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## Document Version

Accepted author manuscript

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## Citation for published version (APA):

Stelma, J., & Fay, R. (2019). An ecological perspective for critical action in applied linguistics. In A. Kostoulas (Ed.), *Challenging boundaries in language education* (pp. 51-70). Springer Nature.

## Published in:

Challenging boundaries in language education

## Citing this paper

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# An Ecological Perspective for Critical Action in Applied Linguistics

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## AUTHOR ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT – DO NOT CITE

Stelma, J. and Fay, R. (to appear). An Ecological Perspective for Critical Action in Applied Linguistics. In A. Kostoulas (ed). *Challenging Boundaries in Language Education*. Berlin: Springer.

### Abstract

In this chapter, we argue that critical perspectives focused on resisting oppression fail to recognize the stratified nature of language education and applied linguistics ecologies. In human ecologies, power is conceded as much as it is taken, and “unjust” orders are generated by stakeholder action on all levels. Our ecological alternative suggests that individuals and groups *on all levels* of an applied linguistics ecology should problematize normative assumptions (implicit theories held by the majority), develop enhanced understanding of what is happening, and use this understanding to become more purposeful – all the while remaining open to, and supportive of, others within the ecology developing their own unique intentionality. We exemplify this critical-intentional perspective through an analysis of how universities, located in non-English speaking contexts, appear to respond to the hegemony of English as the global academic language, as well as a contrasting analysis of how the Nordic notion of Parallel Language Use may represent a critical-intentional response to this situation of hegemony. We conclude by suggesting that the ecological perspective on critical action, involving actors on all levels of an ecology, may be our best opportunity to transform unjust orders in language education and Applied Linguistics.

**Keywords:** Critical Action; Intentionality; Intentional Dynamics; Ecological Theory; Globalisation

### Introduction

In this chapter, we develop an ecological perspective for critical action in situations and contexts of interest to Applied Linguistics (henceforth AL), including but not limited to language education, where issues of language use, practice, and policy are a principal concern. Our ecological thinking is based on the view that “both the nature of the world and human sense making are dynamic and emergent” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 174). It recognizes not only traditional ecological relationships of stakeholders and their social, pedagogical, and material environments. It recognizes, also, that AL situations involve human activities, which are defined by stakeholders’ individual and collective agency (or lack thereof). As such, and

building on existing critical scholarship, our ecological perspective identifies and challenges the boundaries between language use, practice, and policy based on normative assumptions (implicit theories held by the majority) – which may constrain emancipation and transformation – and language use, practice, and policy based on understanding and purpose, or what we call intentionality.

The paper begins with a review of established critical approaches in AL. A second section develops our ecological perspective, thus outlining the theoretical bases of what we mean by critical-intentional action. We draw on the ecological principle of mutualism, intentional dynamics that give rise to affordances and action, the interplay of agency on different levels, and normative assumptions as a means to understand the limits of agency. This second section also includes an analysis of the nature of power, and the role of diversity to distribute power. The final substantive section uses the ecological perspective to analyze the responses of universities, located in non-English speaking contexts, but seeking to benefit from the affordances of English being the language of global academia. We also include a contrasting analysis of how the Nordic notion of Parallel Language Use may represent a critical-intentional response to the dominance of English as the global academic language. The chapter concludes by suggesting that critical-intentional action may be our best opportunity to challenge unjust orders, and the normative assumptions that underpin these orders.

## Critical Perspectives and Applied Linguistics

A number of critical perspectives have emerged in the discipline of AL. One early perspective is “critical thinking”, or what we will call the *critical-cognitive* perspective. John Dewey’s frequently cited definition of “reflective thought” offers a starting point for understanding this perspective. Dewey (1910, p. 6) suggested that “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought”. Somewhat less cited is what he adds subsequently, that reflective thought is an “effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of reasons” (p. 6). Thus, critical thinking, in this tradition, may be defined as “considering an issue from multiple perspectives ... [and] being able to identify assumptions and evaluate evidence and issues logically” (Banegas & Villacañas de Castro, 2016, p. 455).

It is informative to consider both what is assumed and what is excluded in Dewey’s definition of reflective thought. Notable assumptions include the privileging of rational (cognitive) categories such as knowledge, belief, and reason. Excluded, however, is any consideration of feelings, emotions or inter-personal categories, such as, e.g., expectations, which also contribute to cognitive activity (Stelma, 2011). Atkinson’s (1997) critique of “critical thinking” for the foreign/second language classroom touches on these omissions. He suggests that critical thinking may not be quite as rational as it is sometimes claimed to be. Instead, he suggests critical thinking may be akin to a social practice which young people may learn “through the pores” as they grow up in a particular cultural milieu (p. 73), and hence that it may be “beyond the capability of most teachers to teach them [i.e., critical thinking skills] in more than an anecdotal and hit-or-miss way” (p. 77). Atkinson also

critiques the reductive and detached nature of critical thinking, contrasting it with more emotive and connected ways of thinking. Thus, he suggests, thinking will differ depending on whether young people are socialized into either more individualistic or more collective cultures. He makes a similar point about the role of language in critical thinking. He suggests that the use of language to enable and structure meaning-making is a “Western” practice that should not exclude consideration of alternative ways to make meaning, such as observation. To us, this highlights a need for our ecological perspective to avoid privileging one set of social practices and values over another. Our focus on intentional dynamics, to be outlined below, is precisely a search for diverse values that may guide thinking in context.

