



Phipps, A. (2022) Decolonizing languages in rural settings: towards equatorial epistemologies. In: Ayres-Bennett, W. and Fisher, L. (eds.) *Multilingualism and Identity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp. 155-180. ISBN 9781108490207 (doi: [10.1017/9781108780469.008](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780469.008))

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/263704/>

Deposited on 25 January 2022

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

Decolonising Languages through Rural Settings: Towards Equatorial Epistemologies.

Alison Phipps

Prelude: Te Maramataka Turu

Atua Whakahaehae

Kia mau kit e nagārahu Ki te tūpato ka pai noa iho Kāre e whara

(Tāwhai, 2013)

Outside curtains of rain are pulling themselves across the river and the scots pine. A red squirrel is feeding in the tree. I hear bird song. And the now familiar ping of #ScotsGaelicDuollingo telling me my words in the Gaelic sentence are correct.

“Bidh mi a seòladh a hu uile latha.”

“I sail every day.”

I earn points, crowns, gems, cartoon characters try to motivate me. I have a streak of 157 days. That’s 157 days since I decided to try learning a language with an app for the first time. The iconography of the metropolis, the power of the realm, the wealth in vaults, the entertainment industry spread out across my view juxtaposed with the rurality of sailing, or ‘iomain’ – shinty games; of Ghàidhealtachd (The Highlands) as rural source of a language displaced by the Clearances and poverty to the urban centres, like the languages of so many speakers of indigenous languages – languages quite literally of the soil – in migrant populations today.

I took the decision at Auckland airport in Aotearoa returning from a period of study leave where learning more Te Reo Māori had been both a reality and a frustration. What it

prompted, however, was an engagement with one of the indigenous languages of home. Scots Gaelic.

Learning has occurred in entirely urban environments – Auckland – Manilla and then Glasgow under the conditions of ‘lockdown’ of the pandemic. The only Gaelic language I’ve seen offline in the last 173 days has been walking past a Glasgow pub where the sign was in Gaelic, and I’d enjoyed working out what it meant. I took a photo of it to share with the Gaelic learning ‘community’, as it loosely terms itself, and thus took it back online.

My social media prompts remind me that three years ago I was in the Dangbe speaking region of the Dodowa Forest, in Ghana, working with rural, indigenous and internal migrant young people on a dance project. The project focused on idioms of distress, wellbeing and resilience.

Behind the pine tree is a small volunteer run folk museum where some of the artefacts still bear their Gaelic names, and some of the practices of working the flax or the tweed or the songs have Gaelic inscriptions.

Another familiar ping from the Gaelic app franchise of Duolingo, and I’m smiling at the words they have chosen to teach us, the cultural metonymy and the knowing humour that blend to tell us this exists at the same time as it exists really as a memory. I know the word for salted gannet now, in Gaelic. ‘Guga’. The word takes me into the folk museums of the west coast and the epic tales of the hard life and voluntary evacuation of St Kilda. It’s juxtaposed with experiences of a ‘hangi’ and of varieties of kai, not least of kumara, of learning of the place of the ‘tuna’ in the waters of Te Urewera and of the need for waiata and karakia; of what it means to be wāhine and to practice manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga, to observe the rites of matariki and of Te Maramataka and to wonder at knowledges of land and language relations, far removed from the apps of urban dwelling, and bureaucratic busyness which characterises majority language learning in the global north.

He rā pai mō ngā mea katoa, mō te moana, mō te whenua, mō ngā awa.
Kua hoki mai anō te ora ki ngā tahtaha katoa o Papatūānuku.

Turu is a good day in every sense.

It's a productive day for the sea, for the rivers, for the land. Life is on the move again.

Hostile Winds in Rural Settings

“We lost our breath among the hostile winds.” (Anyidoho, 2011)

Kofi Anyidoho, perhaps Africa's leading humanities scholar and award-winning poet, uses this phrase in his poem 'Gathering the Harvest Dance: Departure I' to describe the intergenerational trauma of slavery. It also describes, poetically, the way certain indigenous languages are lost, made as they are between the tongue, the teeth and the patterns of breath in plosives and glottal stops; long and short vowels and clicks.

The winds have been markedly hostile to Gaelic and to Te Reo Māori. And to indigenous languages per say. We know this not least as I am finalizing the writing of the chapter on 9th August. It is Nagasaki Day; and also the day marked by the United Nations as the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. We mark these days to build a scaffold of education around the things which have been rendered fragile by systemic and structural hostility. The forms hostility has taken, might also be understood as an assault on rurality, on indigene, on the autochthonous – literally, in these latter formulations, on the people of the soil, and the way language has been formed through its relation to place and rural practice. The military, missional, educational, health and social structures of colonial cities working to eradicate languages which were opaque to the rulers from the margins.

There is no need to rehearse here the arguments used by dominant language users of colonial speech against indigenous repertoires, or the injustice which has been well documented by scholars (Ellis, 2006; Gramling, 2016; Phillipson, 1992; Santos, 2014; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Smith & ProQuest, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). The debates within the broad field of language studies are heated and interesting with conceptualization from 'language death' to 'linguistic genocide' marking the most extreme positions and many studies nuancing these important polarities in between. The study has helped, perhaps most strikingly in recently years, with understanding the value of monolingualism to those who invented it – for which Gramling's masterful work (Gramling, 2016) is of key

significance, and for being the thinking about what it might mean to decolonize multilingualism. This has been the subject of my own more recent work (Phipps, 2019) which has been focused on justice, agency, sovereignty and pragmatic action, as well as on the difficulty this presents (Phipps, 2013).

In this chapter, however, I turn my attention to the rural and urban dimensions of this task.

