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# Decolonizing Technologies through Emergent Translanguaging Literature from the Margin: An English as a Foreign Language Writing Teacher's Poetic Autoethnography

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**Abstract:** Many scholars have portrayed technological advances as conducive to English language teaching and learning, without questioning their possible colonial assumptions about languages and literacies. Drawing on critical pedagogy and Global South epistemologies, I reconceptualize decolonization as a humanizing project in the contact zones between English and non-English languages. This poetic autoethnography, informed by my memories of my own experience as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner in China, alongside a wide range of artifacts from a senior seminar course in an international college in a Thai private university, illustrates how educational technologies can be decolonized by producing (and publishing) emergent translanguaging literature that repositions teachers and students from marginalized backgrounds as co-creators of new knowledge about languages and literacies in the global context.

**Keywords:** decolonization; technology; writing education; poetic autoethnography; translanguaging



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## 1. Introduction

This poetic autoethnography recounts, analyzes, and interprets my own experience, first as an English learner in China and then as an English writing teacher at a private university in Thailand. My goal is to explore ways in which technology-sustained colonization can be disrupted by frontline English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing teachers together with their students in a Global South context. My central question is: How can technologies be decolonized in an EFL writing classroom? In the rest of this article, I will first discuss key concepts. I will then explain my process of producing a poetic autoethnography. Next, I will present my poetic autoethnography about a shared monolingual bondage and liberation through emergent translanguaging literature. Lastly, I will discuss the significance of my exploration and conclude a way forward in decolonizing technologies.

As a writing educator who actively sought to implement critical pedagogy and translanguaging in EFL writing classrooms, I formed communities of practice with my students by writing with them; engaging them in reading, discussion, and peer review; and encouraging them to experiment with their linguistic and cultural resources. I taught them by using a dialogical and process approach, expecting them to produce quality work at the end of the semester through multiple rounds of revision. After each week's teaching, I wrote fieldnotes to record memorable moments such as my confusions, decisions, and breakthroughs. The course in focus is senior seminar, which I first taught as a new instructor from August to December 2020. Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I could not travel to Thailand, so I taught the course online. The main educational technologies that I used were an institutional version of Microsoft Teams (Version 1.6.00.24078) (64-bit) (as required by my university), a free version of Zoom (version 5.14.8) (16213), and Google Docs. With my former students' written permissions, after they had all graduated, I accessed a wide range of class artifacts such as their online portfolios, recordings of some

class sessions, and chat records. These artifacts and the memory of my past language learning experience informed all but one poem used in this poetic autoethnography, through which I argue that emergent translanguaging literature from the margins can be used to decolonize educational technologies.

## 2. Poetic Autoethnography, Decolonization, and Translanguaging

A review of poetic autoethnography needs to first consider Poetic Inquiry and autoethnography separately. The last decade has witnessed a surge of poetic literature as an arts-based research method, often known as Poetic Inquiry [1–3]. Poetic inquirers seek to foreground human experience by knowing it intuitively, representing it artistically, and sharing it telegraphically [4]. They use poetry informed by data to challenge self-detached research and writing practices that follow natural science conventions [5]. Therefore, poetry as a research method helps to capture what typical academic prose tends to leave out: rhythm, sound, imagery, as well as the intense emotions and voices of the participants, especially those from marginal backgrounds [6].

In contrast, autoethnographic researchers often use the self as a vantage point to understand self–other relationships, particularly in a cultural sense [7,8]. “Autoethnography addresses the need and desire to make the human sciences more human by writing in ways that are more poignant, touching, vulnerable, and heartfelt” [9] (p. 8). Like Poetic Inquiry, autoethnographies often foreground the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of marginalized groups such as female sociologists in a male-dominated academia [8], indigenous scholars in a West-dominated discipline [10], and multilingual professionals in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) [11,12]. Therefore, an autoethnography is more than storytelling; it creates and critiques cultural meanings behind the narrated experiences [7].

Poetic autoethnography is a combination of Poetic Inquiry and autoethnography. Hanauer defined it as “the use of written poetry to explore the writer’s own experiences” [13]. Poetic autoethnography allows the writer to transverse between poetry and prose, lived experience and artistic expressions, rigor and intuition [3], and most importantly, to challenge normalizing practices. As Hanauer argued:

When done diligently, honestly, and professionally, the meanings which emerge [from a poetic autoethnography] present a picture of the process of contending with the ways in which powerful discourses impose their meanings, in the attempt to erase the contextualized individuality and positionality of each person. [14] (p. 38)

Poetic autoethnography is thus a powerful cultural tool for the marginalized. As I have argued elsewhere, poetic autoethnography joins two historically practiced epistemologies of the Global South—Poetic Inquiry and autoethnography—and thereby allows the marginalized to speak against the culturally dominant other with their own voices [15]. They do so through self-authoring in cultural fields [16] or contact zones [17], which are filled with imbalanced power relations. For this reason, poetic autoethnography can contribute much to decolonization, including that of technologies.

