

Anglocentrism in the Academy: On Linguistic Privilege, Mastery and *Hoito*

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Abstract

In this paper, we discuss the tacit agreement to use English as lingua franca in global academia. Our interest is in how Anglocentrism manifests within academic practices – seminars, conferences, and academic publishing – all of which are marked by neoliberal assumptions of mastery, quality, and efficacy. Drawing on autobiographical narratives, social media conversations, and literature, as well as recent discussions on conferencing and peer review practices, we analyse how historically shaped linguistic privilege and linguistic divides continue to be lived at the level of the body, affects and affective atmospheres. Language is not just language, rather, seemingly practical decisions about language always involve the aspects of material labour, time, money, and careers: they shape researcher subjectivities and entire domains of scientific knowledge. However, we also highlight the potentials nested in the emergence of *minor language* and the deterritorialising forces of humor. Articulating the speculative lines of *what if*, we propose more care-full academic linguistic practices.

Key words: Anglocentrism, linguistic privilege, academic practices, mastery, care, minor language

Suomen kieli
on minulle ikkuna ja talo
minä asun tässä kielessä.
Se on minun ihoni.

*Finnish language
is my window and my house
I inhabit this language.
It is my skin.*

(Pentti Saarikoski, cited in Berner, 1986, p. 70)

In today's global academia, the tacit agreement is to use English language in practically all communication manifesting in conferences, international networks and academic publications. Illustrative is the estimated use of English in academic journals, which is somewhere between 75% and 90%, depending on the discipline (Curry & Lillis, 2017). In this paper, we argue that language is never just language. When making choices concerning language, we also choose ways of distributing material labour, generating knowledge and meanings, and creating and supporting careers. Academic linguistic practices are historically charged, shaped by colonialist, individualistic ideas, and Whiteness, and they reflect Eurocentric normative ideals of knowledge production (Bozalek, Zembylas & Shefer, 2019; Truman, 2019b). They continue to shape academic subjects and entire scientific domains. The current neoliberal knowledge economy provides the frame for viewing academic publications as a measurable commodity reflecting a nation state's economic activity and ability to generate knowledge. The ideal of the free flow of knowledge facilitated by a shared linguistic medium is rendered utopian and false when we consider the negative consequences that *not* publishing in English carries for scholars, such as being passed over for promotion, not being considered eligible to supervise doctoral students or to receive research funding (Curry & Lillis, 2017.)

We are two early career researchers who have come to realize how Anglocentrism works as a difference between us – one coming from a small linguistic minority globally (Finnish¹), and the other a native English speaker born in Canada. We acknowledge the privilege granted to us by our white, Western backgrounds and able body-minds. We also think that linguistic privilege should be paid attention to as one dimension of the interplay in which professional trajectories are created and academic subjects shaped. We got to know each other in a seminar in Manchester, and since then have met frequently in terms of formal or more informal gatherings, engaging in

¹ Finnish, member of the Uralic family of languages, differs from English and all the other Nordic languages in many ways, most visibly because of the exclusive use of suffixal affixation. Further grammatical differences include lack of definite/indefinite articles (a, the) in Finnish, as well as the lack of separate prepositions and gender-specific pronomina. In the Eurowestern perspective, Finnish is small and exotic, but globally only one of thousands of small (under 10 million speakers) languages. (Finnic languages. Wikipedia)

conversations, sharing experiences, and circulating texts between each other. While English language allowed us to get to know each other in the first place (and write this article together), we argue for critical attention to the fact that a researcher's relation to this language impacts everything they can do or desire in the academy. Linguistic privilege intersects in complex ways with other privileges, such as neurotypicality, white privilege, or cisgender privilege, just as linguistic disadvantages intersect with other marginalized positions. Adopting an intersectional approach, which stems originally from Black feminism and Critical Race theory, we want to address the ways language operates as part of these "simultaneous, intersecting, inseparable, coterminous and multiple forces of oppression" (Chadwick, 2017, cited in Horton & Kraftl, 2018, p. 938; see also Staunæs, 2003). Just as other marginalizing forces, language politics need to be talked about, as language is something we essentially *live by* (Levisen, 2018).

Recently, scholars have brought up important critical insights into normalized academic practices. Bozalek and colleagues (2019) discussed anonymous peer-reviewing of manuscripts as a practice located in a tradition of critique and individual contestation stemming from colonialist and humanist hegemonies in the academy. Benozzo and colleagues (2019) deployed experimental spatial interventions and experimental writing modes to disturb the routines, regularities, and striated spaces that constitute what they call AcademicConferenceMachine. Osgood and colleagues (2020) presented a series of collective interventions toward "conferencing otherwise". These scholars brought up how conferences are difficult spaces in which academics are required to undertake considerable emotional, physical, and academic labor in attempts to "fit in" and to perform the unspoken rules of the conferencing game that tends to privilege the White, Western, middle-class unencumbered male academic. Complementing the above presented perspectives, we focus on the role of both written and spoken language within several normative and "sedimented" academic practices. The theoretical lens of feminist new materialisms (Bennett, 2010; Barad, 2007; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Truman, 2019a), which grants agency to beings beyond humans, such as technologies and architectures, helps us to examine the relational and material detail of these situations, and to account for academic subjects as dynamic *becomings* with other humans, nonhumans and inhuman forces.

