

Reading for: *(In)justice and English as a Lingua Franca*

Colloquium

Textual stimuli

While our discussion will be guided by the three overarching questions above, the following short texts offer additional stimuli for reflection. These are mini 'case studies' illustrating different ways in which English is directly caught in mechanisms that (re-)produce inequality.

Stimulus 1

Adapted from Mario Saraceni (2024)

Nigel Ng, a London-based comedian originally from Malaysia, is best known for his alter-ego, Uncle Roger. Ng attributes much of Uncle Roger's humor to the character's distinctive way of speaking (Ng, 2022a). Ng himself speaks a cosmopolitan, trendy form of English with clear North American influences, the epitome of what we might call 'global' English. Uncle Roger, in stark and intentional contrast, uses a parodic (and slightly sanitized) version of Chinese-Malaysian English which is much more local and meant to appear somewhat flawed by phonological quirks and 'broken' grammar. It is the kind of English we are implicitly invited to associate with someone who has never left their village and who typically speaks another language.

Nigel Ng believes that accents from Africa, South Asia, or East Asia carry far less social status in the West. He contends that, as an Asian person, he needs to code-switch to a more prestigious variety in order to gain respect, both on a professional and a personal level (Ng, 2021).

[Source: Saraceni (2024) "Way forward: Down to earth with Unequal Englishes". In: Tupas, R. (Ed.) Investigating Unequal Englishes]

Stimulus 2

The following two vignettes, taken from Darvin (2017), are about two separate Filipino migrants in Vancouver, Canada.

Vignette 1

Sixteen-year-old Filipino Ayrton is a tenth-grade student at a private high school in the west side of Vancouver. His family immigrated through the Investor class [...] The language they speak at home is primarily English, which was also the case when they were living in a home with a swimming pool in a gated community in the Philippines. [Ayrton uses] English as a lingua franca in multicultural Vancouver, as he engages with multilingual others from a range of different geographical regions, online and offline. [...] Because of his privileged position, Ayrton is able to immediately claim a legitimate place in his country of settlement, and develop a greater sense of agency. Assigned to the English Honours program of his

school, he maintains great confidence in speaking English. "I feel that I didn't need to adjust my English ... I'm just slowly being influenced in my speech." He expresses ownership of the language ("my English") and talks about how he now stresses his syllables in a different way, but that this did not require any kind of active learning on his part, and that he is just "influenced" by the environment.

Vignette 2

Like Ayrton, John is also 16, but is a Grade 11 student in a public school in the east side of Vancouver. He moved to Canada when he was ten, after six years of being separated from his mother, who started working in the country as a Caregiver. They speak primarily Filipino at home, which was also the case when they lived in a rural area of the Philippines. [...] John sees English as a language that is foreign to him. When asked what language he prefers speaking, he says, "I prefer more Tagalog since I speak it. Like it's part of me." He does not view English as a natural part of his linguistic repertoire, much less a language that he owns. [...] Because of the less privileged conditions of his migration, he feels like a "stranger" in this country of settlement and thus needs to actively "adjust" the way he spoke to conform to what he regards as native standards and to overcome the accent which is a mark of his own Filipino identity.

[Source: Darwin, R. (2017). Social class and the inequality of English speakers in a globalized world. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 6(2), 287-311. DOI:[10.1515/jelf-2017-0014](https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2017-0014)]

Stimulus 3

The following two texts represent different illustrations of the ways in which English impacts on people's lived experiences, in this case in the context of South Africa. The first one is a short extract from Trevor Noah's autobiographical book *Born A Crime*. Here, Noah talks about language with reference to identity and racism. In the second one, a university student recounts their experience growing up without much English.

Extract 1

Language brings with it an identity and a culture, or at least the perception of it. A shared language says "We're the same." A language barrier says "We're different." The architects of apartheid understood this. Part of the effort to divide black people was to make sure we were separated not just physically but by language as well. In the Bantu schools, children were only taught in their home language. Zulu kids learned in Zulu. Tswana kids learned in Tswana. Because of this, we'd fall into the trap the government had set for us and fight among ourselves, believing that we were different.

The great thing about language is that you can just as easily use it to do the opposite: convince people that they are the same. Racism teaches us that we are different because of the color of our skin. But because racism is stupid, it's easily tricked. If you're racist and you meet someone who doesn't look like you, the fact that he can't speak like you reinforces your racist preconceptions: He's different, less intelligent. [...] However, if the person who doesn't look like you speaks like you, your brain short-circuits because your racism program has none of those instructions in the code. "Wait, wait," your mind says, "the racism code says if he doesn't look like me he isn't like me, but the language code says if he speaks like me he ... is like me? Something is off here. I can't figure this out."

[Source: Noah, T. (2017). *Born A Crime*. John Murray]

Extract 2

As a young boy, I grew up in poverty and attended a poor crèche, primary school and secondary school. My parents were poor and uneducated, so they did not see why they should spend the little money they made on books. Unfortunately for me, my schools did not have computers, and libraries that could assist me to read and write in English. At school, we were taught in our home language by teachers who were very serious about their job. When I went to high school, the medium of instruction was English and not knowing to read and write English well, I struggled with all my subjects because they were taught in English. Other learners laughed at those of us who could not speak English well especially when we were asked to answer a question in class. I also felt like I was discriminated against by the teachers because most of our teachers were whites and they did not really care about our education. So, throughout my life I have struggled to read and write in English and I am still struggling even here at the university.

[Source: Pineteh E. Angu (2019) Understanding voices from the margins: social injustice and agency in first-year students' literacy narratives, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43:8, 1152-1162]