More recent critical work in AL departs significantly from the critical-cognitive perspective. One aspect of later work is a concern to “remake the connections between discourse, language learning, language use, and the social and political contexts in which these occur” (Pennycook, 2004, p. 796). This critical focus on context has given rise to useful conceptual metaphors, such as “tissue-rejection” to describe how a language teaching method (the tissue), originally from one educational context (the originating body), cannot be used in, or transplanted to, a different educational context (another body) without the risk of it being rejected by teachers and learners in this other context (tissue rejection) (Holliday, 1992). This *critical-contextual* perspective has included theorization of a variety of socio-cultural dimensions of context, and in the case of language education there is a concomitant rejection of context-independent constructions of “best methods” in favor of teachers, with their local knowledge of their socio-cultural contexts, being the arbitrators of method-in-context (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Finally, this critical-contextual perspective highlights how there may be stakeholders working on different levels of AL ecologies, and also that there may be more global structures that shape the experience of local actors.

Another strand of recent critical work is the field of Critical Applied Linguistics, which seeks to problematize normative assumptions that shape situations and contexts of interest to AL. Pennycook (2004) describes Critical Applied Linguistics “as a way of thinking and doing that is always problematizing” (p. 803). Central to this perspective is Freire’s (2005) philosophically grounded argument about the “concrete historical fact” of working and middle-class people being subject to oppression, or dehumanization, by “unjust orders” in 1960s Brazil. He suggested that dehumanization is “the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (p. 44). The “unjust orders” that we commonly encounter in AL may be less visibly violent than the Brazilian situation that motivated Freire. Nevertheless, this *critical-humanistic perspective* has convincingly identified possible language-related contexts of oppression. A salient example is the work of Phillipson (1992), who analyzed a situation of “linguistic imperialism”, with the English language in a hegemonic position in the global system. It also includes work focused on how dominant social orders, as indexed by language-as-discourse, may have a powerful subjugating impact on individuals’ identity. This includes Norton’s (2000) study of female immigrant learners in Canada developing identities through their “investment” in a new language, and Canagarajah’s (1993) description of Tamil tertiary students negotiating what parts of the curriculum to engage with, and what parts to ignore. In both cases, the dominant forms of English-as-discourse positioned these language learners vis-à-vis more powerful orders, and their learning journey included finding ways to

engage with the English language in ways more aligned with their own sense of national and ethnic identity. Finally, Kumaravadivelu's (2006) critique of method shows how the critical-contextual and the critical-humanistic perspectives may align. Kumaravadivelu argues that language education professionals need to explore the intersection of the particularity of context, the practicality of teacher action-in-context, and how teachers' and learners' positions in applicable social orders may limit their freedom. Kumaravadivelu is particularly concerned about the socio-political impediments that prevent language learners from "realizing their full human potential" (2006, p. 177), and how, then, teachers may support the development of what he calls "liberatory autonomy".

It is hard to argue against the value of autonomy for liberation, and we will not do so. We are concerned, however, about how analysis in the critical-humanistic perspective privileges the action of stakeholders that are otherwise weak within the social and linguistic order they find themselves in (e.g., learners from the global South or East learning the language of a dominant Western power). The critical-humanistic perspective puts all its stock in the transformative action of the weak (e.g., the learner) possibly with some help from a middle class intellectual (e.g., a teacher). It is unwilling to accord any transformative role to the powerful Other. This view can be traced back to Freire (2005), who stated that,

the oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. (p. 44)

Thus, except for the possibility of solidarity, which we will discuss in a later section, Freire allowed little or no focus on what contribution might be made by those with, or in, power. Anticipating the ecological theorizing of the next section, we will suggest that a critical perspective that is singularly focused on challenging power and hegemony fails to recognize the stratified intentional dynamics of human ecologies. We accept what is implied by Freire, that in human ecologies power is "conceded" as much as it is "taken", that being human is to live in a "just order", that a "just order" is one where everyone is able to freely express their humanity, and that such a "just order" is desirable. However, and while addressing also Freire's conceptualization of solidarity, we will argue that we express our humanity through intentional acts, informed by understanding and purpose of various forms, and that transformation towards a "just order" is best achieved if *all* stakeholders, whatever their position of power in the ecology, become more intentional.