Our interest is in how linguistic divides are lived and experienced in particular situations – how these situations involve privilege, how they mobilize particular affects and how they distribute capacities. When talking about affect, we foreground the relational, discursive and socio-spatial mediation and articulation of emotions (Zembylas, 2016) and the dynamics in which "(e)motions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 119). Feminist scholars have suggested that oppression is often carried out at an affective level (Ahmed, 2004; Cvetkovich, 2012). These theorists have opened up ways in which power relations work through affect and shape individual and social bodies, as well as (re)produce dominant social and political hierarchies and structures, which often are linked to the legacies of colonialism and racism (Zembylas, 2018). When locating privilege based on an analysis of affects, it

is important to note that not all the emotions and feelings involved are clear or shared by everyone. Rather, they can become felt as “sticky” emotions (Ahmed, 2004; 2010): emotions that manifest for example as nagging discomfort or inarticulate feelings of incapability rather than being strong or overwhelming. Gatherings of affects, spaces, and bodies can also become felt as *atmospheres* which can be shifting, conflicting or ephemeral (Stewart, 2011, Anderson & Ash, 2015), and yet compose force fields that have clear ethical/political consequences. The perspective of affects and atmospheres *situates* the politics of academic practices in place and time, offering new sensitivities towards the ways materials and discourses create force fields in situations, enabling some thing or some body to become capacious while preventing other capabilities to become (Clough, 2007; Truman, 2021).

Our essay proceeds in a zigzagging manner through empirical materials including autobiographical memories and narratives and social media conversations, as well as inspiration drawn from literature and poetry. Our intention is to think with care about the complexities of linguistic practices, and to promote critical but hopeful visions of the possibilities for academe being “otherwise” (Osgood et al., 2020). To this end, we interrupt the analyses with occasional speculative “fault lines” (Osgood et al., 2020), asking **what if** and **what else** (in bold font), and addressing more directly the Anglophone readers. Paraphrasing Bozalek and colleagues (2019), we ask: *How can we see academic language practices as processes that are framed by an ethics of care and community? How can we acknowledge our own becoming-with and capacity as an academic through engaging with care-full language practices in the academy?*

Privilege

Sarah:

‘Speak English,’ the voice booms across the tram. ‘Speak English or go back where you came from.’ ‘They can speak whatever language they choose.’ I say. ‘You shut up too, what are you American?’ He approaches me. ‘They should speak English if they want to live in England.’ The women climb off the tram at the next stop.

I’ve observed the same vitriolic imperative to ‘Speak English’ yelled at people speaking other languages in Canada and Australia – typically emanating from the mouth of a white Anglophone toward a person of colour. The violence of imperialism, ongoing settler colonization, and white supremacy are immanent in the imperative ‘Speak English’ in Anglo-dominant spaces like Canada, Australia, and the UK. But a similar imperialism reveals itself in other contexts where English is not the dominant language. How many times have I heard English screech across markets, restaurants or shops in Nanjing or Bangkok when an Anglophone didn’t want to pay a certain price, or needed help finding their way? The less English the local person speaks, the louder the volume of English emitted from the Anglophone, as if volume has the capacity to translate. And it does translate – it translates as the bombastic tone of privilege.

While not all these interactions are perhaps deliberately antagonistic, English has a singular gravity, an affective weight in social interactions as it becomes the default language of business, travel, and academe. The angry Anglophone yelling 'Speak English' is violent, racist, and crass, while an insidious and coercive assimilation is also enacted through English's omnipresence in seemingly convivial spaces such as academic conferences and publishing.

Anglo privilege and its effects in academia has been discussed across several disciplines during the recent decade. In his commentary 'Awkward Wording. Rephrase': Linguistic Injustice in Ecological Journals, Clavero (2010) brought up the difficulty of achieving the linguistic precision required by high-ranking publications and claimed that there is an intrinsic difference in the probability of having the paper accepted between Native English speakers and Non-native English speakers. Pronskikh (2018) claims that the chance of acceptance for papers by authors whose first language is not English is approximately 30 percent lower than that for papers authored by native English speakers. Despite the relative agreement that perceived (il)legitimacy of knowledge is compounded by the dominance of English in academe (Kubota, 2020), there are also voices that challenge the significance of linguistic background. Hyland (2016) calls the Anglo privilege a myth or an "orthodox" that is not adequately supported by evidence. For him, based on surveys and interviews, the Native-non-Native distinction does not explain publishing success, and he thinks that making this distinction dangerously both discourages English as second language authors and obscures the challenges faced by native English-speaking authors. In their response to Hyland, Politzer-Ahles and colleagues (2016) remind that privilege does *not* entail that everything is easy for a member of this privileged group, or that nothing a privileged individual accomplishes was earned. They continue that language injustice might not be easily observable, but this should motivate even more empirical research on its consequences, just as increasing awareness of other societal privileges has driven increases in empirical study on those (Politzer-Ahles et al., 2016).