[Learning the Languages of the Northern Metropolitan Centres](#)

Writing a 'Manifesto for Good Living/ Buen Vivir' Boaventura de Sousa Santos writes from the perspective of the ragged and loosely affiliated people engaged in social movements worldwide, not least through gatherings like the World Social Forum. In imagining a generalized subject position for this work, he states:

A few of us speak colonial languages; the large majority of us speak other languages. Since only a small number of us have voice, we resort to ventriloquists, whom we call rearguard intellectuals, because they go on doing what they have always done well: looking back. (Santos, 2014)

I began my immersion learning of languages in my early youth in the Schwaldwald / Black Forest and Schäubische Alb/ Swabian Alb in Germany, and St Porchaire and Soulignonnes in Charente Maritime in France. The genealogies of school exchanges forged by teachers from previous connections with rural settings. My immersion and relationships in Germany were a far remove from the tatty, run down cauldron of adolescent hopelessness and rage that was the French and German language classrooms of my secondary school in Sheffield. But it was my teachers who provided the escape routes, from a future that was unimaginable in the tense and mildly threatening accents of my South Yorkshire home.

Already, as a 'marked' case in English – a 'northerner', living, as I was repeatedly told – 'North of Watford Gap' – I knew that accent and dialect mattered alongside education. The discovery of 'non-standard' 'dialect' forms of German in particular was a double escape from the urban tyranny of class and the urban-educational tyranny of standardization. My own German quickly took on the hues and shades of the rural south of Germany, standing against the standard of 'Hoch-Deutsch'. I didn't know it at the time, but I was reveling in what I would come to call 'code-switching', but the escape was not into 'coding', not like

*ScotsDuolingoGaelic*TM. It was also into a rural life of language learning, as a seasonal migrant, which was what I became for the next ten years of my language studies. These studies were shaped by the only language opportunities available on my path, those of European languages, and languages of colonial and economic power; languages which I had chosen as part of the ideology of the Entente Cordiale, of a vague sense in my fourteen year old self, that they mattered for peace building with near neighbouring countries. My Grandmother's stories of the 'bomb your grandfather threw a bucket of water over' when it landed on her doorstep in Horncastle from Hitler, somehow joined the soundtrack in my mind of "Ich heisse Alison. Ich bin elf Jahre alt. Wo kommst Du her?" (my name is Alison. I'm 11 years old. Where are you from?) Not so much a 'white saviour complex' as a good neighbor complex was in my grandmother's milk.

The rural dimension of language I explore here, is practice-led and land-connected. It has a particular genealogy when I look back, and it formed around my PhD thesis, undertaken in 1992 and 1993 on *Naturtheater*, Open Air Community Theatre in southern Germany with groups of people who were both displaced peoples and refugees, but also indigenous rural speakers of Swabian. It was practice-led and intensely rural. I dressed up to speak Swabian dialect in rural folk costumes and acted as an amateur in plays which took a decisively rural theme. The clue, perhaps, is in the title of the form of theatre – *Natur* - as in nature- theater; theatre in the open air. Language was not being spoken into classrooms or phone mics, no crowns or gems were gaming my play. It was theatre proclaimed into auditoria of up to 2,000 people at a time, in proud dialectal form, with no lapel amplification, week in week out throughout each summer, from the high sunshine of the afternoons into the darkness of the night performances under the moon, and the stars.

The invitation to write a chapter for this volume on multilingualism in urban settings was the prompt for a retrospective recognition that my practice-led language arts work in Ghana is simply a continuation of a seem of work which works in the open air and has done, in rural settings, for over thirty years. It also, importantly focuses attention on a key element in decolonial work – that of de-centring; of understanding how the power of the urban metropolis produces urbanized forms of colonialism, which reach only partially into the rural arenas of speech. Graeber has described this powerful in his work (Graeber, 2001, 2004) showing how power from urban and colonial centres becomes a partial enactment of being colonized in areas where the language and practice of everyday rural life continues regardless. Graeber's work centred on Madagascar but his thesis applies

more widely to the continuation of languages, pressed by colonial forces into rural margins – Gaelic and Te Reo Māori being two instances of this. It is to the more recent dimensions of this rural focused work that I now turn, with a focus on the work of the Arts and Humanities Research Council Project, *Researching Multilingually at Borders* project and the work we have been undertaking in the Global South, and in the Dodowa Forest in Ghana in particular.

[Researching Multilingually at Borders](#)

The *Translating Cultures* theme of research funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council made over a hundred awards, including three large, multi-million-pound grants which have been precursors of the *Open World Research Initiatives*. Our own project was entitled *Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State*. It worked in eleven countries, with twenty-two researchers, five case studies and two synthesizing hubs, one focused on arts practice and on applied linguistics and the intercultural language dimensions of researching multilingually. None of the project was overtly rural and the majority of the focus of the three large grants was on urban settings. In our own the focus was on the body and language under duress, pain and pressure with an overt focus on refugee populations and those seeking asylum.

Our studies focused on the large refugee resettled populations in Southern Arizona, on the protocols for care of new arrivals in Bulgaria and Romania; on the legal frameworks for protection and translation rights for those seeking asylum in The Netherlands and in the UK; on the post traumatic growth of former child soldiers in Uganda from the Lord's Resistance Army and of young unaccompanied minors learning English in Glasgow and then with the situation for learning to teach both Arabic and English in the Gaza Strip. In each of these contexts the focus was on ways in which the bureaucratic states of the global north, or the aid and development work from the north, meet and are frustrated by or fail in the face of the challenge of the figure of the refugee. As our studies revolved around the mechanisms and consequences of decision-makers, residing in urban settings, then our empirical and theoretical work was largely focused on urban solutions and urban manifestations of these consequences. Our project produced, for instance, guidance for 'cautioners' – those standing bail or attending bail hearings – in the Scottish system of administrative justice; they focused on the manuals for training psycho-therapists for

dealing with trauma in former young militias; they focused on universities and their programmes of education and online learning.