## Features the Ecological Perspective

Our ecological perspective on critical action has developed from a number of recent contributions, by the authors and colleagues, working to understand the intentional ecology of both language education and related AL situations. This includes understanding the development of shared intentionality in language classroom interaction (Kostoulas & Stelma, 2016; Stelma, 2014), how socio-professional intentionalities shape L2 curricular innovation (Kostoulas, 2018; Kostoulas & Stelma, 2017), the impact of socio-political

intentionalities on primary English language education (Stelma, Onat-Stelma, Lee, & Kostoulas, 2015), the development of researcher intentional action (Stelma, 2011; Stelma & Fay, 2014), and understanding the intentional dynamics of researching multilingually (Stelma, Fay, & Zhou, 2013). Recently, we extended our ecological thinking to critical action (Fay & Stelma, 2016), suggesting that becoming more intentional was central to critical action. In this chapter we extend this work to include the issues of power, agency, and diversity, which we believe are central to contemporary critical work in AL.

This section starts by outlining the principle of mutuality in ecological theory, as well as how this mutuality is constituted by affordances for action in situations. This is followed by an introduction to the concept of intentionality, including how it integrates into a mutualist perspective and how it involves the dimensions of understanding and purpose. Next, we look at the notion of intentional dynamics, including how normative assumptions may hold particular attraction and may inordinately shape AL situations. Towards the end of the section, we address the linked constructs of power, agency, solidarity, and diversity.

### ***Mutuality, Affordances and Situations***

The starting point for our ecological theorizing is the principle of *mutuality* in ecological psychology, and its genesis in human perception and action. Humans perceive information “encoded” in their environment, this information “presents” affordances to act in this or that way, and this gives rise to activity (Gibson, 1979). Moreover, ongoing activity gives rise to new states of individual-environment mutuality, the perception of additional information, further affordances, and the potential, then, for further action. Later ecological theorizing extends the mutualist perspective to social processes, suggesting that “mind, body and environment cannot be understood in isolation, but are constructions from the flow of purposive activity in the world” (Good, 2007, p. 269). Trying to understand the affordances of social situations, Chemero’s (2003, p. 185) suggests that “affordances are features of whole situations”, with situations representing a dynamic coming together of a range of individual and socio-contextual shaping influences.

However, in order to understand the role of language in social situations, our focus needs to shift to semiotic forms of information. Reed (2014, p. 56) has proposed that “informative structures, created by people for communicative purposes, provide the bases for different kinds of cognition”. This is consistent with Aronin and Singleton’s (2010) suggestion that more developed linguistic competence, or ability to perceive linguistic informative structures used for communicative purposes, enhances the perception of affordances to communicate in the world. Add to this, language indexes also identity, emotions, interpersonal relationships, culture and more, and language users have the ability to access and create meanings beyond those present only in language (Kramsch, 2008). Thus, whilst needing to function within a mutualist perspective, and able to specify affordances, we need a conceptualization of information that captures a fuller range of phenomena, both cognitive, emotional, and social. For this we turn to the concept of intentionality.

## ***Intentionality***

The ordinary sense of intentionality is “being purposeful”, and this is a sense that we also adopt. However, we combine this with two broader senses of intentionality, signifying how we are connected, in ways that we perceive as meaningful, with others and our environment.

Our use of intentionality to mean being purposeful is motivated by the philosopher Daniel Dennett and his “Intentional Stance” (1987). Dennett contrasts the intentional stance with the physical stance (e.g., description of physical processes) and the design stance (architectural descriptions). He suggests that the intentional stance is the only one that goes beyond description and explanation, affording, in addition, the ability to predict what may follow. This meaning of intentionality is established in mainstream cognitive science where there is a particular interest in the cognitive and social antecedents of intentions (Malle, Moses, & Baldwin, 2001). There is also an interest in the functional properties of intentions, such as that of Bruner (1981) when he suggests that,

an intention is present when an individual operates persistently towards achieving an end state, persists in developing means and corrects the development of means to get closer to the end state, and finally ceases the line of activity when specifiable features of the end state are achieved. (p. 41)

A focus on the ordinary meaning of intentionality is established, also, in ecological psychology, including research in classroom contexts (Barab, Cherkes-Julkowski, Swenson, Garrett, Shaw, & Young, 1999), in technological learning environments (Young, DePalma, & Garrett, 2002) and in researcher education (Stelma, 2011; Stelma & Fay, 2014). In this ecological work, the focus is on how context – the ecology – constrains and enables intentions-in-action (see also Juarrero, 1999).

Our broader sense of intentionality, signifying how we connect with others and our environment, is based on the work of Searle (1983). Searle draws on, and in part subverts, the early phenomenological definition of intentionality (Brentano, 1874/1995), to suggest that psychological states (love, anger, belief, and more) are “about” either another psychological state or some object or state of the external physical or social environment. Thus, for Searle, the aboutness of psychological states – i.e., the intentional character of the psychological – connects us in meaningful ways to the world. For instance, a teacher may believe that a class should be conducted entirely in the English language. This belief may be cognitively based, but may also have been informed by, and hence be “about”, actual learners in an actual classroom that the teacher has taught. Crucially, all psychological states, including more emotive states such as love, anger, and so on, have this aboutness, or intentionality, and potentially connect us to others and the world around us.

