre norms.

Victoria: *How is it possible for university colleagues/peers from the Global North to enter into dialogue about language diversity and decolonising with university colleagues/peers from the Global South without igniting extractive relationships?*

Suresh: Currently, many Northern scholars are engaged in dialogue and collaboration in arrangements that are institutionalized or mutually rewarding for them. So Southern students and scholars who come to the North adopt a mentoring relationship with their supervisors in degree programs. In other cases, Northern colleagues enter into research and writing collaborations with Southern scholars. I can understand such motivation, as "there is no free lunch" Americans say! However, these arrangements do pose the danger of knowledge extraction, however altruistic people are. We have to be wary how Southern knowledge is mediated by the language and discourses of Northern scholars in these collaborative activities. Often certain forms of ideological distortion and control are not visible, explicit, or deliberate.

While I was working in Sri Lanka, what I expected most from Northern scholars was simply access to resources. I was confident in my ability to read and process the relevant publications for my own research and arguments. What was difficult was getting those books or journals that helped me write and publish. Such service calls for types of generosity and help that don't yield benefits to Northern scholars. It calls for a sacrificial act of generosity. The question is whether Northern scholars who care about decolonization are generous enough to sacrifice their time, energy, and resources to help Southern scholars overcome their resource limitations without any personal benefits in return. This will involve facilitating the research and writing of Southern scholars while keeping a safe distance, so that Southern scholars have the freedom to represent their voices and knowledge, critically processing the dialogue, mentoring, and resources in their own way.

Here are some examples of the types of help I needed while working from Sri Lanka:

1. Latest journal articles on my area of research. Though I had a few limited journals in the local library in Sri Lanka, they were not always relevant for the topic I was writing on. And reviewers and editors in the North are always quick to recommend that I have to read up an article that appeared just a few weeks ago in the latest issue of a journal to revise my submission!
2. Information on the most relevant journal for a research project, and its publishing guidelines—and perhaps a copy of that journal. There were countless times I sent an article to a journal that was not suitable for my study because I didn't know the range of journals available in the field and didn't have anyone with knowledge about them to advise me on that question.
3. Access to the relevant style conventions. I didn't have access to all the range of style manuals beyond the better known ones like APA and MLA. Unfortunately, sometimes publishers adopt their own in-house style sheets, and some journals adopt their own atypical conventions. There have been a few times when journals returned my manuscripts because I had not prepared them according to their style sheet. I wasn't lazy; I simply didn't have access to their style sheet (compounded by poor internet access).
4. Help with reading and commenting on a work in progress. Offering feedback and peer commentary is a huge favor, and it was difficult to find anyone who was willing to give me their valuable time. It is hard to find anyone who will sacrifice the time to read and comment on a Southern colleague's work, when Northern scholars are themselves caught up in the publish or perish race. Such comments can provide a window into the expectations of the Northern journals, reviewers, and readers so that Southern scholars can revise them in our own way by taking those concerns into consideration.
5. Consultation on interpreting editorial decision letters and reviewer comments, and strategizing for resubmission. One of the most difficult challenges I faced was in interpreting what exactly the reviewers expected in my revision or even understanding their estimation of my chances of publishing in their journal. In addition to the usual academic hedging and other idiomatic peculiarities in

different English-speaking countries (i.e., does “quite good” mean excellent or not so impressive?), there are also different categories of acceptance which can be difficult to interpret (i.e., is “substantial revision” hopeful or damning?). There are occasions where I misinterpreted a “revise and resubmit” decision as hopeless and gave up the project, when a senior American scholar read the decision letter many months later and discerned that the tone was promising!