Whereas colonization has initiated, sustained, and expanded its sphere of influence globally, the decolonization of technologies provides a critical lens through which cultural meanings are both made and contested. I associate decolonization with Global South scholars, both those located in the geographic south [18,19] and those who embrace Global South epistemologies [6,20]. It systematically counters the historical processes and the effects of colonization on the colonized, with various ill effects on local economies, politics, and global relations. Ocheni and Nwanko concluded that Europe’s colonization of Africa established “a dichotomy between the centre and the periphery nations” [21] (p. 53). Decolonization, in contrast, disrupts this center–periphery relationship in pursuit of better alternatives. It requires formerly oppressed groups and individuals to wrestle with the historically shaped hegemonies to “regain their humanity” and restore humanity in their oppressors; according to Freire, the act of oppression also deprives the oppressors their

humanity [18] (p. 44). The university, which sustains a Eurocentric system, is reimagined as a pluriversity to enable “knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity” [22] (p. 19). During this counter process, formerly marginalized individuals and groups can begin to reimagine “I” as an epistemological [15] and dialogic agent [23] to both create and communicate new knowledge [24].

Another ally in this counter process is translanguaging scholarship. A translanguaging perspective emphasizes multilinguals’ flexible and creative language use as informed by their whole communicative repertoires, which extends beyond identifiable languages or modalities [25,26]. Due to its political emphasis on language as a practice [27] and critical stance toward monolingual ideology, translanguaging is viewed by some scholars as a decolonization project [28]. This project requires teachers to engage with their learners’ “experiences and practices” [29] (p. 179). Both poetic autoethnography and translanguaging can thus help to mobilize dormant resources for reimagination. I propose that we decolonize technologies by producing, and if possible, publishing emergent translanguaging literature through poetic autoethnography.

My proposal is based on the following considerations. First, to date, two main ways of decolonizing technologies have been proposed: top-down and ground-up [30]. The top-down approach requires engineers to embrace a philosophy of design that transcends colonial thinking. Das suggests that this approach is limited in that it can reach only a small group of engineers. In contrast, I believe this approach’s greatest limitation lies in that it requires great reflexivity by the engineers. As for the number of people it can reach, I do not think the engineers themselves should be the main concern. Instead, we should consider to what extent existing structures, including technological structures and ideologies, allow decolonizing designs to emerge, propagate, and be utilized in language teaching.

The other option, a ground-up approach, is preferred by Das [30]. It requires engineers to collaborate with practitioners, hear their voices, and design technologies with their interests in mind. This seems a promising way to prevent colonial worldviews from sneaking into design. Nonetheless, I view it as an idealized scenario and a call that may remain unanswered. As an EFL writing teacher for over twenty years, I have never been approached by any engineer to seek my view on technologies, nor invited to comment on any existing technologies. Nonetheless, a ground-up approach should consider frontline writing teachers’ experiences, preferences, and concerns. Furthermore, being an EFL writing teacher entails a heavy workload that would discourage people like myself from seeking or welcoming opportunities to work with engineers, even if anyone were interested in a collaboration. Moreover, there is a huge number of English learners worldwide. A real ground-up decolonizing design of technologies should not leave the needs and voices of the learners unconsidered. To reiterate, this is an impossible mission, for the moment at least.

My proposed approach systematically takes a “Zhongyong” path or middle road between the two extremes [31]. There is a top-down design in the sense that the writing teacher should embrace a decolonization mindset, which shapes material choice as well as ways of teaching. At the same time, the writing teacher should also work at the ground level, in the specific classroom, to facilitate the production of emergent translanguaging literature by using available technologies, thus disrupting the normalizing effects of colonial thinking and practices. In this way, collaboration occurs between the writing teacher and the students locally. Ripple effects of colonialism such as Eurocentric ways of thinking about the “mother tongue”, “native speakers”, and “academic writing” can be recognized, challenged, and expanded. Counter-discourses in the form of emergent translanguaging literature can begin to inform participants’ subjectivities and classroom practice and produce their own counter effects on the cultural field within and beyond the classroom. My approach is also systematic. I believe that neither poetic autoethnography nor translanguaging should be approached in isolation. For me, they are a part of the systematic undoing and remaking that occur at the ground level in each English writing classroom. Whereas colonial epistemology naturalizes decontextualized and self-detached ways of