This broader sense of intentionality, or how we are connected, includes shared intentionality, intentionality encoded in the environment itself, as well as hybrid forms of intentionality. We, as intentional beings, are able to perceive something about the intentionality of others. Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, and Moll (2005) suggest that the ability to have shared intentionality with others develops in the first two years of life, when children are able to internalize into their own psychological states “something of the goals

and intentions of the other” (p. 680). This, then, is the basis for groups of individuals to have shared values - i.e., to share intentionality. Furthermore, intentionality, or aboutness, may be embedded in the broader environment. Searle (1983) proposes that as we create objects in the real world our intentionality becomes embedded in these objects. This is perhaps most evident with texts, which are composed of language that, on various levels (word, sentence, paragraph, and discourse) has aboutness. There are also hybrid forms of intentionality, such as the intentionality of professional or social traditions and practices, which arise from the interaction between individual, shared, and embedded forms of intentionality. Professional intentionalities of applied linguistics, such as “communicative language teaching” and “conversation analysis”, are such hybrid intentionalities. For instance, meaningful use of any language teaching approach is facilitated by the individual intentionalities of teachers and learners, their shared intentionality (what should we do), and the embedded intentionality of teaching materials designed to encourage the use of the approach.

Thus, we suggest that intentionality, which pervades both our psychology and the world around us, is the ‘information’ that we need to act in the world. It is a relational form of information that human beings are particularly able to perceive, within ourselves and in our interaction with the environment, and as such it specifies affordances to act in situations and contexts of interest to AL.

### ***Intentional Dynamics***

Intentional dynamics captures how “meaning is not solely in the environment or solely in the individual but in the flow (the relation) between them” (Barab et al., 1999, p. 359). Here, we wish to highlight three aspects of intentional dynamics: (a) the attraction and danger of normative assumptions; (b) the presence of local action across *all* levels of an AL ecology; and (c) the relationship between global and local processes. An understanding of intentional dynamics is what enables what we call *critical-intentional* action.

Language teaching materials, professional codes of conduct, government or school policies, as well as beliefs common in society all represent embedded or hybrid intentionalities that may enable and constrain language and language education activity. In the case that an intentionality is espoused by a majority, it may be referred to as a normative assumption (e.g., the normative assumption that native-speakers of English are better English language teachers [Holliday, 2006]). There is the additional view – itself a normative one among critical researchers – that normative assumptions, due to their pervasive presence, suffer from a lack of critical scrutiny. We adopt this view, and suggest that, because of their “off the shelf” character, normative assumptions are “attractors” for human activity. Our argument centrally involves contrasting the impoverished intentional genesis of normative assumptions with the possibility of a more rigorous (critical-cognitive) search for understanding of what is happening, including a consideration of contextual particularities (critical-contextual), an assessment of possible injustice (critical-humanist), and the use of enhanced understanding generated by these forms of criticality to evolve new and diverse forms of purposeful activity (critical-intentional).

Next, intentional dynamics give shape to local activity on several levels of an AL ecology. Critical researchers often focus on the activity of “front-line” practitioners, such as teachers



or social workers, and they treat this front-line activity as “local”. Here, we want to highlight that local activity takes place on *all* levels of an ecology. For instance, when a language curriculum designer is writing a new syllabus or textbook, her affordances for action are shaped by intentional dynamics just the same way as is the case for language teachers and learners acting in the classroom. The curriculum designer, influenced by a range of professional intentionalities, as well as her own intentionality (beliefs), is embedding intentionality into the materials she writes, and these materials will, in turn, shape the activity of teachers and learners in classrooms. Thus, whilst engaging in a different sort of activity, with different affordances to shape the ecology, the activity of a curriculum designer is just as local as that of teachers and learners. Similarly, the situated activity of language managers, policy-makers or researchers is equally subject to intentional dynamics, and therefore – as we see it – local activity.

Looking beyond these interconnected levels of local activity, at what enables and constrains these forms of activity, we discover a “systems effect”. AL situations and contexts exhibit a continual interplay between faster/local activity and slower/global phenomena. Faster/local activity, such as classroom interaction, curriculum design, academic writing, researcher action or policy-making, occur on relatively short timescales – whether minutes, hours, days or weeks – and their intentional dynamics are similarly quick to form. By contrast, slower/global phenomena may persist across years. This may include, e.g., the emergence, and subsequent persistence, of a particular teaching method within a community of language teachers, it may consist of the tendency of policy documents to change only gradually over time, and it certainly includes the persistent ways that discourse-in-use index relations of power in society. Holling (2001) summarizes this continual interplay between faster/local and slower/global phenomena – the “systems effect” – as follows.