Now that I am on the other side of the access divide, I receive emails from colleagues in diverse Southern communities for help like those listed above. After having responded to these requests for a long time, I thought I can expand the scale of this service through a consortium. Therefore, I have set up a web-based network for work of this nature in the Consortium for Democratizing Academic Publishing and Knowledge: [Consortium for Democratizing Academic Publishing and Knowledge | An academic mentoring site! \(psu.edu\)](http://psu.edu) This consortium brings together senior scholars in the Global North to read manuscripts in progress and respond to relevant queries from Southern scholars to facilitate their publishing. I match the scholar from the South with a suitable mentor from the North, based on their research project. The mentors provide a range of advice: where this article might fit; whether the article ready for submission; how to frame the article with relevance to the journal’s style and guidelines; sending pdfs of articles relevant to their project; helping interpret decision and reviewer comments; and help with serial drafting and revising of manuscripts. This is a selfless service for the cause of decolonization, and not extractive. I admire the scholars who are giving their time selflessly to their Southern colleagues. One interaction between a British faculty member and an Indian graduate student has gone on for about 8 months since the beginning of this year, through diverse drafts, revisions and resubmissions—with conversations on the requirements of journals, style conventions, framing of the paper, interpreting editorial decision letters, etc. I am moved to see the selflessness of scholars like this who are willing to help!

Gillian: *What advice would you give multilingual post-graduate students from minoritised backgrounds about ‘making their way’ in English-dominated universities, whether these are in the Global South, such as South Africa, or the Global North, such as the UK? Or should an alternative metaphor to ‘making one’s way’ be sought?*

Suresh: I prefer the metaphor “shuttling between” to “making one’s way.” I do care about cautious, informed, and strategic making of one’s way into any new professional community. However, it is important to always process the knowledge and discourses of the professional community from other communities one is part of. One’s family, village, social group, and affinity groups (such as activist or community groups) provide a critical edge for the way one might process the dominant insider discourses. I borrow this orientation from socialization models such as Communities of Practice. The CoP model argues that people who engage in “boundary crossing” are always open to new knowledge via their diverse networks, and they hold the best prospects for diversifying and transforming the knowledge and practices of a community. And this practice of “shuttling between” is relevant not only

for those in the South; it is important for all of us engaged in the process of democratizing knowledge whether in the North or the South.

I have always advised my students from multilingual and minoritized backgrounds that their difference is an asset. They are sometimes deferential towards the dominant languages and discourses of the University in the North, and feel pressured to acculturate to the dominant conventions too quickly. Though I encourage them to familiarize themselves with the dominant academic discourses and practices, I also tell them that their own languages, cultures, and communities offer a reality check on dominant knowledge. This is the value of the restless and resistant periphery against the stable and invested center. Because we are outsiders, the differences and contradictions in dominant knowledge stand out starkly. Because we are not invested in maintaining the center through any inherited privileges, we are motivated to change them. And because we are not fully socialized into those discourses, we have the relative detachment to interpret them differently.

Thankfully, “shuttling between” was not just a metaphor or attitudinal, but a physical reality for me. As I mentioned earlier, my professional trajectory involved shuttling between Sri Lanka and the US. The differences were obvious to me in many ways when I first arrived in US as a graduate student from a former British colony. I was more familiar with British critical linguists than my American peers. While they knew Labov and Hymes, I was also familiar with Basil Bernstein, Gunther Kress, and Roger Fowler who had introduced a more edgy Marxist orientation to critical linguistics in the ‘70s. I enjoyed bringing this alternate strand of scholarship to complicate the liberal orientations to criticality in the US. And rather than feeling embarrassed about the code switching and creolizing practices in my home community, I actually leaned into them to complicate the structuralist approaches in graduate school.

And after earning my doctorate, when I returned to Sri Lanka, the dominant Northern orthodoxies felt irrelevant in the context of stark poverty and chaotic civil war. I realized that the liberal, student-driven and activity-based, Communicative Language Teaching was difficult and irrelevant in a context of resource limitations. The students didn’t have the space, time, or materials to play language games! They were under pressure to pass standardized tests such as TOEFL, and seek possibilities for higher education or employment abroad. It is in this context also that I found some of the progressive and radical positions in critical pedagogy not relating to my context. I read Phillipson’s 1992 *Linguistic Imperialism* while teaching in Sri Lanka. While I was heartened that someone was addressing the politics of English teaching in an OUP publication, I was unsure when Phillipson recommended that ELT efforts of funding and textbooks should be halted because of their imperialistic outcomes. What I found was that my poor rural students wanted English—but wanted to use it in their own terms for their own purposes—and not take away the meager resources to this language. That occasioned my first book, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*, with the clarification that resisting is different from rejection—as the former involves engaging with English to transform it from within.