Neoliberal academia relies on individualistic competition and assumes authoritative expertise. This puts increasing pressure on academics to produce publications and conference papers quickly and prolifically, with emphasis on quantity rather than quality (Bozalek et al., 2019.) Tronto's (2013) feminist ethics of care combined with Barad's (2007) diffractive methodology offers Bozalek and colleagues a direction in which to think otherwise about publishing practices, especially peer reviewing and its ethical implications. These authors suggest thinking about texts as material and something that matters in how academics are constructed as subjects in the academy. They propose perceiving peer review processes as situations in which reviewer, reviewee and the text are rendered capable (Despret, 2008) or become-with one another (Haraway, 2016) through interacting with one another's ideas.

The imperatives of productivity and efficacy included in academic work materialize differently

depending on circumstances. Tronto (1993, see also Zembylas et al., 2014) talks about the easiness and effortlessness of experiences belonging to privilege as *privileged irresponsibility* – a politics in which the group-in-power fails to acknowledge the exercise of their power, thus maintaining their taken-for-granted positions of privilege. In the academy, the affective state of *privileged irresponsibility* becomes a precondition for the expected productivity, however, it is not available equally for all.

I am not brave.

The usual one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one format of presenting at conferences is so easy to fall into; to obey. It functions as the way of conferring, albeit the verbal language privileges some. Not me. The enjoyable stream of words lull us into being good academics. I share with colleagues how to do conferencing, experienced, how to be a good academic. I do not follow my own advice. I seldom resist the usual conference format, even though it is problematic. The enormous amount of work that it would take to do it differently is almost too much. (Osgood et al., 2020, p. 605)

Within the usual conference format, “the enjoyable stream of words” produces “good academics” (Osgood et al., 2020, see above) – yet, how does the English-as-an-additional-language speaker fit in? The neoliberal logic is complete when its affective costs fall on the shoulders of individuals. The affects become felt individually as exhaustion, incapability, and shame in the face of the “enormous amount of work” that it takes to do scholarship differently.

Mastery

Riikka:

I am a PhD student, and attending a conversation group in an international summer school. I am an enthusiastic newcomer to the topic, new materialist theories. The milieu is perfectly “academic”: clean, neat, well-lit. The wall-to-wall carpet softens all the voices, and the hum coming from air-conditioning accompanies the conversation. I don’t speak. Haven’t done so for a long time, because all my energy goes to trying to listen and keeping on track with the topic. The pace and the register of the conversation is defined by the voices of fluent English speakers. Sitting there, feeling outsider, getting tired, I hear one word being repeated over again: Sandwich. A sandwich. Deleuze and Guattari’s sandwich theory...? This is getting very material indeed! Why do they talk about sandwiches? It is only after the seminar that I realise what the repeated word had to be – a concept quite essential to the theory in question: assemblage.

Riikka has told the sandwich/assemblage story in many occasions, and each time it gets a good laugh. It is, however, a story that deserves further thought, as Sarah insisted when she heard the story. Why was it unthinkable for Riikka to interrupt the situation, to ask people to speak slower

and louder? Or to suggest that the chairs would be moved closer to each other to facilitate better hearing? According to Anderson and Ash (2015), each situation can involve numerous affects or affective atmospheres that can touch, contact, and rub up against one another. Atmospheres can exist beneath the thresholds of humans' conscious awareness and they do not necessarily become felt for everyone at all, but even so, they condition everyday life and politics by becoming part of how situations and events happen (Stewart, 2011). The seminar in the example above is a gathering of "good academics" (Osgood et al., 2020) and the atmosphere in the room assumes academic mastery. The atmosphere of academic mastery is not so much an individual quality, rather, it is something produced in the "hanging together" of several elements: the well-equipped seminar room, its materials, colors, light and air, as well as the specific discursive and embodied habits shared by those present. Privileged irresponsibility (Tronto, 1993) is visible in that when someone in the group stays silent for the entire discussion, the ones comfortable with the pace and register of the interaction do not pay attention. It would be for Riikka to interrupt and actively suggest something else. Instead, just like in the example by Osgood et al (2020) quoted above, she chooses to keep awkward disturbances out, doing her part in maintaining the atmosphere as smooth, ongoing, efficient, academically correct.

A speculative and hopeful potential lies in the understanding that academic practices and situations cannot be fully known in advance: the consequences of these atmospheric assemblages remain always open to some extent. The in-betweens or the "middles" of assemblages are fields of variation, places where things can grow, expand and pick up speed (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Such speculative middles (Springgay & Truman, 2018) can be put to work as sites of political transformation through attending to the tensions and frictions (Puar, 2012) at the intersections of societally and historically shaped differences. The speculative middle, seen *frictionally* (Puar, 2012), is a difficult place to be, as it calls for responsiveness and agitation. This kind of approach shifts the purpose of critical research from producing accounts from an outsider position to a way of being in the world that is experimental, and (in)tension (Springgay & Truman, 2018). Like Bozalek and colleagues (2019), we believe that changing the "sedimented" ways of neoliberal academic practices, turning them "around and about in ways which open it up to multiplicities" (Benozzo et al., 2019), can be a way of challenging neoliberal academia. When intervening with material and bodily routines, and articulating the tensions within academic atmospheres, we are intervening the everyday business of the academy in places where change might be at its most difficult.