The rural was not a setting for the majority of the empirical research or the thinking. Nor is rurality a feature of the research on colonial languages or language learning in general. The utilitarian purposes or grander artistic purposes of language endeavor, of migration and population density and the solutions-focused approaches to migration and multilingualism are all bear the imprint of the urban centre, as opposed to the way multilingualism might be formed in the periphery. I realise this is a grand claim, and it is many ways self-evident. The institutions productive of linguists, professionally, outwith the family, are found within the institutions of the state and of business which concentrate in urban areas. Furthermore, as our research took place during the passage into mass consciousness in 2015 of the movements of large numbers of people from the war zones of Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, DR Congo, and the oppressive states such as Iran, Eritrea, Sudan, our focus was also drawn to those wishing to begin to seek asylum.

The majority of refugee hosting is undertaken in the countries of the South, where people congregate waiting for passage from large cities such as Khartoum, Tripoli, Istanbul, Lebanon and in the many refugee camps which formed into tented cities in Jordan, Turkey, Greece and the Pas de Calais. The camps and urban accommodation in high density housing represent urban features but they are often temporary places of stay for people of rural provenance. As well as not so much being a 'refugee crisis' as a 'hospitality crisis' the urban accommodation crisis is also a constructed one. What this throws into sharp relief, here, is the fact that what may be accommodated as an urban crisis for the North, is in fact often a rural crisis in the South, with linguistic dislocations as much to do with shifts from urban to rural settings as from South to North, but with the focus firmly on the latter.

One of the core lines of inquiry in the *Researching Multilingually at Borders* project took its cue from Elaine Scarry's work *The Body in Pain* (Scarry, 1985). In this work Scarry examines letters sent on behalf of those writing letters to leaders of nations and decision makers of the highest level in a state, to beg for clemency and for just treatment for prisoners of conscience on the list of those brought to the attention of Amnesty International. Scarry notes the exquisite levels of courtesy deployed in the letters, the need for acute tonal stability in the modes of address and apostrophe. She sees how when the

body is in pain, when under conditions of extreme duress and pressure the subject is stripped of their voice; “word, self and voice are lost, or nearly lost” and she contrasts this with the courtesy and eloquence of the modes of address used on behalf of others.

Researching Multilingually at Borders was looking at what happens to language in times of conflict, pain and pressure. It wanted to consider how we might break with extractiveist ideologies of research methodologies and how we research multilingually in different disciplines. We were very clear that in our own disciplines of modern languages, applied linguistics of modern language, literature, languages were part and parcel of both our objects of study and also our ways of researching, but we were equally clear that we were failing to reflect ethically, methodologically or theoretically on what it means to conduct research multilingually. This element was further amplified, when joined on the project by scholars from other disciplines medicine or engineering, and from areas of law, all concerned with borders as theoretical and practical sites of action. The question of what it means to deploy another language in research as a methodology or as a way of being a researcher was an anathema to the way in which people have worked over the last three decades at least with the idea of race or gender and class. This trinity of Cultural Studies has transformed the arts, humanities and social sciences and is a site of acute hegemonic contest today. It is a key intersectional feature which has been absent from study, methodologically and practically, ethically and theoretically.

The aims of our work were as follows:

By considering language as a social construct and category,

1. to research interpreting, translation and multilingual *practices* in challenging contexts, and,
2. *while doing so*, to document, describe and evaluate appropriate research methods (traditional and arts based) and develop theoretical approaches for this type of academic exploration.
3. To up end the ‘normal’ routines of academic representation giving control and voice to those normally denied representational power as artists.

Years of research into the cosmopolitan, metropolitan centres for the Global North, their literary texts and festivals and artworks have shaped the normativity of urban multilingualism and the criteria by which research into multilingual aesthetic practice is judged. Audience size, reach, reviews in the periodicals of the state, use of feted actors or artists – these are the criteria. The centre is the place from which colonialism may be planned, may begin its fantasy, may operationalize its plans, and offer its discourse and aesthetic to the process. It relies, as stated above, on the institutions of power and the training of certain mindsets, of civil servants and bureaucrats who will serve the continued strength of urban power, and whose work lives, if not whole lives are enacted from within an urban frame. In short, we might follow and apply Bueggemann's thesis with regard to rhetorical criticism and hermeneutics here (Brueggemann, 1997), seeing the power of urban language, and therefore of the space accorded urban multilingualisms, as having both character and agency. Character, in the sense of concentrations of institutionalized power and normativity, and agency in the sense of the means with which to propagate and direct the continuance of this character over time, and through actors.

Within the granting institutions of the United Kingdom and of the epistemologies of the Global North this character also prizes critique and questioning. These have been responsible for many important emancipatory movements, not least fusing, at a later date, with the slave rebellions that ultimately lead to the abolition of the forms of slavery perpetuated in the plantations of the Caribbean and America. They have allowed for the development of deconstruction, of feminism and of many forms of humanism over the centuries. Such thought requires the institutions of the state, the double break of phenomenology as described by Bourdieu in *Pascalian Mediations*, (Bourdieu, 2000) and of well-endowed institutions with sufficient resource to free individuals to conduct research. In order to proceed such critique will of necessity foster an uneasy relationship to institutions of power and benevolence, depending on their preferred modes of submission, and the risks they wish to take with the lengths to which critique may proceed.

In the case of research into multilingualism in the UK in the second decade of the twenty-first century critique centres around the continuing salience of the cultural studies trinity of race, gender and class as seen through the lens of deconstruction. Critique centres around empirical evidence and data collection around these categories in the social scientific and scientific forms of language study, and it centres around texts and cultural forms in the arts and humanities. *Researching Multilingually at Borders* was ostensibly

offering to add the category and construct of language to this trinity for researchers to begin thinking the salience of language to the manner of their conduct of research.

Submission required a 'Je-s form'; a "case for Support", multiple supplementary documents and an appearance at an interview. To all intents and purposes this quasi legal process is how the centre perpetuates its preferred epistemologies. Critique feeds off these epistemologies as it deconstructs them, necessarily parasitic. In the interstices between scientific normativity and critique, as generated in the urban centres, lies praxis. (Freire, 2006). Praxis, broadly conceived as continuing cycles of action and reflection through critique, offers the possibility of rupture in the normative framings of research and action. It can, in certain contexts, break with normal runnings, interrupt and set a different course, or allow for a different conceptualisation, thematization or methodological trajectory for research to take.