knowledge making and communication, decolonization will inevitably involve more contextualized and relational practices. Therefore, I approach my students' writing from a classroom writing ecology perspective, as proposed by Canagarajah [32]. More specifically, using slightly changed terminology, I view each piece of writing as a type of cultural product, which interacts with participants (teachers and peers), processes (how a text comes to be), and parameters (structural constraints such as institutional policy and curriculum) [15]. Furthermore, I view translanguaging as an integral part of my classroom writing ecology that shapes all participants' subjectivities and texts [3,15,33].

### 3. Context, Materials and Methods

This poetic autoethnography is part of a larger autoethnographic study approved by the human ethics committee of a Thai private university. I used classroom artifacts to "provide additional perspectives and contextual information" (Chang, 2008, p. 103) as I explore decolonization in my classroom. I taught the course in focus, senior seminar, completely online in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. There were seven international students in the class, all bilingual or multilingual speakers. Their non-English languages include Korean, Chinese, Japanese, German, Pennsylvania Dutch, Karen (an ethnic language in Myanmar), Burmese, and Thai. However, as common in Asian international education, English has been the default language of instruction in the International College [34]. In fact, the International College advertises that all its programs "are fully taught entirely in English" (college website).

My students participated in creating new knowledge in three ways. First, they drafted and revised their literacy autobiographies, as informed by autoethnographic research, which I aided through guidance during the 15-week semester. Their research, together with class activities such as presentation and discussion yielded autoethnographic texts, which index their experiences and evolving subjectivities about self, language, and literacy.

Second, my students participated in creating new knowledge by writing for publication. As I wrote in my syllabus:

You are getting ready for your senior projects and work, which call for different ways of positioning yourself in the world, no longer just as a knowledge consumer, but also a contributor and communicator of new knowledge. [...] To best prepare you for these prospects, you are expected to explore your own experiences, emotions and dreams related to academia and work. At the end of the semester, each of you is to contribute a polished chapter to a self-published book in PDF, whose working title is: *Literacies, Cultures and Identities from International Students' Perspectives*. [...] The draft of your chapter should be ready by the 9th week and you are encouraged to submit your draft to *MEXTESOL Journal* as a non-refereed article to benefit from the journal's free mentoring service.

Ultimately, the aim was for my undergraduate students to publish their literacy autobiographies. This goal extends beyond the colonial way of using participants only as data providers [32]. Through my teaching and research activities, I aimed to see my students grow as emergent scholars.

Third, my students participated in the creation of new knowledge by allowing me to use their artifacts to inform my poetic autoethnography. Their literacy autobiographies and other artifacts helped me to cross-verify my findings and speak, albeit indirectly and under pseudonyms, through some of the poems I crafted. More details are provided below about my research process.

Poetic autoethnographies, however, have their own pitfalls. First, the quality of poetry can pose a problem. As Faulkner [35] pointed out, poetry in Poetic Inquiry needs to be aesthetically appealing and demonstrate critical engagement with knowledge making. Second, autoethnography can also be misused. According to Chang (2008), these include too narrow a focus on the self, a lack of critical analysis and cultural rendering, an over-

reliance on personal memory, unethical research practices, and an unfit use of the term autoethnography.

To avoid these pitfalls, I composed my poetic autoethnography by following a similar process of moving from personal to social to reflective levels, which I adapted from Hanauer's [14] study. More specifically, the process includes the following phases:

Composing and revising poems based on memory. During this process, I used the self as a vantage point for autoethnographic research and Poetic Inquiry as an ongoing process of engaging with mundane details of my lived experience as an EFL writing teacher. Inspired by other multilingual writers [36–38], I experimented with translingual poetry, which draws on my heritage language, Chinese. For consistency, I used 50 words for each poem that I wrote.

Composing and revising translingual poems by using artifacts. Artifacts are important in autoethnographic research [7]. In my case, these artifacts include firstly my teaching documents, textbooks, writing samples, and fieldnotes, which do not require others to provide consent. Moreover, once I obtained informed consent from my former students, I accessed, downloaded, and analyzed their course-related artifacts such as writing samples, written questionnaires, class video recordings, chat records, semester reflections, etc. As I examined these artifacts, I composed and revised poems to embed their words, metaphors, and images so as to approximate my students' voices—a practice adopted by other poetic inquirers [3,15,33].