What if we tried to *think with care* about seminars and other academic events? **What if** we attended more care-fully to the atmospheres of particular situations – tensions, silences, sounds, lights, body movements and sensations – thus resisting the notion of academic work as mere "brain work". What if we became attentive to how atmospheres at times rub against each other gesturing to tensions and frictions, which might be the places where political change becomes possible?

What else? Architectures and materials matter: if the event takes place in a big hall or the room has lots of echo, it becomes difficult to hear. This has an adverse impact on disabled academics. Big crowds and audiences can also prevent the full participation of non-native speakers. What if we asked people to talk in smaller groups to facilitate wonderings, questions, interruptions? How do technologies participate in the situation? How are different atmospheres at work in online conversations? The time of the Covid-19 pandemic has complicated linguistic differences, as conversations over an internet connection can be much more demanding for those not operating in one's native tongue (while close captions provided online can help disabled audience members and translation software might assist non-native speakers).

Affect and capacity

Affects and affective atmospheres offer us a way to account for emotions as part of social fabric, and to examine how they work as collective and pre-personal forces that do things beyond the intentions of individuals (Ahmed, 2004; Zembylas, 2016). Through focusing on affect in situations involving language, we can approach the ways they extend or decrease the capacity of bodies, defining what a 'body' can do (Clough, 2007). For examining the 'tacit agreement' of English as *lingua franca* (Levisen, 2018), it is important take into account how power and its strategies are frequently invisible in everyday life interactions (Zembylas, 2016). Yet, in closer examination, power relations can be felt as subtle discomforts and nagging affects that manifest as silences, absences, or feelings of muteness. Often these affects can only be in retrospect traced back to linguistic power relations.

Riikka:

Academic situations in which I need to speak English nowadays go quite well. But a certain unpredictability remains. It is always different how my vocabulary is available or how my body works when I don't feel safe. Will I this time find the right way to raise the pitch of my voice when asking a question? Does my tongue pronounce the right version of 'th'? Do I remember to use 'he', 'she', and 'they' correctly?

The body parts involved in producing speech are the ones that sustain life at the most fundamental level. Throat, tongue, teeth. When I get nervous and the adrenalin rushes in, these organs fail, and all I'm left with is dry mouth, trembling voice and lungs getting out of breath. If I nevertheless speak up, heart beating wild, I am likely to fail in finding words, even familiar ones. Shame. Until very recently, this emotion has haunted me, waking me up even in the middle of the night, offering lively replays of my slowness and clumsiness in situations of speaking English.

Singh (2018) talks about linguistic mastery as an ability to have control over a complex combination of colonial and power relations. In the competitive academic climate, in which the

slightest of nuances are used to justify rankings, inclusions and exclusions, language becomes easily understood in terms of individual “skills”, and as mere tools for communication. From the point of view of affect, however, languages are not only media for expressing thoughts, but they have a sensing function. Entangled with capacities and energies, they are involved in becoming-with the world beyond the spheres of communication. In his poem, Pentti Saarikoski (at the beginning of this paper) coined the metaphor of a house when talking about language. For the poet, language is a window, a tool for *seeing*, but also a place in which to live: *se on minun kotini*, “it is my home”. Being at home: a mode of breathing, dwelling, being at ease, an affective dimension of existence that we identify at once in its absence, such as in the seminar room situation above. While academic discourse patterns can be tiresome and difficult for anyone (Hyland, 2016), we are thinking about a specific *homelessness* familiar to those who do not have the option of working (living) in their own language. Uncovering the tensions between mastery and linguistic backgrounds does not mean to perpetuate an essentializing, simplified notion of “nativeness” as the sole producer of linguistic privilege, rather, for us, it is a way to approach the phenomenon in all its political complexity. Singh (2018) writes that questions of mastery cannot be asked before they emerge in situations. For us, re-narrating the “sandwich” episode created an estrangement, which enabled us to explore the situation as a “matter of care” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) in all its three dimensions – the materiality of labour, the affective dimension, and the dimension of ethics and politics.

What if we attuned more care-fully to how mastery becomes constructed in situations? What if we centered on enhancing *capacity* instead of performing mastery or competence? **What if** we made it into a habit to ask people if they feel comfortable or *at home* in academic events?