From the outset our own proposal was seeking to undertake multilingual research as praxis, to attempt to turn critical attention towards the means and modes which enabled multilingual research to occur and to critique the power dynamics in place in such work. In order, paradoxically, to create a break the project presented itself as running 'like clockwork' with the kinds of cogs and wheels that drive progress diagrammatically offering reassurance as a form born of urban invention in a place of judgement by such conventions.

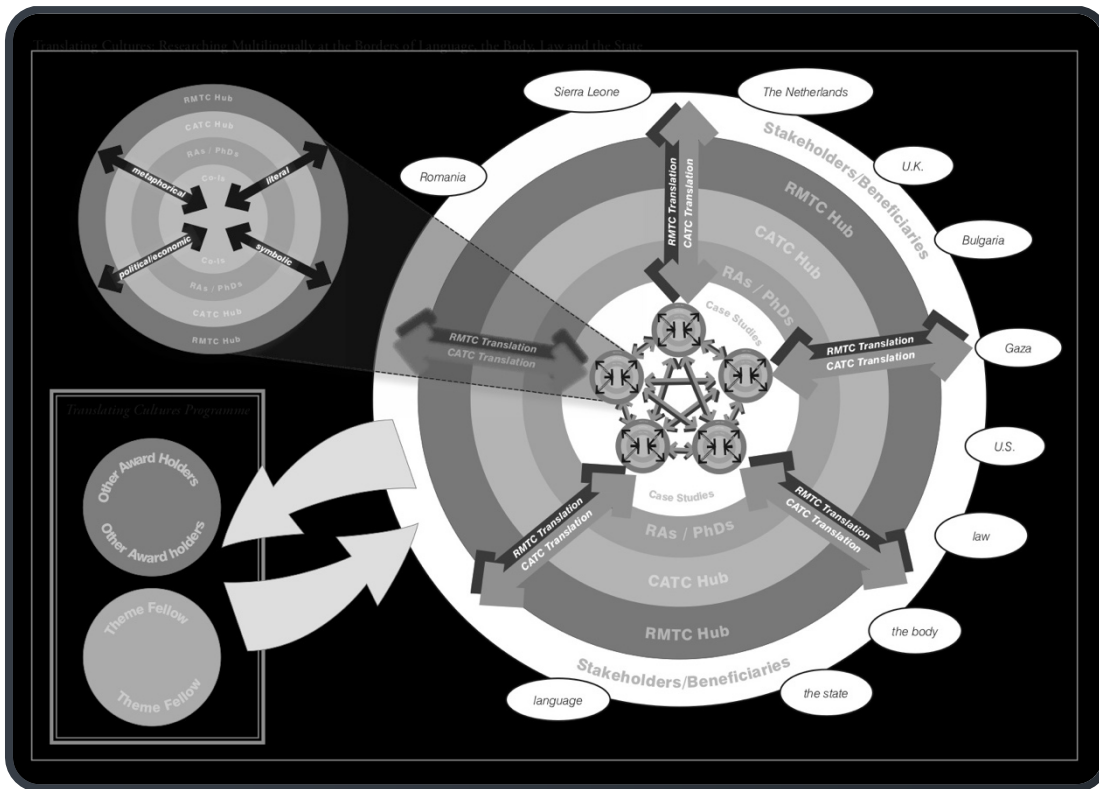


Fig. 1: Researching Multilingually at Borders working like clock-work

This paradox became a plank of the interview process, whereby due diligence required the question to be asked, what the plan was for the work, for demonstrating coherence, and what we were going to make as our final performance. In many ways it's a question born of urban, bureaucratic centres of power. In urban settings there is a powerful belief in the plan, the timetable, the smooth running of projects. In rural settings there is a greater weather dependent seasonality to what can and cannot be done and therefore which narratives, which stories of events of consequence, might come to the fore. Human ecological interdependencies are heightened by the proximity to forms which are more-than-human (Abram, 1997). There are also many ways in which the urban environment masks the more-than-human-world, canalizing rivers, concreting over soil, placing bird-proofing spikes along buildings, creating highly managed riparian

The presence of artists in the project team from Ghana meant we had already proposed Ghana as a setting for this production, not least as it allowed for the upending of the normative assumption that performance would take place in the metropolitan centres for the North – London, New York, Paris, or the Edinburgh Festival. This and the employment of diaspora artists from the Global South were two key ruptures with metropolitanism and

with colonial languages within the proposal. There was a third rupture is that of the rural-urban divide which detains me here, but this did not come into view until well after the work had concluded.

One of the demands of centralized bureaucracies and grant application processes is clarity. At every step of the way, in the minutiae of Gantt charts and log frames it is imperative to 'delivery' that ever step to be taken is tracked in advance. This is, of course, a chimera. There is no tracking a road never taken. There is no way clear method when no previous attempt has been made to create a devised piece of theatre with young people who speak multiple languages, in the Dodowa Rainforest, and to do it without even knowing the group exists at the point of interview for the project.

Our response to the question of coherence, plan, gantt chart and logframe was was, of necessity, vague, but insisted on the integrity of a practice-led and praxis orientated research process. "If I can tell you what we are going to make in four year's time you should not fund this project" was our response to what, in the urban interview settings of the Global North, is a perfectly logical, even reasonable question. Whether or not this was a satisfactory answer remains in the committee room, but the grant was awarded and in 2015, having tested our methodologies we eventually settled on devising and improvisation in live performance, in Ghana.

[Serving the Centre's Linguistic Needs](#)

The third rupture, that of breaking with the urban centres, requires critique of ways in which multilingual power concentrates in the urban settings, which are also the settings of colonial planning. Multilingual power defines urban institutions, is forged in bureaucratic, educational, cultural and civic contexts, detached from the land and the practices of the indigene. Indigenous languages may be heard on the streets of the cities of the world, but the dominant language of state governance will dominate nonetheless and will shape the conceiving of social and political life. For instance, the *Translanguaging Project*, which has also been part of the AHRC's Translating Cultures, portfolio have looked at the four most superdiverse wards in the UK and has, of course, as such been focused on the most multilingual wards which are found in settings of high population density.