Drafting and crafting the poetic autoethnography. I treat writing as a process of inquiring into reality differently [39], whether in the form of poetry or prose or both. Thus, I constantly sought the best way to document, represent, and interpret my lived experience. To improve the quality of my writing, including poems, I read poetry books such as *A Life with Poetry* [40], watched poetry videos, and practiced poetry writing every day, sometimes in English, sometimes in Chinese, sometimes translingually. This process has helped me to sharpen my poetic intuition to craft the poems in this poetic autoethnography so that they can at least qualify as emergent translanguaging literature.

Contextualize and critique the poems through prose informed by artifacts and scholarly literature. Autoethnographies should provide not only reliable accounts of one's lived experience, but also cultural interpretations [7]. Therefore, in this poetic autoethnography, I used the abovementioned artifacts whenever possible to validate, contextualize, and explain the meanings of my selected poems. I then linked my discussion with critical theories, especially regarding decolonization and translanguaging, to produce cultural insights.

Seek feedback from others, particularly the student participants, and revise the poetic autoethnography accordingly. Once the draft was ready, I sent it to scholars and my student participants and revised my draft based on their feedback. I then submitted my revised poetic autoethnography to a journal and engaged in another round of revision. Throughout the process, my goal was to produce a truthful, evocative, and inspiring poetic autoethnography that illustrates clearly how producing emergent translanguaging literature can contribute to the decolonization of technologies.

As described above, I began intuitively in my creation of translingual poems. Gradually, I expanded my inquiry by delving into artifacts, contextualizing my poems, and collaborating with important readers. The result is the following poetic autoethnography, an example of emergent translanguaging literature, with my translingual poems for artistic expression and critical reflection, and prose for theoretical exploration and cultural interpretation.

#### **4. Emergent Translanguaging Literature**

##### *4.1. Bonded by a Monologic Vision*

### **Microphone and Speakers**

Microphones and speakers

– Are simple but powerful technologies  
That taught me to sing patriotic songs  
To love China, our great motherland  
The infallible Leader  
And hate foreign “devils”  
Even as I learned ABC  
And as I wrote my diaries in English  
I pursued my English-filled Chinese dream  
By forgetting Chinese.

This poem was based on my memory of my formal education in China, both in the countryside and in the city. At first glance, this poem does not involve any translanguaging. A closer look, however, shows a double vision, and thus a case of covert translanguaging, hinted at but not spelled out. For example, I used to “sing patriotic songs” such as “我的中国心” (My Chinese Heart) because patriotism was an important part of my Chinese school education, promoted through singing contests held every year on National Day, 4 May (Youth Day), and 1 June (Children’s Day). Similarly, writing and speaking contests were frequently held on the subject of patriotism.

I remember that while in high school in the countryside, I was once selected by my teacher to participate in such a speech contest. I struggled. It was my first time presenting a speech. Furthermore, the topic was simply impossible. What can I say about my love for my country? In a culture that does not encourage verbal expression of love, even between parents and children, I found it ironic that we had to express love so verbally, openly, and artistically as in singing through a microphone, “我爱你中国, 我爱你中国!” (I love you China, I love you China). Should I disregard my mixed feelings about its history of burning books, binding women’s feet, and in the early 1950s, bonding my grandfather for execution under false accusation? I remember my then brother-in-law, a Tibetan doctor, who suggested to me (in a Southwestern Chinese dialect): “Just give a speech on your hometown. That’s another way to show patriotism”. I suppose the cultural logic was that if I do not love my hometown, how can I love my country? But I just could not bring myself to do it. I could not give a speech about loving my hometown either. I disliked its drinking, gambling, and gossip culture. To say the least, I was ambivalent toward its culture. On one hand, of the multiple local cultures, I sided most strongly with the dominant Tibetan culture. On the other hand, the stories of my mother and aunt running for their lives when “guzong” (the old term for Tibetan bandits) robbed houses, raped women, and burned the township always haunted me. To say that I loved my hometown over the microphone, however popular it might be, was too disingenuous. My first Chinese speech turned into a fiasco.

Amidst the dominant discourse of patriotism, I was speechless. My experience, emotions, and imaginations were incongruent with the words expected of me. Consequently, I spoke only two lines from a Chinese classic poem: “前不见古人, 后不见来者, 独怆然而泪下” (None before me, none after, alone, I shed my tears). I began to understand that speech making is not simply a matter of language (of course, growing up speaking the Southwestern Chinese dialect, I struggled to speak Mandarin properly, unable to distinguish even to this day the second and the third tones). It is also a matter of ideology. It concerns whether the dominant discourse allows the marginalized group to speak with their own voices.