What else? We need to use our imagination. How does a care-full situation feel like? How does mastery feel like? At the moment of writing our research papers, can we resist the will and pressure to perform academic mastery? Is it possible instead to become aware of diverse audiences and cultivate simplicity, even incompleteness? Often simplicity can clarify and strengthen the text. If you are a native English speaker, take care in the length of the sentences and chapters – open up what you mean by complicated concepts – this can in turn bring thinkers together and enhance the impact of your own text. It is about creating contact zones, or ‘sticky-knots’ (Haraway, 2008) that bind us to other people, and ideas, and generate further thought. Find help from technology and work together to make meaning in challenging language moments with non-native speakers. Practice estrangement; experiment in making yourself uncomfortable once.

Time / money

Riikka:

At an international conference. The session is packed, and I am waiting for my turn to speak. The American presenter before me does the common thing, tries to fit a full paper in fifteen minutes. With no visuals, I am soon lost. The situation is familiar, as is the habitual

self-blame (I did not read enough, I did not try hard enough, I am not competent). But when this presentation ends, I ask the presenter if he is aware that there are non-native English speakers present and tell him that his dense paper with no visuals is likely to leave them completely out. The presenter is embarrassed. I am astonished that I actually said anything. He apologizes.

Sarah:

I was in the conference room when Riikka told that other speaker that he could have used slides and considered that there were non-native English speakers in the room. Considering the conference was held in Belgium, this should not have been a surprise. Yet he was surprised. After the session Riikka and several other colleagues from different European countries discussed (in English of course for the Anglophones' benefit) how difficult it is for them to follow all of us. I was co-presenting a Plenary that very evening and my colleague and I went back to the hotel and re-wrote it and re-worked the slides and promised to speak slowly. I'm not saying this so I can be congratulated, I'm saying it because it's ridiculous that we, too, hadn't considered how difficult we might be to follow.²

We know that many Anglophones have learned other languages and are fluent in them. And that many native English speakers have struggled when learning academic English, which is no-one's first language (Hyland, 2016). But we don't think we are being harsh saying most Anglophones don't think about their linguistic privilege enough. They fail recognizing language as much else than just a tool, and they fail to attune to the ways in which language is concomitant other privileges such as white privilege, ability, socioeconomic privilege, and the privilege of time. By privilege of time, we refer to the concrete hours and years spent learning languages and the time spent for preparing papers, texts and talks. Privilege of time involves privileged irresponsibility in that native English speakers do not even need to think about the fact that English as a second language speakers write their work in *lingua franca-English* or attend entire conferences in *lingua franca-English* in order to be heard in academe. For Riikka, it was not quite clear in advance that her work as an academic would be conducted almost entirely in her second/third language. We might contemplate what it means for her, temporally, that even if she studied English in school since she was ten, she still struggles with feelings of linguistic incompetence, checking and double-checking phrases and words in dictionaries, and sending manuscripts to be language edited before submitting them. This also is where linguistic privilege is connected to knowledge capitalism: private sector language businesses thrive. As for Finland, most universities cover the costs of using them for their employees, but precarious short-term working relations and periods of working on grants complicate the situation.

² Accessibility for disabled people should be prioritized when making slide shows and giving presentations.

And when the publication is out in English, a question follows: how is the domestic audience going to get to know about Riikka's work? In addition to the temporal investment in writing in English, researchers coming from other than English-speaking countries face the pressure of publishing in their own language, too, which in practice means to lead a second career situated in a second linguistic environment (Curry & Lillis, 2017).

What if we raised the issue of Anglocentrism in conversation more often? When an agreement is tacit (Levisen, 2018) it is resistant to change. Speaking about linguistic difference as one difference among others might help to rupture privileged irresponsibility, and change attitudes from shame toward valuing the ability of speaking multiple languages. What if the costs that fall on non-native English speakers were acknowledged and taken into account when creating budgets and timelines for international applications and events?

What else? It is not wise to skip using visuals in conference presentations – you will likely miss the attention and comprehension of part of the audience. Often slides with key concepts and references will do (on the other hand do not pack the slides with text, and if you have visuals, you should describe them). The all-too-usual habit of squeezing a full article in the 15-20 min slot of a conference presentation undermines non-native speakers, as well as disabled people – and the paper as well to be frank! Be ready to slow down with speaking according to your audience. Think about your audience as diverse from the very beginning; in addition to many linguistic backgrounds in the audience, pay attention to cultural differences, neurodiversity, and more.

What else? The agreement to use English in all communication is indeed tacit (Levisen, 2018) - a silent one, we realize, as we so clearly remember the few times the whole issue has been brought up³. There is something mutual in the dynamic around this agreement – in our examples, the hegemony of English is maintained both by the privileged fluent (mostly) native English speakers *and* the English-as-a-second-language speaker coming from a far corner of Northern Europe. **What if** we really tried to break this sedimented condition?

Wild language – the potentials of the minor

The pleasure of thinking and writing is an important driving force behind academic work. But to create a pleasurable relationship to one's second or third language is something native English speakers in the academy mostly do not need to worry about. Deleuze and Guattari (1986) wrote about *minor literature*, referring to the language constructed by minority within a major language.

³ One of these occasions was some years ago when Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, Swedish professor and childhood scholar, in the middle of a keynote lecture raised her head saying she wanted everybody to know that to learn Deleuzian conceptual vocabulary and to create own work based on it may well take ten times longer for non-native English speakers compared to native ones. (Ironically Deleuze wrote *in* French, but his ideas circulate *in* English in the academy.)