Gramling has described this in some depth as he has examined the very specific and quite admirable ways in which the European Union and its institutions have elaborated codes and protocols for what will and will not be translated. When presenting to the Culture Committee of the European Parliament in 2018, for instance, our words could be translated into any of the languages of the member states, or spoken in any of the languages codified as belonging to member states, but not in languages of secondary status – indigenous, heritage or migrant. And so it was that the Gha speaker presenting in the Committee, was muted across the live streams and her words excised from the record. The centre was served, together with the peculiar multilingualism's of the European Union's project. The periphery was muted. In short, in considering multilingualism in rural settings the centre: periphery models and the centre: periphery biases of our own research project become evident, problematizing some of our assumptions about diversity.

Whilst there were attempts in our own practice within the project to experiment with multilingual forms of presentation, with writing full academic articles in languages other than English; in conducting research and field research ethnographically (R. I. Gibb, Julian Danero, 2017; R. T. Gibb, Anabel; Igelsias, Julian Danero, 2019) each of these attempts took place in and from urban settings, and was largely a set of failures. We regularly fell into the patterns of Eurocentric multilingualism, or particular enactments of proficiency and fluency and competence defined by the central multilingual imaginary. We would default to English, the pragmatics of the academic setting and linear coherence required by the bureaucratic forms of accountability, project, visa and career management, mitigated against multilingualism, or translanguaging, at every turn. The urban settings made this especially acute as English has come to function as the default *lingua franca* of the academy. The paradox here is important. A multimillion-pound project on researching multilingually failed to research multilingually.

We lost our breath to the hostile winds.

Te Maramataka Turu

Atua Whakahaehae

Kia mau kit e nagārahu Ki te tūpato ka pai noa iho Kāre e whara

(Tāwhai, 2013)

The reasons why it's difficult to research multilingually parallel those which face us in other endeavours which seek justice and equity and where the power of a centre of colonizing power is to be challenged to cede of some of its resource or its epistemological control. Giving in up the power which accrues to dominant and easy modes of operating, questioning the forces which hold and structure that power is not easy. And for language there is a double bind for the methods by which the unequal linguistic power is held in place are made in, and of language, primarily. This structuring goes beyond the way in which institutions might be organized, or syllabi produced, or academic work reproduced but, given that language is also primarily an embodied dimension to life, it is an area where the body is in play significantly. The centre is embodied and performed in the what Cavarero has termed 'the din of the realm' (Cavarero, 2005). The offer of and professional use of translation in areas such as medicine or law, whose institutions and rituals of power are primarily accommodated within the metropolis, we found were explicable by the fact that these are also areas of life when safety of the body is paramount. Translating for asylum seekers in court or in surgeries was something which went some way to ensuring safety, based on comprehension of symptoms or of experiences. In these disciplines our research could help support the development of better codes of practice around working with interpreters, and materials for training and development. This was indeed multilingual work, in that languages were in play but it was undertaken at an elite level, through translation and interpreting professionals, and it was largely urban in manifestation.

For most of our practice, we were found it difficult to work multilingually. It was too hard to give up our linguistic power. It was too difficult to be exposed when speaking a language in which we were not already highly fluent, too humiliating to accept what we weren't able to do. We felt like frustrated little children. We didn't have the power to conceptualise or name or debate or argue, key academic skills. Everything we had learned was somehow something we were not able to be or do any more. For all the celebratory multilingualism that there is around in linguistic circles in the UK, we found we were still really reluctant to try and practice and expose ourselves in the work we did with one another. In a number of our discussions we reflected on the reason for this being strongly linked to a perception of reputational damage or a lack of seriousness in our academic study if our arguments were

not honed, clear and conceptualized in the language of the state. Once again, concerns which pin the the urban forms of the academy and its role in instituting metropolitan power.

It is worth stating here that at this stage there are two key aspects to this. First, metropolitanism under this description is not necessarily to be understood as simply 'a bad thing', where rurality might be a romanticisable 'good thing' from some past idyll. These binaries linger but this is explicitly not the purpose of my argument here. Rather I am keen to enact a phenomenological double break and both describe the workings of linguistic power in these different settings, account for how this proceeds and its performativity multilingually and through researching multilingually, and then to consider the power dimensions at play and how, for the sake of a decolonizing procedure, this might be addressed.

It is to this address and attempt at a rural decolonizing remedy to the normative forms produced by urban multilingual research and its preoccupations, that I now turn.

[Senuous Epistemologies](#)

In the aptly entitled *Field Work is not what it used to be* (Faubion & Marcus, 2009) Faubion and Marcus consider with their former students what field work has become in an age of digitization, mass travel, and they deconstruct the notion that, for anthropology, as for other social sciences, the metaphor of field is deeply problematic, enshrining hierarchies of knowledge and activity in complex ways, and requiring at the very least attention of the field as having undergone a semantic shift to become a metaphor for empirical or practical research undertaken with people who are not necessarily of the academy, rather than being a denotation of geographical space. In the historical imaginary of fieldwork there resides a rural setting.

In the context of *Researching Multilingually at Borders*, as noted, the fieldwork was largely undertaken in urban settings. It might be said that we failed as fully to research multilingually in rural settings even more than we did to research multilingually in urban and academic settings. There is an irony here embedded in the concept of field.

Fieldwork is a difficult term. It comes from the days of early anthropology and geography and still has fetish status as a gold standard of social scientific quantitative and qualitative

research. To be 'in the field' is to have attained a particular stage of research, a certain status. It's a term which exemplifies all that has been elaborated above, setting up a binary between Centre and Periphery, between the urban environment and the field. It uses a bucolic, agrarian term, one associated with agriculture and, in the UK, with the wave of enclosure acts occurring over a century from around 1750 to 1850, displacing the concept of common ownership and instituting fields as property of an individual landowner.