Unfortunately, educational technology can be used not only to instill a blind patriotism, but also to demonize the cultural other. In a college in Southwest China, I had to learn Japanese as my second foreign language. I never put my heart into it. Not surprisingly, I hardly learned any Japanese. Upon reflection, I believe one reason was that I had been taught, both openly and implicitly, to hate the Japanese. Growing up in rural China in the 1980s, when television was just entering our community, I watched TV series featuring heroic Chinese soldiers, including the much-celebrated “xiaobin zhang ga” (little soldier Zhang Ga) fighting the Japanese. In history books, Japanese were referred to as *wo kou* or dwarf bandits. Once, a retired teacher taught us to sing, with accompanying movements

of using a broadsword to behead the Japanese, “大刀向鬼子们的头上砍去” (hack the head of the [foreign] devils with our broadswords). We sang the song for the National Day singing contest. I do not remember if we won any prizes. All I know, in hindsight, is that we were committing some “symbolic violence”, a habitual way of not recognizing the cultural other as equally valuable humans [41]. In history, such misrecognition legitimized the ill-treatment of anyone foreign, as in the case of the Boxers, who murdered missionaries and their families in the 1900s. Reflecting on this part of my educational experience, I felt that the decolonization of technologies must be accompanied by a process of externalization. I must face the internalized truths about cultural others, regardless of the specific technologies used to promote such truths.

English, in contrast, gave me a life between local constraints and global affordances. This liminal space was filled with multiple discourses about the new foreigner, typically romanticizing the English-speaking “other”. By the time I was born in 1977, a great void had been left by the ten-year Great Cultural Revolution (1967–1977). The great leader whose “thought wins at every battle”, as was still written in big red characters on the wall of my elementary school, had died. The once-favored “Russian Elder Brother” fell out of favor for his mean ways of responding to China’s famine. Dr. Kissinger visited China. The national policy of reform and opening (to the West) began to change the school curriculum, students’ hair styles, and way of thinking. The decade-long-debunked College Entrance Exam system was restored. English was again taught at school.

Hardworking but taciturn as a student, I remember some of my teachers predicting that I would “不鸣则已，一鸣惊人”—that is, I would eventually sing, after a long silence, like a quiet bird, to surprise all. In the meantime, I remained speechless, not able to say much in Mandarin Chinese. “Who cares”, I comforted myself. “My dream is to leave these big mountains behind. I want to study abroad as my aunt in Hong Kong and my farming father once said”. “If I cannot speak Mandarin well, I will study English well”, I decided; “After all, Karl Marx learned English by forgetting his German, as the high school English textbook says. I too will forget Mandarin, my dialect Chinese, and my mother’s ethnic Naxi language”. My English teachers’ words also impacted me: “You should study English as your major. Once you learn English, you can find a job easily”. Little did I realize, through public education and mass media, I had already subscribed to a monolingual ideology. Misguided by this ideology, I classified people into three kinds. Those who spoke English were rich, open-minded, and knowledgeable—the civilized species. Next down the line were speakers of Mandarin Chinese, followed by those like me who spoke a dialect of Chinese. At the bottom of the ladder were people like my mother, ethnic minorities who spoke an unintelligible language not used in schools and who had never attended schools themselves. My life sat in between my rural upbringing with its biases and a hope for geographic and upward social mobility that only the language of the West could bring. My inner scale was measuring the worth of each language based on the social evaluations of these languages.

### Facing the Devil in Me

I must confess I am not a master  
Of English, or an owner.  
How can I?  
For over three decades now  
I have given my every day and breath  
To speak and live my dream  
By learning it, teaching it,  
Marrying it  
And I thought I was better  
For it.

In this poem, I did not yet mention technology. Nonetheless, technology lies in the background of all that I did with English-related learning, teaching, and living, nor does the poem exhibit any overt translanguaging. However, translanguaging is a matter of degree, and its specific configurations depend on individuals, conditions, and contexts [15,25,27]. First, I will deal with two foreign concepts—“master” and “owner”—before I discuss technology and translanguaging. This is made necessary because decolonization requires a close examination of Global North concepts that assume a universal currency [42].