The idea of *minor* gestures to the speculative middles of linguistic practices - the spaces in-between two languages that occasionally allow the emergence of wild potentials for creating something new. Greek novelist Theodor Kallifatides (2001) describes this in connection with learning a new language in his new home country Sweden: *'In the beginning (. . .) I threw myself over the new language like a starving dog on a juicy piece of meat. I ate up Swedish. I filled my mouth with words, chewed them, and swallowed them.'* (p. 51). Languages are not only about cognitive structures but also about matter and body, and they involve the 'wild element' of sense that makes it exceed propositional meaning and resist the laws of representation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; MacLure, 2013). In line with this, Kallifatides (2001, p. 51) continues: *'As a writer, I have never been freer than in these first poems, when writing was not bound by banalities like meaning, signification and intention.'* (cited in Martín-Bylund, 2018, p. 23.)

The deterritorializing forces of *becoming-minor* within language offer us one more way of imagining how to intervene with masterful academic practices. Even if this force is likely to be initiated by those belonging to marginalized language groups when engaging with the dominant language, it is possible for the native English speaker, too, to operate as 'a sort of stranger *within* his [sic] own language' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 26). We do not intend to suggest any straightforward politics based on "becoming-minor" - it is no business of those in power to tell others to become minor. However, the productive possibilities nested in minor language could be actualized as means of rupturing the pervasive, suffocating assumptions concerning scientific quality and professionalism. This kind of work is not easy, as it grows from marginalization, and it means both risking our academic subjectivities and putting the inclusiveness and the resilience of the academic world to serious test, when forcing a negotiation of historically shaped conventions, norms and values.

Calls from reviewers implying "Awkward wording. Rephrase." (Clavero, 2010) are all too familiar to Riikka: for her, it is not rare to be advised to have the paper language edited even if it already was language edited! But there are (rarely) other kinds of readers, too. When Riikka and colleagues, none of whom spoke English as their first language, compiled a special issue in an international journal, one of the reviewers suggested that instead of taking the normal language editing routine the issue could 'celebrate the variation of English language'. The editorial team saw this as an invitation to political action in terms of academic linguistic practices – one, that could be risky for individuals but possible as feminist and collective action (Gunnarsson & Hohti, 2018). For an example of "minor English" put to work in autoethnographic research, see how Hanna Guttorm (2018) poetically writes in two languages about her personal journey to her Sàmi inheritance, neither of the languages being her first.

A session in another conference. Riikka, already somewhat empowered by the encouraging discussions she has had during the writing this article, once again comments upon tight packed papers read aloud in exhausting speed. She can hear a Norwegian colleague sitting

beside whisper “yes!” The presenter is sounding offended when replying that the session was one characterized by an affirmative atmosphere, Riikka was all the time free to interrupt – didn’t she know that? Another presenter comes to Riikka after the session to say, you know, invited by a famous thinker to a session (herself being present), it was not easy... everyone just tried to do their best...

There is no safe space. Where academic merit and careers are at stake, privileged irresponsibility thrives, mostly unnoticed and unacknowledged. It becomes the responsibility of the one who is least privileged to guarantee the seamless academic performance. Once again, time and energy are involved:

In the evening, when the other participants of the conference went dancing after dinner, Riikka returns to her room. Exhausted from stretching her senses the entire day. Besides, she still has to rehearse reading her paper that she is going to present the next morning.

What if conference sessions were reconfigured as situations in which all the participants are rendered capable or become-with one another? What would it look like if these practices were committed to care-full attentiveness, responsibility/accountability, and responsiveness? What creativity might be needed in order to render each other capable, rather than attacking the scholarship of the other (Bozalek et al., 2019.)

What if we were more cautious not to equal linguistic privilege with skills or competence? In the role of reviewer, consider your suggestions concerning language more carefully. What if we tried to enhance our tolerance towards multiple languages and versions of languages in academic events? In the middle space between the English-speaking academics from different backgrounds, we might make space for variation. What if we sensitized ourselves to how non-native speakers speak and spoke accordingly?

What else? Haraway (2008) requests that we become response-able through creating ‘sticky-knots’ that bind us to other critters, people, and ideas. It is through such encounters that we learn to respond differently because *once we know we will no longer be able to not know*. With this knowledge we charge ourselves and our fellow Anglophone colleagues to do better.

Imperial language, colonizing concepts

‘When you study language, any language, you learn quickly that you do not possess it. To the contrary, the study of language and literature is precisely the study of how language escapes, evades, and crystallizes differently at different times and through different speakers (. . .)’ (Singh, 2018, p. 90).