Each level is allowed to operate at its own pace, protected from above by slower, larger levels but invigorated from below by faster, smaller cycles of innovation. The whole ... [ecology] ... is therefore both creative and conserving. The interactions between cycles in ... [an ecology] ... combine learning with continuity. (pp. 398–399)

A point of particular interest to critical work is that normative assumptions, the unjust orders that these assumptions may engender, and any associated forms of oppression, may be slower/global phenomena, and hence may be quite resistant to change. In fact, Sealey and Carter (2004, p. 175) point out that one of “the properties of social structures [...] is their endurance beyond the actions or intentions of individuals”. This possible endurance of normative assumptions, then, is a particular challenge for any theory of critical action.

### ***Power and Agency***

There is a fundamental obstacle to the freedom of individuals in stratified ecologies. The obstacle has to do with the limits of our own acting and knowing. A language learner may have intimate knowledge of her own learning activity, perhaps also of her peers, and may even know something about what the teacher does in the classroom and why. However, the learner is less likely to know much about language teaching approaches, or curriculum

design, or the policy reasons for why she is studying English or another language. As part of a critical pedagogy, these other areas of knowing may be encouraged, but there are inevitable limitations to such an endeavor having to do with both time and the demands of specialization. Thus, the “liberatory autonomy” that Kumaravadivelu (2006) advocates for (see above), whilst desirable, may have its limits. In the large and complex ecologies that are of interest to AL researchers, each stakeholder may have a particular expertise and will play a particular role. The consequence is that individual stakeholders’ local affordances to act, in their own role, will be shaped by the activity of stakeholders on other levels, thereby giving rise to a sense of imposition – the sense that others have power over what we do. This stratification effect, with stakeholders on different levels engaging in action guided by intentional dynamics particular to their own fast/local activity, means that no single individual is likely to be entirely satisfied with the overall outcome. This stratification effect gives rise to Archer’s (1995) comment on society more generally.

“society” is that which nobody wants in exactly the form they find it and yet it resists both individual and collective efforts at transformation – not necessarily by remaining unchanged but altering to become something else which still conforms to no one’s ideal. (p. 2)

There are thus inevitable constraints on agency in AL situations and contexts, and at times these constraints are experienced as unwelcome power over what we can or cannot do with language. Clearly, the structures that we sometimes describe as constraining can enable activity as well. For instance, a great deal of time is freed up for a teacher when she uses a textbook designed and assembled by someone else. Also, as suggested by Holling (quoted above), faster/local activity may be “protected from above by slower, larger levels”, offering a sense of security and belonging to language learners and/or users in local activity. However, this protection may be experienced as oppression, and it is necessary to investigate what assumptions (normative or other) underpin the structures, or orders, that constrain action.

### ***Solidarity through Diversity***

Earlier in the paper we quoted Freire, saying that the oppressors “cannot find in ... [their] ... power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves” (2005, p. 44). Freire argues that powerful groups are unlikely to relinquish power when this may cause material disadvantage. He also rejects the concepts of generosity and charity as ineffectual, as these behaviors simply reaffirm the unjust order. A challenge, however, is that those that are oppressed may lack the social and cultural capital to “free themselves”. For this, Freire evokes the concept of solidarity, suggesting that the struggle for transformation may be aided by individuals with the necessary capital. We believe this fails to recognize the intentional dynamics of stratified human ecologies, as we have outlined above. In a stratified ecology, with stakeholders who have different specializations and who take on different roles, critical action by single individuals or groups may have limited impact. Rather, the struggle against an oppressive order needs a more concerted strategy. Thus, we

suggest a different way to think about the concept of solidarity, and in turn a different conceptualization of transformation.

A key concept in the broader field of ecological studies is “diversity”. In studies of the natural environment, ecological thinking suggests that bio-diversity can mitigate against environmental shocks, such as the local effects of climate change. Closer to the field of AL, eco-linguistics argues for maintaining the diversity of language codes (Fill, 2001). Each language indexes particular cultural practices and knowledge that may be of value, not only for the well-being, vitality, and linguistic human rights of the people using the language (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996), but also as part of a larger pool of knowledge for addressing social and scientific challenges that are shared across borders. Extending this ecological thinking to the struggle against oppressive orders, we suggest that there is value in having ideational diversity, or a diversity of intentional dynamics, in human-social ecologies. This diversity should extend to *all* forms of faster/local activity, including those associated with more power. Since local activity is how the world changes, local diversity would create the conditions, over time, for transformation and new, intentional, and ‘just’ global orders to emerge. Thus, rather than acting in solidarity with a single group – which we do not reject but which we think has limitations – our position is that *all* stakeholders, in concert, must recognize the necessity for diverse intentional dynamics right across an AL ecology. This is not a zero-sum game, where one party gains and the other loses. Encouraging diversity will make the intentional ecology richer in opportunity, more able to meet a variety of needs, and hence be of benefit to us all.