That kind of resistant teaching and scholarship emerges from the process of “shuttling between.” And these are the stories I tell my graduate students to encourage them to shuttle between communities for transformative scholarship.

Victoria: *In your email you inquired about the accomplishments during the curation of the Special Issue, perhaps one accomplishment has been the embracing of difference and the unevenness that goes with it. One example of this is the inclusion of different publishing style guides within the same Issue, APA 7th edition and Chicago. On the surface this may appear to be a small, even trivial, shift as they are both Anglo-American style guides. Even so, I hope that changes in praxis like this has the potential to open up possibilities for new dialogue. Could you comment on what you might/have let pass, or encourage, in order to diversify academic knowledge production?*

Suresh: Yes, your approach addresses something I mentioned earlier about the problems Southern scholars face with Norther style manuals and conventions. Let me elaborate further. For many of us in the South, teaching is the primary professional expectation. We are not expected to publish or given time-off and resources for research. For someone to devote their energies to doing a research study and publishing it is a rare privilege. Factor in also that as our university jobs don't pay us adequately, we are all doing many jobs on the side to look after our families. And then consider that when I was working in Sri Lanka, I had to prepare all my submissions in manual typewriters. Consider the difficulties on top of those when every resubmission requires not just working on your rewriting and editing, but also reformatting the references. It is a crime to expect Southern scholars to toil for hours on changing their references! Imagine the hours spent on checking commas, semicolons, capitals, and parentheses according to the whims and fancies of every journal and publisher! We in the South used to wonder whose cruel joke it was to ask us to spend our valuable time on these hair-splitting citation conventions when we had other more important things to do in life. I proposed in my *Geopolitics of Academic Writing* that editors and publishers in at least different disciplines and professions should get together and agree on some uniform style conventions so that it becomes more predictable for others, especially to Global South scholars who don't always have the style manuals from everywhere. However, as software developers have now offered convenient ways to change the style conventions with the press of a key on laptops, it is not imaginable that publishers will consider the needs of scholars in the South who don't have such resources. In my academic community in Sri Lanka, I found that my university's guidelines for dissertations and intramural publications simply requested internal consistency, whatever style one wanted to adopt, making sure that we provided the necessary information for readers to access that publication for their reference. So you did the right thing about style conventions, and I am sure many Southern scholars will appreciate this concession.

Other requirements to be loosened can be the following:

- Tolerate language diversity as long as the article demonstrated internal consistency. That is, respect the norms of the author, especially in cases where they bring a variety like Indian or Nigerian English. Note that, even British writers complain when copyeditors in American journals change their spelling

and grammar into American conventions. Some journals now allow either variety as preferred by authors.

- In copyediting, focus on intelligibility rather than correctness. When I edited *TESOL Quarterly*, I asked the in-house copyeditor to adopt the practice of “minimalist copy editing.” I interpreted it for him as “don’t put your red pen on the manuscript unless you see a major infelicity or unintelligibility in usage.” This is not only to favor differences in language and style. I found that copyediting is ideological! Certain formulations went against the footing, positioning, and ethos of certain social groups. So APA’s preference for using the active voice was resisted by women, transgender, and ethnic authors who found it overly direct, agentive, and impositional.
- Don’t insist on everyone framing their article or argument in relation to the most current publications out there. Often, this required “new literature” is published in privileged journals in the West and is not available for scholars in the South. When I was publishing from Sri Lanka, I found that I was familiar with the general theoretical paradigms I was critiquing or adopting, but not the latest papers using those paradigms. But the editors wanted the absolute latest publication for my reference or literature review. I found this too rigid and unfair. Those latest references are not critical for someone to understand my argument. Literature review had become a fetish—a rule for its own sake.
- Allow a fairer range of citations. In fact, we can go further in citational justice. That is, rather than expecting only the scholars from the North to be cited, we should also give space to scholarship from elsewhere. The notion of citing the latest (Northern) scholarship is ideological. This is not just a neutral publishing convention on starting your paper with relevance. Those citations frame your argument and might constrain what you are able to say. Imagine representing knowledge from the South by framing the article with citations from French and American scholars relating to their contexts. So, editors have to be prepared to countenance a greater range of Southern scholarship in other languages, which might be more relevant to that article.
- Allow references, quotations, and citations from other languages without translating them into English. Readers now have a lot of help from AI to translate or locate multilingual sources, and even to translate them for their purposes if they are interested. It is not the responsibility of multilingual scholars to offer all this scholarship to English readers on a platter—when English journals don’t translate everything into other languages for other readers!