Concepts are gatherings of discourses, histories and material and embodied knowledge. The power of concepts lies in their *becoming* nature – their capacity to shift the conditions of existence by affecting everything around them (Manning, 2020; Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). When

connected with conceptual power, single words of a given language can initiate entire domains of knowledge. In his study 'Biases we live by', Levisen (2018) argues that there is an Anglocentric metalinguistic discourse in the academy that remains rarely mentioned or debated. He examines three examples of Anglo concepts that dominate international discourse on language and cognition, producing heavily 'Anglicized' scientific domains: 'the mind', which has led to the Anglicisation of global discourse of human personhood; 'happiness', mounting to the Anglicisation of the global discourse of human values; and 'community' which shapes the global discourse of human sociality. He brings up how a closer examination of corresponding concepts within two other languages (Danish and Pacific Bislama), denaturalize the assumed neutrality of these English words. The unruly becomings of concepts (Manning, 2020) and the difficulties related their adoption and translation highlight the impossibility of creating genuinely global academic language practices. The concept of *assemblage* by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is a case in point: the translation *agencement* emerged in texts by Paul Foss and Paul Patton in 1981 and was retained in Brian Massumi's later English version of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Since then many (albeit not all) translators and commentators have continued in a loose consensus to keep to this early translation of *agencement* as 'assemblage', while acknowledging that the translation is not really a good approximation (Phillips, 2006).

Riikka starts a conversation in social media about the difficulties non-native English speakers face in prevailing Anglocentric academia. "Language is not just language!" she claims. She also shares that in the pandemic, she feels she has become less and less productive and wonders if this has to do with the situation in which she now never interacts with English-speaking colleagues but still continues to work in English. *You feel me?* she asks, and the response is overwhelming. *"I truly feel you! I have regretted so many times for promising to write the doctoral dissertation in English! Sooooo slow!"* (a Finnish doctoral student going to defend her thesis in couple of weeks). *"Feeling right now so incompetent trying to write"* (professor). A fellow postdoc brings out other aspects: *"Yes, it's slow and painful. However, I see some pros, too: writing in a non-native language forces me to be simple (or use simpler language than I would in Finnish) and thus concentrate on what is essential. It also allows a sort of distance between me and my text, which I find sometimes useful in terms of argumentation."* This comment gets likes and "smiles": *"Humbled by my own clumsiness - oh what a lovely learning experience!"* One of Riikka's colleagues raises the issue of different languages producing different knowledge: *"I'm not sure that the end result as such is necessarily so different in a way that I can express same things in Finnish or English and it doesn't really limit what to write down, but rather the language shapes the whole process of writing so much that it might lead to very different end result"* Another says that he actually feels divided by half when living and working between two languages, which both are in a way his first: his native language Finnish, and English, which is his first language in the academy.

The last couple of the comments highlight how Anglocentrism works at the level of scientific knowledge and the production of academic subjects. The experience of lacking essential concepts

when shifting back to her native language is familiar to Riikka. A divided existence between two languages but also two conceptual spheres makes her at times wonder how phenomena actually exist across contexts – are they translatable at all? For example, to talk in Finnish about ‘care’, Riikka needs to use many different words (*hoiva, hoito, huolenpito, hoitaminen*) to reach the conceptual dimensions present in the feminist theory of care (e.g. Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). New materialist theories are quite new in the educational scene in Finland. When Riikka and her colleagues talk in Finnish about, for example, Barad’s (2007) agential realism, they translate concepts as they go. This is a creative, even if demanding space. Those who move between two languages are familiar with the ways in which sense, matter, body and imagination – chewing and tasting words – are involved in the processes of translating concepts. However, this also is something scholars coming from English-speaking countries rarely need to give a thought.

When talking about Anglocentrism, we are talking about ongoing imperialism in the linguistic sphere. Linguistic colonization takes many forms. For Black people, Anti-Black Linguistic Racism entails emotional harm, linguistic violence, persecution, dehumanization, and marginalization, as Baker-Bell (2020) brings out. For Riikka, who otherwise is multiply privileged as a white European, the colonizing dimension manifests in the moments she needs to bend and force Finnish words into a research framework based on English concepts, knowing they do not fit. Or in the moments when she, lecturing or talking to students, notices that English words have invaded her vocabulary and she gets lost when trying to express herself in Finnish.

What else? A text written with care is at once recognizable for someone coming from a linguistic minority. It is a text that takes the reader by the hand and avoids the masterful note for mastery’s sake. Do not take English for granted. Even if it is likely that English is being used in international contexts, the decision can always be discussed first. If you are an editor, publish a special issue or section of your international journal in another language. Get funding to translate your English scholarship into another language. Listen beyond faults and discomfort and find the potentials nested in becoming-minor. Remember that competitive academia makes us believe that everybody else writes more easily and quickly and publishes much more. **What if** we actively resisted this neoliberal legend? **What if** we sensitized ourselves to linguistic divides especially in moments that are of importance for careers? For example, situations in which professional networks are formed – does anyone stay out because of language? Note that this is often concomitant with exclusion based on race, ethnicity, neuroatypicality, or other forms of difference.

What else? Talking about one privilege does not mean to ignore others. Because of the imperialist status of English, even a privileged Nordic scholar can experience the legacy of colonization in complex ways.

Unthinking mastery – laughter, hoito and care

At its most intimate level, linguistic difference shapes our researcher subjectivities.