## Using the Ecological Perspective

This section exemplifies how our ecological perspective on critical action can be put to use. To this end, we focus on universities that are located in non-English speaking contexts, but which seek to benefit from the affordances associated with English as the global academic language. The involvement of such universities in the Anglo-centric processes of globalization can contribute to a loss of linguistic diversity, and potentially also epistemic diversity, and thus is of particular ecological interest. This section also looks at what critical action might look like within this situation of English language hegemony. For this, we explore the emerging Parallel Language Use (PLU) tradition in Nordic universities. We look at how PLU policy has evolved from action on several levels of the Nordic education ecology, and to what extent this nascent global structure encourages the kind of intentional diversity that we argue for.

### ***Globalization, English and Universities***

Globalization and the spread of the English language are, by many, axiomatically linked (see Phillipson, 1992). English was the language of the United Kingdom, which was the most successful colonial power of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. This colonial era created a global system of transactions, relying on the English language, spanning trade, finance, politics, education, art, culture, and war. Halfway through the twentieth century, the United States replaced Britain as the pre-eminent power, thereby ensuring the further development of the Anglo-Western colonial system of transactions, and

the use of English as the language facilitating these transactions. Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, various political and economic entities have challenged this hegemony; most notably, the Communist Block led by the Soviet Union, OPEC, the European Union, and more recently China. However, the former communist countries have transitioned from Russian to English as the foreign language taught in schools. OPEC's influence has moderated in a gradually diversifying global energy economy, and its official working language is English. The European Union may be losing its most prominent English-speaking member (the UK), but to this day maintains a "one foreign language plus English" educational policy. China may end up challenging the Anglo-American hegemony more than any of the other entities. However, it is estimated that nearly 400 million Chinese have studied the English language, to some level, in school (Wei & Su, 2012).

The above brief (and simplified) history describes an apparently stable, and certainly slow moving, global order. It is a global order that is associated with a number of possible injustices. One such structural injustice is suggested by Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck (2005), who – using capitalist terminology - suggest that there are "centers" with high levels of capital accumulation, including also cultural and linguistic goods. Moreover, there are "peripheries" with low levels of capital accumulation, and "semi-peripheries" somewhere in-between these two. This structural order means that "high prestige is attributed to 'central' accents of English – UK and US – among non-native speakers, as opposed to the low prestige attributed to linguistically equivalent, but 'peripheral' accents such as Indian and Nigerian English" (Blommaert et al., 2005, p. 202). By extension, the role of English as the language of globalization results in disproportionate power being accorded to universities located in center English speaking contexts.

A more specific injustice derives from the dominance of both the English language and center context institutions in the academic publishing industry (Curry & Lillis, 2018). This industry relies, in the main, on the normative assumption that publication should be in a center variety of the English language. Moreover, the indexing organizations that make academic publications available to the wider academic community strongly privilege English language publication. For instance, the English language bias of Scopus and the Web of Science leave academics that publish in other languages near invisible in these databases (Delgado-López-Cózar & Repiso-Caballero, 2013). The real-world effect of this linguistic bias plays out differently across individuals and groups of academics (Hyland, 2016; Li & Hu, 2017), but in more clearly peripheral non-English speaking contexts it acts akin to a "tax" on the academic work of scholars. This may include translation, additional cycles of revision, or outright rejection of work due to the lack of English academic competence (Salager-Meyer, 2014). It may also include subtle, but academically significant changes to the knowledge production of periphery authors, by what Lillis and Curry (2006) refer to as "literacy brokers" who mediate their scholarly publication in international English medium journals. Thus, the dominance of English in the academic publication industry contributes to what Paasi (2005) calls "homogenisation" of publishing practices and knowledge production, something which, we suggest, is a threat to the epistemic diversity of academia.

Critical applied linguistics has identified a number of additional normative assumptions that shape, and are shaped by, the hegemony of English as the global academic language. One such normative assumption is *native-speakerism*. Whilst recognizing that the term

makes less sense linguistically – as may be expected of a normative assumption – Holliday (2006) suggests that the term describes how English language teaching thinks about itself. More generally, the assumption may be linked both to the perceived superior accumulation of cultural and linguistic goods in center English language contexts, such as the US and the UK, and, thus, describes the privileged status of high prestige varieties of English language. In universities of non-English speaking contexts, native-speakerism may affect both teaching and other forms of communication within and between universities. The normative assumption may also lead to privileged treatment for native-speakers of the high prestige varieties of English language in the educational job market. Another related normative assumption is the value accorded to *English as a Medium of Instruction* (EMI) in universities. EMI is becoming increasingly common in a variety of non-English speaking contexts, ranging from Northern and Western Europe, the Middle East, as well as East and South-East Asia (see Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018; Williams, 2015). There are even examples of national university ranking regimes that award additional status to universities that adopt EMI (Cho, 2012). In many such non-English speaking contexts, the aim of EMI appears to be three-fold: (a) offering access to prestige knowledge; (b) attracting international students; and (c) developing students' competence in (preferably a prestige variety of) the English language.