The concept of “master” is foreign to me. It is true that I worked hard to learn English as early as middle school. As I wrote elsewhere [43], I committed English grammar rules and vocabulary, even extensive English passages, to memory. I majored in English. I read through an English dictionary. I spoke English every day with my roommates in college. I even read the English Bible, long before I became a Christian, “to really learn English well”, following the advice of a stranger. I also passed advanced national and international English exams. Yet I could not “master” English. I soon realized that even though I was motivated to become like a native speaker of English, I could never be one. My face betrays me. My accent betrays me. Even the international English tests I passed could not change the fact. After I had passed the TOEFL exam (托福 in Chinese, which meant to me “托英语的福”—by the grace of English), I wrote an email to my Chinese Canadian teacher, Mr. Hew. He wrote back: “Congratulations! But remember, it’s just an English proficiency test!” Indeed, as I would read in critical literature [44] and experience throughout my life, proficiency never delivers the status of a native speaker. One can only be born with such a status. Consequently, I wanted to master English but was instead mastered by it, so much so that I labored for it with all my efforts, even at the cost of distancing from my own heritage.

The other problematic word, “owner”, is often referred to as “ownership” or “to own” by other scholars. Some scholars consider it possible for EFL learners to “own” the English language, “redefine the target language community, and develop unique forms of intercultural competence” [45] (p. 5). Somehow, I felt this conclusion was an ill-fitting suit for me. It was ridiculous to “own” a language in a Chinese context, where even all land is owned by the state. Individuals and families can only use it like a tenant. Thus, I often felt betrayed by the word “ownership”, which simply means to me, “You can have it temporarily; it belongs to me [the state] only”. If even owning a plot of land is impossible for an individual, how much less to own a language! After all, no constitution, national or international, is there to protect the ownership of a language. Consequently, I began to shift my relationship with the English language. Perhaps, instead of talking about ownership, I should consider myself but a living organism: a tree, a fish, or a human in need of air. Everyone knows the importance of air, but it is ridiculous to claim that we own the air, or that the air belongs to a nation-state, as a language is often mistakenly labeled, and its location demarcated on the map. Perhaps, the English language, with its humble origin as a regional dialect on the British Isles, cannot really be owned by any individual or state. It is only to be shared like the air we breathe to contribute to the human potential of “living creatively” [46]. By learning someone else’s language, we may be less susceptible to living in the world of a uni-versity and more likely to experience pluri-versity [22].

Putting master and ownership aside, we can now examine pragmatically the three hidden characters behind my poem: technology, ideology, and translanguaging. I consider them at the same time because the use of each technology often foregrounds certain modalities and linguistic resources while putting others in the background, as supported and normalized by the ideology I held. My four decades of life have witnessed considerable technological advances and mixed experiences with English language use. I first started learning English in middle school in rural China. As with my peers, my main approach then was to recite, drill, and remember. Day after day, we copied white-chalked grammar rules from the blackboard. We read aloud the dialogues in the textbook. Occasionally, we would listen to some tapes. Regardless of the technology used, we were

positioned only to reproduce. We were praised for reciting passages from our textbooks and scolded for not being able to remember. The English we learned was good for taking exams but not for communication. Once my friends and I saw a foreigner in our remote countryside. We said, “Hi!”. He turned around, evidently happy that in the deep mountains in Southwest China, someone greeted him, and started walking toward us. But we all ran away. “Hi!” was the only thing we could say, not to mention that deep in our hearts, a foreigner is like a devil, not to be approached.

While in college (1995–1999), I began to have access to more advanced technologies. Like my classmates, I used a short-wave radio to listen to news from the Voice of America (VOA) and British Broadcasting Company (BBC) every day. By using a Panasonic Walkman, given by a cousin of mine, I listened repeatedly to a tape of American conversations, great speeches in English, including my favorite, “I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King Jr., and New Testament stories in English. As English majors, we also had listening comprehension classes in a listening lab with Japanese-made sound systems. Day and night, I immersed myself in English. Motivated by my dream of studying in the USA, I invested all that I had in learning English. Nothing else mattered to me. Learning English and becoming proficient in it, as evidenced by the tests that I passed and the fluency in speaking that I developed, transformed me. I was reconfigured, reinvented, and reimagined from a shy country boy into an outgoing, optimistic, and successful English learner. I felt superior to others who did not learn English well and far superior to those who could speak only a Chinese dialect or a minority language. A monolingual ideology or a myth about English as better than any other languages became my yardstick to measure my own and others’ worth. It was transmitted, sustained, and naturalized through all the English-teaching and -learning technologies that I was exposed to, be they a textbook or a handheld short-wave radio.