To work in the field was to be out of the institution of the University, isolated, away from peers and colleagues, from libraries and the rarified atmosphere of universities. To work in the field was to move the body in ways which were not of the 'armchair' as the somewhat derogatory term of 'armchair' anthropology indicates, from the kinds of thinking which Bourdieu highlights in *Pascalian Mediations* (Bourdieu, 2000) but of the village, which required participation in activities of the field, or at the very least outdoor observation of the same. Whilst the positivist paradigm has been deconstructed to a certain extent within linguistics; applied linguistics and language studies the notion of field research persists. As does the metaphor.

A key aim of *Researching Multilingually at Borders* was, as stated above, to up-end the ways in which data is traditionally extracted and analysed and to put these activities into the hands of participants under the 'enablingship' of artists from the global south. This was not a simple task and as the project was working from urban environments in the Global North we proceeded with our plans for this work by piloting our auditions and script with young people from Scotland. In Glasgow. An urban setting. Following the auditions, it became clear that we could not work with a script but would need to improvise, as we had participants for whom literacy was a prohibitive challenge. We piloted our approaches to devising and improvisation by organizing a residential at a 'field centre' in rural Dumfriesshire, for a week.

For the first time during the project our research left the urban centres and entered a rural environment – walks, trees, gardens, roaring fires, big kitchens with wide vistas became the setting for our multilingual improvisations. The sensuous dimensions of working in a rural setting are heightened, and these became available to us as objects for our devising. During this time our methods evolved considerably, but it was the multilingual dimensions and the devising methods which we saw as crucial to our embryonic breakthroughs in undertaking multilingual practice-led research, not, at the time the rural setting that had

allowed us to engage differently with balance, intuition, smell, taste, touch, texture, sight, vista and horizon, sky and rural architectures, heat and cold.

Fieldwork, in the most literal sense, enabled a context where the play and improvisation with multilingual methods, which focused on both the generative themes of the research and on the languages of all actors, became possible. Away from the urban settings and their habits, with this urban rural rupture enacted, it was possible for us to devise new multilingual performance practices. We saw this as being linked largely to the grasping of sensuous epistemologies born of embodiment and of divesting our work of text-based, scripted performance practice. The break-through for our practice rested, at this stage, in our conceptualization, on the move off the page, not the move into the 'field'.

[Equatorial Epistemologies.](#)

From the fields of Dumfriesshire, following the piloting of our methods, we moved to our main performance development phase. We were led in this task by artists – Gameli Tordzro, Naa Densua Tordzro and Tawona Sitholé who took us to the equator, to produce a performance on the equator. We landed in Accra, hosted by the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, Legon. A symposium was held on Researching Multilingually and the Performing Arts, the National Theatre in the CBD was a focus of our work to identify suitable partners. All of our focus was urban and institutional. At this point, whilst we had certainly succeeded in researching how people largely failed at researching multilingually across different disciplines, and what, if we were to build towards a theory of researching multilingually, might be some key constituent components we had not broken with the urban settings or institution. In fact, we were keen to work with urban performing arts institutions in Accra and spent many hours of protocol in meetings discerning and discussing possible ways forward. What became clear during the course of our meetings, and our team discussions late into the night, was the extent of the bureaucracy and necessary protocols towards Memoranda of Understanding, where various equities would be enumerated, that would be required for us to proceed with the potential organisations. We wished to embark on the arduous process of co-design but were in a setting where the normal assumption was that those in the North were funders, not co-practitioners. The irony was intense. It was a perfect illustration of how the colonized had used the 'Masters' bureaucratic tools' very well.

During our research symposium at the School of Performing Arts a heated intellectual debate took place between two different intellectual traditions relating to the teaching and practice of dance. We had already met with the late Professor Nii Yartey and experienced the work of three of his apprentice dancers from the Noyam Institute for African Dance earlier in the summer of 2015. We had dismissed the idea of working with these dancers because they were 'out of town' in the 'Dangbe-speaking region'. The intellectual debate was electrifying and related to everyday moments of rural life and their incorporation into traditional dance. As more doors closed in the city the possibility of a visit to Noyam, in the Dodowa Forest, on the equator, an hour's drive from the edge of the city.

The visit took place. It took place multilingually. We were able to begin to work and improvise together from the start. The match to the work we had undertaken with Ignite theatre Company in Glasgow was marked. Over the course of our final days we made an agreement with Professor Nii Yartey that we would return the following year to work with the young dancers to produce a dance piece around the generative themes of our research.

The production work with Noyam Institute for African Dance took place over two visits and 8 weeks in total, with a group of young people who spoke a language which at the start of the projects I did not know existed in the world, and I certainly didn't speak. Whilst participatory research and co-design have become important markers of work with and alongside partners for international development projects our work was not, at this point, a development project but a performance project. The aim was to render the generative themes of our research in dance and to work towards this using all of the languages we possessed. In terms of mutuality the young people wanted to dance and learn new ways of dancing, and we wanted a dance piece. This created a set of equitable relationships, and whilst we cannot ignore the access to capital and resource which a project housed and funded in the global north can access, this particular element of the work made was nonetheless significant. Whilst it is possible to tease out many different dimensions of equity within the work, it was the linguistic dimension which was, we believed, the important innovation in that we undertook the work not in Dangbe, nor in English – the dominant languages of the two groups, but multilingually. In previous antecedents of decolonizing language work, most notably that described by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (Ngugi wa, 1986), the linguistic resistance against hegemonic English took the form of a work of theatre entirely produced in the indigenous language. This was not our approach, but

rather to acknowledge all the languages of the temporary multinational community we were forming around the task of the performance.

Whilst there is much to elaborate with regard to our multilingual methods both as practice-led research and the applied linguistics research undertaken the important rupture for my purposes here is that of the rural environment.