These kinds of changes are easy for me to list, as they are the ones I suggested in my 2002 book *Geopolitics of Academic Writing*. It is sad to realize that we haven’t progressed much towards accomplishing them after 20 years. But not all hope is lost. This special issue and journals like *Decolonial Subversions* show that there are hopeful developments on certain fronts. You have allowed for a greater diversity of genres and languages in your articles in

this issue. There is also greater code meshing in the way authors freely use qualified uses of other languages when they need them for rhetorical reasons in an English essay. This is becoming more common in different mainstream journals, suggesting that code meshing is gradually becoming a new convention. Congratulations on a worthy publication!

And we mustn't ignore the value of having this conversation on how to decolonize publishing and academic work. I didn't expect Northern scholars to sincerely wrestle with these challenges when I was struggling as a novice scholar in Sri Lanka 30 years ago. So, thanks for this opportunity to talk about this important concern. I hope more journals and editors will take up these meaningful suggestions and directions!

Victoria: Dear Suresh,

Thank you for responding to our questions in such a scholarly but also deeply personal way. I recall attending a talk you gave at a UK university in 2007 on academic writing, multilingualism and the coloniality of language (my paraphrase) when I was a doctoral researcher. It has been fascinating to read about your life trajectory shuttling between diverse academic spaces as well as traversing other communities in the Global North and the Global South. I lived in Ghana for a short time and what you touch on - for me - is a stark reminder of some of the material inequalities between those who live and work in parts of the world where essential resources such as electricity are scarce, intermittent or simply unaffordable. The South is more than a metaphor. You continue to give me much to think about.

Who does the work?

The question above echoes Sara Ahmed's 2012 and 2021 monographs which highlight the academic labour involved in doing transformative work in universities, albeit in the Global North. One theme that stands out for me from your extended responses is rejection and persistence. For instance, you refer to the rejection of your manuscripts by American journals, and their reviewers, who may well have responded from a position of ignorance with reference to American English and British English norms of academic writing. It has been very helpful to learn of some of the obstacles navigated as you state, for 'deviating from privileged norms' of language use as you simultaneously pushed into new areas of scholarship. Many would, understandably, give up or compromise.

You write that in decolonising the university we must consider dominant 'ontological and epistemic orientations towards language and knowledge' production; but also that being overly concerned with which named language to use for academic purposes may - inadvertently - limit 'transformative' scholarship'. You articulate further the many advantages afforded dominant speakers of English, who are privileged by virtue of their accidental relationship with prestige varieties of former-colonial languages. This is important as the power afforded certain forms of academic communication need to be separated from the value of contributions made.

Your deliberate strategy of ‘strategic and gradual resistance’ from within is enlightening. It constitutes a kind of gentle activism, the effects of which are - it is hoped - long and enduring, and yet, you also remind me of the important role of translanguaging practice as an integral part of decolonising universities in order to make space for the further diversification of knowledge.

What can we do?

Those of us located in - or who otherwise identify with - the Global North must consider what we can do to ensure this essential work continues. Hamja Ahsan and Sarah Corbett, in their respective books, advocate for a gentler form of protest which involves ignoring the ‘loud elite’ in order to be more attentive to quieter voices. I think this is something I can do more of more frequently. This listening involves careful work that subtly resists institutional and epistemological domination. At the same time, your detailed strategising provides detail on what can be done in more practical terms to mitigate such inequalities. For instance, you recommend forging a ‘mentoring relationship’ which is not as it may initially be interpreted, as it is the supervisors and scholars from the Global North who have much to learn from their peers in the Global South. As you say, it is, important to avoid one way traffic.