Arnsbjörnsdóttir and colleagues (2017) draw the attention to the task of developing a voice in academic writing in their analysis of the experiences of Icelandic scholars. They discuss the hampering effects of the tensions felt by scientists who write for an international audience in a language they see as distant from their ways of thinking. They argue that choosing to write in English might also exclude access to the local community affected by the research results. Riikka becomes aware that her constant negotiations concerning language have affected her work perhaps more than she has realized:

My English whispers me where to get involved. Partly subconsciously, it guides me where to go when making choices concerning literature to read, topics and theories to engage with. Then: Can I argue? Can I insist? These stances are not my favourite ones when writing a paper. I never felt at home with what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call ‘royal science’, instead, I have found territories of comfort in narrative and poetic modes that do not submit to the hierarchies of grammar and authoritative mastery. It is in the registers of small stories or “bag lady stories” (Hohti, 2018) that I feel at home, when writing in English. But then, perhaps, “minor” English, different from the masterful scientific discourse, has benefitted me when doing research among children or animals – those “minor players” (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2018).

Finally, we return where we started when beginning to talk about the sandwich/assemblage confusion: the broken lines within linguistic between-spaces. The ruptures made by humor and the specific poetics that emerges with the deterritorializations of minor language. There is hardly a more effective antidote to mastery than “the grace of laughter”, to refer to Nietzsche. Both Riikka and Sarah observe that they are much more slapstick when speaking languages that are not their own.

Sarah:

In 2018, when Riikka invited me to Finland to speak in a seminar, ‘hoito’ was the only Finnish word I knew. I knew hoito meant ‘care,’ and I knew that it must be a good word based on the status of The Hoito Restaurant, in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The Hoito is a famous co-operative that was built in 1918 to serve the Finnish migrant loggers. I had eaten at The Hoito on several occasions during drives around Lake Superior.

I was out with Riikka and several other colleagues for dinner, when I, like a typical Anglophone announced, ‘I know a Finnish word: I’d be happy to provide some hoito (care) for anyone who needs it tonight.’ The table exploded in laughter. Turns out in the 100 years since The Hoito restaurant was founded in Canada, the term hoito has acquired different

meanings within Finland. Hoito now might also be used to describe the comforts provided by a short-term sexual exchange. As Riikka explained, Hoitaa/hoidella (verbs) can mean dealing with something as a 'final solution.' The bawdy-hoito-humour continued all evening, and the following days through our seminars, and saunas. We mused about how linguistic spaces shift and change over time: the histories, potentials and forces of concepts, as well as dead-ends that words can lead us to and absurdity of semantics, syntax and vocabulary in academe.

While Sarah's Finnish colleagues had a great time teasing her about *hoito*, we think it's important to note within the context of Riikka's narratives that as an Anglophone who speaks other languages very poorly (or not at all), Sarah rarely feels humiliated by her lack of mastery. We believe this is a function of Anglocentrism: the weight of English skills measuring worth only in relation to themselves. And consequently, Sarah's inadequacy in other languages not having a detrimental effect on *her* life in the academy. We discussed these knotted aspects of language and privileges (also those of whiteness and ability) throughout the time Sarah was visiting Finland (in English of course).

Concluding thoughts

In this paper, we have explored academic language practices, attuning to how these practices always involve 'something else': things, bodies, ideas, politics, as well as affects and atmospheres – how language is never just language. We analyzed the ways in which these practices as affective assemblages merge with imperialist and universalist discourses and the assumptions of mastery reinforced by current neoliberal academic politics. We paid attention to the ways in which angers, discomforts, affective undercurrents and silences, most of which hidden-in-plain-sight as 'sticky' emotions (Ahmed, 2014), continue to shape the capacities of the participants of particular situations. But drawing on examples involving assemblages of care and humor, we showed how at times new potentialities could be found from the emergence of a *minor language*.

The narratives we have offered in this article are not innocent: there is no 'outside' available, from where to offer moral insights. We have told our stories in the spirit of Singh's (2018) argument that questions of mastery, which we understand being crucial for how the structural and individual politics of language are maintained in the academia, cannot be asked outside particular situations. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) urges us to pay attention to those situations in particular in which the questions of care are difficult to answer or even unthinkable. A care-full analysis does not only critique *status quo* but works towards possible futures through the potentials of the 'speculative middle' (Springgay & Truman, 2018). We have gestured to alternative practices through the speculative lines scattered throughout this article asking **what if** and **what else**. Importantly, care as a critical analytical approach remains an indecisive one, one that 'doesn't seek refuge in the stances it takes, aware and appreciative of the vulnerability of any position on the "as well as possible.'" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 7; Gunnarsson, 2018). In line with this, Singh (2018)

warns us about the danger of hurrying to do yet another masterful gesture even when attempting to dismantle mastery. However, she also speaks about the importance of *beginning*, as modest as that may sound. What is at issue here is to begin to render each other and our shared linguistic assemblages more capable while believing that this is to render academia more capable altogether.

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