A sociolinguistic analysis of this situation of hegemony, and its associated normative assumptions, reveals additional dimensions of injustice. Blommaert et al. (2005, p. 199) remind us that “meaningful behaviour is organized indexically and that language is an ideological object, i.e., an object invested with social and cultural interests”. Thus, English as the language of globalization, and the language of academic publication, is ideologically indexing and invested with Anglo-Western “social and cultural interests”. Thus, students in non-English speaking contexts that adopt EMI may not only struggle linguistically, they may struggle, also, to learn content framed by Anglo-Western social and cultural interests. Their lecturers will similarly struggle both with the linguistics of teaching in another language and with trying to make the knowledge relevant to their students. Local social and cultural interests, including also the local/national language which indexes these interests, may be devalued, and there may be a knock-on effect on the vitality of both individual and national identity. Finally, the hegemony of the English language may contribute to what Halvorsen (2018) calls “epistemic expropriation”. In the attempt to learn from more peripheral contexts, Halvorsen suggests that center context academics “remove” knowledge from peripheral contexts, and through a process of “violent abstraction” (i.e. framing the knowledge in terms of Anglo-Western “social and cultural interests”) the “concrete use-value” of the knowledge in the original peripheral contexts is lost.

We suggest, then, that the intentional dynamics springing from the dominance of English as a global academic language are comparatively impoverished. A great deal has been said about this hegemony, and its effects, especially in the Anglo-Western academic literature. However, governments in some of these non-English speaking settings, as well as regulatory authorities and the universities themselves, appear to uncritically accept and act in ways aligned with the normative assumptions of English language hegemony. This lack of strategic and overt consideration of affordances – its impoverished intentional dynamics – allows for the continuation of this slow/global situation of hegemony.

### ***“Parallel Language Use” as Critical-intentional Action***

An oppressive order without any clear oppressors, and with impoverished intentional dynamics, may seem like an impenetrable “Wall of Givens”. However, our argument is that critical action, provided that it is intentional, and provided that it happens across *all* levels of an ecology, can be a “Piercing Arrow” able to penetrate even the thickest wall. In this section, we suggest that the Nordic concept of Parallel Language Use (PLU) is a useful example of such critical-intentional action. It is not action intended to challenge the global dominance of English, *per se*. However, within the Nordic countries which are adopting PLU, it seeks to redress the impacts of hegemony.

PLU is not a policy imposed on any part of Nordic society. Rather, it functions akin to a “social compact”, or what we would call a “shared intentionality”, that organizations and individuals may draw upon when developing their own policies and practices. The concept first emerged in 1998, when the Swedish Language Council commented that “den ensidiga inriktningen på engelska kan leda till att välutbildade personer i Sverige inte längre kan tala och skriva om komplicerade ämnen på svenska [the one-sided focus on English can lead to educated persons in Sweden not being able to speak and write about complicated topics in Swedish]” (1998, p. 14). The recommendation made was that Universities should encourage “studenternas förmåga till parallellt bruk av svenska och engelska inom sina ämnen [the students’ ability to use Swedish and English in parallel in their subjects]” (p. 20). On the broader Nordic arena, PLU gained traction in 2001 (a European year of languages), when a number of reports on the status of Nordic languages were commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers (Höglin, 2002). Finally, the various documents developing the notion of PLU also make a critical-contextual reference to the feasibility of PLU for the Nordic context, pointing out that the English language has an established presence in Nordic societies, and that it is “spoken at a high level in universities and elsewhere” (Gregersen, 2018, p. 8). Moreover, in terms of normative cultural and epistemic traditions, Nordic societies may be more similar to center English speaking contexts, such as the UK and US, than what is the case for some other non-English speaking contexts in other parts of the world.

The actual practice of PLU is being shaped by local activity on several levels of Nordic society. It continues to be encouraged by Government entities; most notably pan-Nordic meetings focused on language and education. These meetings tend to provide only a general outline of what PLU means, should do, and who might be involved. For instance, a recent Nordic Council of Ministers suggested that “as society’s most important institutions for the production and communication of new knowledge, *universities have a democratic duty* to maintain and develop scientific dialogue, both in international research circles and with broad groups of citizens” (Gregersen et al. 2018, p. 8, – original emphasis). Prompted by this general outline, universities are encouraged to develop local policies consistent with their own needs. Hult and Källkvist (2016) describe how local interpretations of PLU, in three leading Swedish universities, address not only language use, but also *status planning*, *corpus planning* and *language-in-education planning* (Baldauf, 2006). Hult and Källkvist point to university guidelines on the use of language across administration, academic publication and teaching. In terms of status planning, the university policies echo the above expressed concern that Swedish should remain relevant, both within the universities and in society. In

terms of corpus planning, the university policies seek to ensure that Swedish is “complete”, including terminology and discourse patterns, so that it can be used for a full range of academic and professional purposes. Finally, the university policies overtly address language-in-education, tending to express a preference for Swedish on more basic levels of university education, where the students may struggle to access subject knowledge in English, and a gradual shift towards the English language on higher levels, such as doctoral education.