A similar mindset was shared by my students, whose language and literacy journey echoed a monologic worldview through international education in Thailand. Take Jessica as an example. Based on her artifacts, I composed the following poem:

### **My True Mother Tongue**

I am half Thai, half German, and half English.  
International schools are my other mother  
Who taught me English  
And it immediately became my mother tongue.  
I then began to respond to my Thai-and-German parents  
Only in English, my favorite L1  
Placing on the altar Thai—my true mother tongue.

However, we should not let individuals’ ideology take all the blame. Individuals’ ideologies, from a dialogical perspective [23], refract social perspectives, which in this case concern the ongoing promotion of English in the Thai society and educational system, especially through programs that use English as the medium of instruction [47]. This is especially telling in Jessica’s case. Jessica’s father is Thai, and her mother is German. Her parents spoke their respective languages to her at home. Nonetheless, as soon as she began to attend an international nursery, her language alignment changed: “English immediately became my favorite language, my mother tongue”. The main reason, as Jessica explained in her literacy autobiography, was that she was always taught “in an international environment” — all through to college — that English, as the official language of instruction, systematically pushed Jessica’s other languages to the background. For a long time, Jessica felt that her high proficiency in English gave her an advantage, without realizing that her lowered and non-native-like Thai was not helping her either. The technologies used by international schools, sophisticated or not, are coupled with a monolingual ideology that surrounds English with an aura of modernization, mobility, and internationalization [48]. Colonized by such an ideology, Jessica was, like me, becoming a willing investor in En-

English while at the same time distancing herself from her other linguistic backgrounds. To decolonize technologies, in our case, inevitably causes us to face the devil within us: an internalized and romantic view of the English language and English-speaking other, and eventually the self as well, as reinforced by diverse English-favoring technologies.

#### 4.2. Translanguaging to Freedom

In this section, I foreground the roles played by emergent translanguaging literature to set us free from limiting monolingual visions and engage in a process of decolonizing technologies. I will use both my education experience in China and my senior seminar class as examples.

### A Marriage of Language(s) and Technologies

Technologies are  
 Invented tongues and voices  
 To extend human words.  
 They speak like my dad, a life-long erhu player  
 Who, pressing two strings and drawing a bow  
 Made music  
 Even when his voice was cut  
 By a surgeon's scalpel.  
 Erhu sings with a hybrid sound.  
 Technologies speak with firing tongues.

It is tempting to view technology as inherently good or evil, or to see technology in isolation. But in my teaching of English writing in Thailand, as in China, I found that technology and language use are always intertwined. Textbooks, PowerPoint slides, Microsoft Teams—each of the technologies I used always contained someone's words, voices, and perspectives, as expressed through language(s) and designs. What is written in the technology was written by people in positions of power: engineers, teachers, and cited scholars. They claim a status of truth, demand agreement, and may give feedback to the other side of the technology and inform our behaviors. Therefore, to me, technologies are extended human voices who “speak with firing tongues”.

Similarly, translanguaging is not inherently just. In one simple case of mixing technologies with languages, I witnessed in my third year in college in China one of my most humiliating experiences as a language learner. It was in a traditional blackboard-and-chalk classroom even though the building name of “dian jiao lou” (Audiovisual Education Building) suggested something more technological. We were studying “Advanced English”. My professor asked a student to read a paragraph in English and paraphrase it. Angered by my classmate's ungrammatical English and accent, my professor spewed out a chain of criticism:

“这种水平还能去教英语?” (Mandarin: How can you teach English with this level?)

么么! (Local dialect: exclamation of surprise)

You should go back and study your high school English textbooks again!

The classmate was one of the many who ran outside the classroom with tears. Although in his criticism, the professor was most definitely translanguaging, translanguaging could not redeem his hurtful words. Culturally speaking however, the professor could still be regarded as a good teacher, a “严师” who is strict and intolerant of students' mistakes. Arguably, native speakerism [49] was at the core of my English teacher's identity to justify his angry comments. It essentially assumes the superiority of the White native speakers found common in English language teaching [50–52].