The Dodowa forest is rich in resources. The Dodowa market full of the produce of field and tropical forest. The life of the cast revolved around our common kitchen, and meals together, our common routines of cleaning and hygiene and around the rhythm of the many tropical storms, the regular power cuts, and the rising and setting of the sun. Our work began around three hours after sunrise, and finished around two hours before sunset, though we often lingered until the mosquitos came to bite. Our cleaning of the space involved vigilance for poisonous snakes and scorpion. We were regular visitors to the malaria clinic with dancers. For our celebrations Antelope were brought from the hunter for our fire; and wild fruit from the forest. Our bodies moved to squat on the earth by the charcoal fire to cook; to bend like the dancers with the 'praia' the traditional sweeping brush. We made a fetish object out of the large calabash we used to gather the company each day and each night to mark the beginning and ending of our day together. We worked outside with the cloth and new tie dye micro industry with the dancers' mothers, creating colourful cloth in traditional patterns for the set and the costumes. All around the trees and scrub outside the airy theatre the cloth dying and drying was dependent on the heat and intensity of the equatorial sun.



Fig. 2 The Calabash and Costumes: Broken Word Broken World.



Fig 3. Tie Dye cloth drying in the sun.

It is from this point, in the equatorial rain forest of Ghana, that we began to devise and improvise ways of researching multilingually which were also attempts at deconstructing the multilingual epistemologies both of the global north and of the urban settings, and recreate multilingualisms in a rural setting, peeling away the assumptions produced by systems of schooling and bureaucracy and state policies, about what languages are and the largely

neoliberal functions that language policies and choices in educational and public spaces might serve.

Around the theatre and our lodgings, the bird and insect life and the sounds of the forest were markedly intense to our urban-accustomed ears. No background roar of traffic, or hum of air-con, or clip of heels on concrete or linoleum. The noise of the town cryer in the morning, the soft pad of dancers' feet, the echo of drums off the vaulted roof of the theatre. Our 'field' was a noisy one, to be sure, but the sensuous dimensions of the equator and the ecology of the production were far from urban in character or agency. As we tuned in to a rhythm of day where the measure of day is equal to the measure of night; as we tuned in to our oral, multilingual methods which decentred the dominance of text and of literacy (Ong, 1982); and as we applied ourselves to the tasks of genuinely working multilingually, with all of our languages as part of the soundscape and working acoustics of our devising our acoustic diversity found a certain harmony with that of the field site. Where all around us were sounds of creatures whose languages we did not understand, the presence of languages of other humans we also did not understand was not jarring and quickly became habitual too.

At the time, in our daily debriefs, the team saw this as the success of our disciplined approach to placing the dominant language, English, last. It certainly played into our first two epistemic ruptures, of the rupture with the epistemologies of the Northern colonial centre and the rupture with the dominant language of this centre. Both of these ruptures instantiated what I am terming here 'equatorial epistemologies' – ones which aim at balance, at equity, at moderating the effects of the centre on the periphery and creating an ecology which would also find a balance, and a practice of reflection that would aim to re-balance. It is only through a return to the praxis that the significance of the urban rupture can be appreciated, and the rural situation of the equatorial rain forest comes in to view as a third, significant character and actor in decolonizing multilingualism and in working towards equatorial epistemologies by multilingual and sensuous means.

Conclusion: Practice-led Rural Multilingualisms

In attempting to understand what it was about the dominant epistemologies of the global north that would mean we failed to research multilingually Membe, writing in *The Postcolony*, states that:

We should first remind ourselves that as a general rule, the experience of the other or the problem of the eye of others and of human beings we perceive as foreign to us has always almost always posed virtually insurmountable difficulties to the Western philosophical and political tradition. (Mbembé, 2000)

It became clear engaging in post- and decolonial thought, that if we were going to begin to understand a multilingual world and embody this in the work of the academy, we were going to have to take seriously that the tools with which we've been trained, cognitively, in urban institutions, and the tools which imbue us the power within the western academy, were not sufficient. Taking on a certain degree of vulnerability and trying to work with what we did not know and could not know, is inimical to the trainings of linguistic proficiency, 'European Frameworks of Reference', of Duolingo's crowns, gems and leaderboards.

Additionally, it also became clear that we were somewhat insulated, in our urban settings, from the immediate effects of climate chaos, brought about by environmental crises within the Anthropocene (Gibson-Graham, 2010). Our extractivist activities over the last centuries, accelerating greatly in the last decades, upon the environment, have produced metaphors which we still use in our research – extracting data, analyzing it; mining it; with the situation today of big data – the bigger the data, it seems, the better.

These positivistic paradigms, which we've still not shaken off or relativized, even in a post-positivistic age, are part and parcel of what Santos has termed 'the cognitive empire' (Santos, 2018). They represent the kinds of urban epistemologies that produces the Anthropocene, that sustain exclusions and is predicated upon traditions of critique which have not produced change. In his theoretical work which attempts to break precisely the kind of multilingual research impasse we were finding ourselves stuck in, Santos proposes a shift to research framed within epistemologies of this south. His work goes beyond the concerns of epistemicide, or 'language death' and how this might be prevented to a praxis which draws together a range of fields into the metaphor of the South.

It is an epistemological, nongeographical South, composed of many epistemological souths, having in common the fact that they are all knowledges born struggles against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. They are produced wherever such struggles occur, in both the geographical North and geographical South. The objective of the epistemologies of the South is to allow the oppressed groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms, for only thus will they be able to change it according to their own aspirations. (Santos, 2018)

The structural epistemic violence of urban multilingual normativity meant that people in my secondary comprehensive school classroom who spoke Urdu or English never got a chance to learn to teach languages to me or to interact with me or with others in their mother languages. That was the academic violence of the school system, which continues across our university education systems as well, out with places other than perhaps, for example, though it's deeply implicated as well in this of us in London on one or two other institutes in the world. This violence is an urban production, of urban institutions and urban language policy making. It does not fully reach into all the peripheral language zones of the world but it has done very considerable harm as a colonial practice. To begin to decolonize our methods and language practice we also had to move out of the urban centres and working more indigenously, in the true sense of that work, i.e. as people on and of the land. To do this in the global south then we had to be in a rural township working with people who spoke with the languages of their land. To do this equatorially, without trying to enact a different rural linguistic idyll from a bygone era, we had to work with the full soundscape languages available to us in our company.