The concrete outcomes of PLU include a different rationale for the use of English in instruction (EMI). Rather than “gaining competence in the English language”, the aim of using the English language in instruction is for students to have parallel language competence in their subjects. Airey and Linder (2008, p. 150) make the more nuanced suggestion that PLU should aim for a deliberately worked out “combination of language-specific disciplinary skills”. In terms of publications, both Nordic and English language outputs are promoted, with Nordic language outputs more prominent in “outreach publication” to local audiences, and English more prominent (depending on discipline) in publications aimed at academic audiences. Finally, university policies, both in the universities investigated by Hult and Källkvist (2016), as well as more generally across the Nordic region, explicitly maintain that individual departments and academics have the freedom to evolve their own unique PLU practices.

PLU does not fully displace the slower/global order of English language hegemony in the Nordic context. In fact, the various government and university institutional documents on PLU all accept English as the language that will function alongside the relevant Nordic language in parallel language competence. Unsurprisingly, then, some of the normative assumptions of English language hegemony remain. Since publishing for academic audiences tends to happen in English, this language remains more prestigious in a narrowly defined academic sense. Moreover, there appears to be some lingering native-speakerism. In a qualitative study at a large Swedish university, Kuteeva (2014) found that students questioned not only their own English competence, but also that of their fellow international students, and the appropriateness of teaching staff with non-native accents (Indian, Pakistani, Arab, and Russian). Rigidly structured EMI situations can also be found in PLU contexts – especially at the higher levels of education, and more so in science subjects. However, Kuteeva (2014) was able to present several voices that challenged these normative assumptions, and these voices led her to conclude that disciplinary linguistic competence, in English or any other language, is not the same as native-speaker competence. Rather, “academic language competence requires both more and less than a native/native-like competence” (p. 341). Thus, PLU may be a hybrid intentionality with more affordances for problematizing normative assumptions. Also, PLU universities, as part of their oversight regimes, can challenge departments whose activity relies too much on either English or the local Nordic language. Again, this indicates something about how different levels of the Nordic educational ecology are negotiating the emerging shape of this new global structure. PLU may not conform to anyone’s ideal (see earlier quote from Archer, 1995), but it is an outcome of diverse intentional dynamics involving stakeholders on different levels, and is more democratic than the order that it replaces. Thus, we believe PLU is a good example of the critical-intentional action that we argue for in this chapter.

## Conclusion

We believe that the ecological perspective on critical action is our best opportunity for the transformation of unjust orders in situations and contexts of interest to AL. Our critical-intentional action is a macro-strategy that begins with “problematizing the givens” (Pennycook, 2004). This will generate understanding of the potentially impoverished intentionality of the normative assumptions that underpin unjust orders. Next, we must encourage critical-intentional action on *all* levels of an AL ecology. We recognize that changing slower/global orders, such as the hegemony of the English language, may take a great amount of time and effort, and that in the shorter term it may be better to mitigate against an unjust order rather than to try to ‘topple it’ outright. Given time, however, we believe that critical-intentional action has a unique ability to pierce through the givens of hegemonic orders.

We have suggested that PLU in the Nordic context exemplifies our critical-intentional action. In this context, PLU achieves valuable objectives, including both the objective for universities to remain competitive on the international academic stage, as well as the national objective of maintaining the completeness of the relevant Nordic language. PLU promotes more diverse intentional dynamics within Nordic universities, and hence a wider set of linguistic affordances for action. That said, our ecological perspective also highlights that PLU does not directly challenge the hegemony of the English language. Rather, faster/local PLU intentional dynamics co-exist with the larger/global intentional dynamics associated with the hegemony of English.

In closing, we believe the key to a “just” world is a human ecology richer in intentional meanings and actions, as enabled by a multitude of ways of thinking, acting and expressing ourselves. We believe that diverse forms of faster/local critical-intentional action can deprive existing oppressive orders of their “oxygen”, and over time remove the conditions which allow hegemony to emerge in the first place. This call for intentional diversity should extend to *all* levels of an ecology, including the levels associated with power. Thus, it should include an openness to, and support for, all stakeholders within the ecology developing their own unique intentionality. Learners, teachers, and policy-makers alike should be encouraged to develop understanding of the intentional dynamics of the particular activity they are engaged in, and leverage this understanding to become more purposeful. The stratified nature of language education and other AL ecologies means that no single individual can comprehend the full set of intentional dynamics at play, and power dynamics will therefore remain. However, the fostering of diverse intentional dynamics on, and across, *all* levels will contribute to richer intentional dynamics overall, will extend the range of affordances to act, will promote innovation on all levels, and will ultimately allow more democratic orders, such as PLU, to emerge.

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