I read your responses as a manifesto, a call for action to everyone considering academic decolonising through careful and deliberate change. And related to this, I sometimes ask what people are prepared to give up (power, privilege, material resources, time?) in their efforts to decolonise the academy, including, by extension, where and with whom we choose to publish. This seems like an insurmountable amount work for scholars from the Global South to tackle alone and, indeed, why should they?

During the process of curating the Special Issue, it’s been great to read about your online Consortium for Democratizing Academic Publishing and Knowledge. Gillian and I wanted to encourage our contributors to experiment with the research paper genre, multilingual praxis and to consider visual and/or acoustic contributions, in doing so aligning with the *Decolonial Subversions* platform and vision. You underscore the importance of what language is and does; and that it is more than an artefact or transparent medium for communication. Different conceptualizations of language (language as a resource or repertoire versus artefact) are important for institutionalized contexts of knowledge production, yet are possibly less well familiar to readers working, teaching, researching outside language and translation studies, so thank you for that. At the same time, there is continued deep frustration expressed about the role and status of many languages in many universities because of the power and status of English. Speaking back involves dialogue, but an unequal one.

Victoria.

Gillian: Dear Suresh,

Thank you so much for your thought-provoking and highly self-reflective responses to our questions, and indeed for suggesting this way (a genre-in-the making?) of producing an 'afterword' for this Special Issue. Your responses to our questions will fuel even further debate, dialogue and forms of activism moving forward.

I found myself reading many of your insights and suggestions as somebody who has worked as an academic practice developer for the last seven years, teaching and supporting academics in how best to design curricula and deliver teaching and assessment in their own disciplinary areas. I think the term 'deliver' teaching is, in itself, very loaded as it suggests a model of education which is highly transmissive, as in Paolo Freire's 'banking model of education'. And so much of what is 'banked' is banked via the medium of the English language, whether the subject taught is nursing, criminology, fine arts or computer science. I have been inspired by your responses to begin to frame these questions for myself going forward:

- so many academics now 'shuttle between' the dominance of 'standard' academic British or American English and the vigorous, expressive 'hijacked' (as you put it) English of their own local communities. How can I support academics to draw on all these repertoires in their teaching and research, and how can I continue to make the arguments about language diversification to monoglot colleagues who insist on one dominant standard only?

- how can I encourage debates around assessment design which enable the development of new genres – genres which are responsive to the often stark material conditions which impinge on the lives of the students writing them? You speak eloquently about what many scholars in the South may not be able to access, such as the latest journals, particular referencing conventions, time to research or the internet. There are so many students in both the global North and South who also have limited access to all of this, yet when academics devise assessment genres do they ever consider which particular resources, including creativity and resilience, students can draw on in completing that genre?

- how can I genuinely listen, and give up the power that genuine listening involves? I am struck by your mention that in the early 1990's your 'poor rural students wanted English—but wanted to use it in their own terms for their own purposes—and not take away the meager resources to this language'. Your careful listening to your students led you to engage with current ideological debates, and in response, to write *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. It seems that real listening may involve giving up on particular ideological convictions, and if we are to move beyond a purely Anglophone environment, this will also entail being present when others express themselves in the richness of other languages, languages some of us may not know or understand. It is our job to do the hard work of translation, rather than placing even more burdens on others to do this. Yet so many of us in the Global North demand that it is our language – our English- in which talking, listening and knowledge production take place. But of course, listening is not

enough, and you provide many practical suggestions of what we can do to democratize our academic communities and their knowledges.

I say knowledges advisedly. Knowledges because this is used in many versions of English round the world. Knowledges because there is debate to be had in the Global North and its affiliations about why some regard this as ‘wrong grammar’. Knowledges, because perhaps this is a good question to pose to academics when they consider what they do: ‘Are we helping our students to construct knowledge or knowledges? And if so, whose?’

Thank you for sparking these further questions for me to ponder.

Best wishes,

Gillian