What is clear from my own analysis of the procedures of multilingualism in the Global North is that epistemologies of the South are also, more widely those of rurality. It is no accident that, for instance, Freire's work was focused on the Landless People's Movement, or that the work of the World Social Forum and also of UNESCO has increasingly embraced the perspectives of indigenous peoples' cultures and languages, as part of decolonizing and ethical practice. With rurality, the rhythm of the seasons, of the tenuous reach of electricity, especially in the South, comes a different sensuality and embodied knowledge. What such rural contexts produce are different kinds of sensuous epistemologies to those of linoleum corridors, high backed chairs, tables, a certain urban fashion and styling, and the back bent over the screen or microphone rather than the earth: embodied knowledges, pains and gut feelings, collective understandings, artistic

propositions, participatory action which are part of producing 'artisanal paths for artisanal futures' (ibid: 1).

What, then, is the relationship between a decolonizing agenda for languages, the centre and periphery, and rurality?

First, we can conclude from our example and failure, that the one place in our own work where it was possible to move into a playful, forgiving, less acutely audit-driven space was in the arts. The arts could distance themselves from the dominant forms of the bureaucratic centre – the forms, audits, surveys, data-bytes, linear plans. Secondly, the decolonizing approach required us to leave the Global North, both in terms of the metaphor and in actual fact. Thirdly, the work needed to be situated outside of the urban setting and to return in a real sense, to the field, to be work in and with the field. Through this final rupture we were able to break with some of the normativity of urban fetishism in favour of different, metaphorically equatorial sensualities.

By way of elaborating a set of statements of practice for our work which continues in this vein of production of performance across a variety of settings these are some basic principles we now attempt to apply:

- It matters that we move languages into a rural environment and are critical of the relationship of multilingualism to urban centres of colonial power.
- It matters that we open a space for devising, for play with the arts as process not as product.
- There is a sensuousness to embodied knowledge which reflects its settings.
- It matters that intentional multilingualism is practiced.
- Decentring linguistic power and urban normativity is crucial to creating spaces for decolonial practice.
- It must not matter that we will fail, in career terms, in the elaboration of a rural multilingual practice.
- Equatorial epistemologies offer a method, as metaphor, as well as a real, tested, setting, for decolonizing multilingual practice.
- Rural knowledge of time is not only linear, but solar, lunar, reflecting different epistemologies of time and equity.

Coda

Te Maramataka Turu

Atua Whakahaehae

Kia mau kit e nagārahu Ki te tūpato ka pai noa iho Kāre e whara

(Tāwhai, 2013)

Show prudence and caution and no harm will come.

The timescape of Te Maramataka Turu, the Māori lunar calendar, with its many inflections based on land and location across Aotearoa, offered the prelude to this chapter as it does the coda. The rhythms of the lunar calendar and their effects upon traditions of fishing and planting, of rest and frustration, of conceptions of what makes for good days and bad days in any given month offers a different epistemological frame to that of urban patterns, and streetlighting. The rich knowledge systems built around fishing and harvesting, planting and sowing in the proverbs used within kaupapa māori – māori ‘approaches or world view’ are significant sources of knowledge but they require both a humility and cautious, prudent, gradual approach by the scholars of the centres in the North. As Linda Smith (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) has insisted research must proceed with questions of indigeneity with utmost care and caution, and with leadership from indigenous peoples. If this is to be a way, as we found in our own work, that it will indeed need to submit, not to Je-s, but to the fickleness of the moon and her seasons.



Fig. 4 Turu.

References

- Abram, D. (1997). *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a more-than-human World*. New York: Vintage.
- Anyidoho, K. (2011). *The Place we Call Home*. Banbury: Ayebia Clarke Publishing.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Brueggemann, W. (1997). *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Augsburg: Fortress Press.
- Cavarero, A. (2005). *For More than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Pedagogy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ellis, E. (2006). Monolingualism: The Unmarked Case. *Estudios de Sociolingüística*, 7(2), 173-196.
- Faubion, J., & Marcus, G. E. (2009). *Fieldwork is not what it used to be: Learning Anthropology's method in a time of transition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Freire, P. (2006). *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Vol. 43rd). São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

- Gibb, R. I., Julian Danero. (2017). Breaking the silence (again): on language learning and levels of fluency in ethnographic research. *The Sociological Review*, 65(1). Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1467-954X.12389>
- Gibb, R. T., Anabel; Igelsias, Julian Danero. (2019). *Learning and Using Languages in Ethnographic Research*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. R., Gerda. (2010). An Economic Ethics for the Anthropocene. *Antipode*, 41(Supplement S1), 320-346. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.2009.00728.x
- Graeber, D. (2001). *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*. New York Palgrave.
- Graeber, D. (2004). *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Gramling, D. (2016). *The Invention of Monolingualism*. New York and London: Bloomsbury.
- Mbembé, J.-A. (2000). *De la postcolonie: essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine*: KARTHALA Editions.
- Ngugi wa, T. o. (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Kampala: East African Educational Publishers.
- Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and Literacy*. London and New York Routledge.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Phipps, A. (2013). Linguistic Incompetence: Giving an account of researching multilingually. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 23(3), 329-341.
- Phipps, A. (2019). *Decolonising Multilingualism: Struggles to Decreate*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Santos, B. d. S. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Santos, B. d. S. (2018). *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming Age of Epistemologies of the South*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Scarry, E. (1985). *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic Genocide in Education - or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Smith, L. T., & ProQuest. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples* (Second ed.). London, UK: Zed Books.
- Tāwhai, W. (2013). *Living by the Moon Te Maramataka a te Whānau-ā-Apanui*. Wellington, Aotearoa: Huia Publications.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Vol. 2nd). London: Zed Books.