My students in Thailand also succumbed to this myth of English. As Hayma, a Burmese student in my class, wrote in a reflection:

I once thought that English is white people language and they were born with the nature of knowing English. Until now, I still have the belief from [from] the Thai lens, that White people speak better English because their mother tongues have the same roots and their speaking muscles are easier to adapting and speaking in English than Asians, which are from a very different language roots. (6 October 2020)

Myths like this about English are residues of colonial thinking. Fortunately, by drafting their literacy autobiographies weekly, engaging in related research, and learning about translanguaging, my students began to expose and challenge the myths they had lived by. Nancy, my German student in her forties, for instance, began to adopt a translanguaging identity [32]. Drawing on the final draft of her literacy autobiography, I composed the following poem:

### **I Am a Studentin**

How frustrating it is  
 To have to call Angela Merkel  
 —our Bundeskanzlerin—  
 “A female counselor”  
 And not to have a single word “studentin”  
 To describe myself  
 a female student  
 I hope that one day  
 I, a German woman  
 can show academic knowledge  
 without the strict corset  
 of the English Academia

In this poem, by using the word “studentin” (which Nancy coined after the German way), I tried to recapture her point that academic writing in English is dominated by male language and a monologic vision. In its stead, she imagined new possibilities of diversity through a translingual lens. As she wrote:

There must be a way to look beyond sentence structures and grammar to acknowledge the original ideas behind the writing. I understand that all languages must follow specific rules to be readable and understood. However, these rules should not be the determining factor of evaluating a paper, an article or any other research in any academic field. The answer to these problems may lie in accepting translingual approaches. (Literacy autobiography)

Nancy’s translanguaging expression “studentin” thus manifests her embrace of “translingual approaches” and her agency “to preserve [her] German voice as well as female identity in English” academic writing. Like me, she also produced her own translanguaging literature through her literacy autobiography.

Emergent translanguaging literature, such as that produced by me and my students, allowed us to enter a “self-authoring” space [16]. The space was not monologic but dialogic. It involved crossing between our past experiences and the current literacy activity, between a lived world and an imagined possibility. It featured “border regions” critical to decolonial thinking and knowledge making [53] (p. 11), [54]. Within this space, we humanized both the self and the other through stories told, written, shared, commented on, and revised, from multiple cultural, linguistic, and epistemological perspectives. We engaged in translanguaging acts autobiographically, socially, and critically to index our ongoing identity work from our own marginalized positions. Such “serious translinguistic work”, according to Pratt, “is an essential tool of decolonization because it becomes a source of the new social visions decolonization requires, visions that can and must come only out of the conflicting but intersecting histories that produced the colonial encounter” [42] (p. 121).

During this decolonization process, educational technologies were not used to reproduce or romanticize any colonial way of thinking and relating. Rather, they were used to mitigate the colonial influences in our own educated lives to widen the decolonial cracks [53].

Reflecting on my own and my students' literacy autobiographies, I composed the following poem to address epistemological injustices.

### A 坐 (zuo) Approach

What if we—人 and 人—  
Both 坐 (zuo) sit  
You on this side, I, the other  
Bonded by the cross and other technologies  
As equals—  
Not one of us lifted higher  
Nor lowered by illusions of each other's languages—  
Let our shared humanity and humility  
Be the ground\_\_  
Leveled.

Through this translanguaging poem, I reimagine the relationship between Global South and Global North epistemologies from a dialogical perspective. More specifically, I propose a “坐” (zuo) approach. The character “坐”, drawing on a Global South linguistic system of Chinese, speaks volumes about epistemological justice. Epistemologies, whether originating from the South or the North, are embodied by each of the “人” (ren) or person. They are to be equals; neither “人” dominates the other “人”, thus removing or reducing the other's humanity and, indirectly, the humanity of the self as well. Furthermore, this character also visually represents both the endowed vision and inevitable limitation of each “人”. This is illustrated by Bakhtin, as explained by Holquist [55], in simple terms of gazing at each other:

If we return for a moment to the situation of two people facing each other, we remember that although they share an external space and time (they are physically simultaneous), inside his or her own head each sees something the other does not. [55] (p. 34)

Humans thus need dialogue, or “the simultaneous unity of differences in the event of utterance” [55] (p. 34), for a synergic vision, which Holquist interprets to mean “the surplus of seeing”. I seek this possibility by combining what this “人” and that “人” uniquely present. That is one meaning of “+”, which can serve as the mathematical symbol, “plus”. It is like the six blind men who felt the elephant with their own hands. If they opt to accept their own blindness and the limitations of their own experiences, and if they opt not to take what they know to be the whole truth and combine each other's interpretations, they would be more likely to achieve a holistic understanding of what the elephant is really like.

However, I also advocate a moral aspect of “+” as a cross to invite the ethical use of technologies in language and literacy education. The Bible tells a story of Jesus being crucified, which the cross often stands for. I first listened to this story on my Walkman in 1998 when I was a junior in college, majoring in English. I was shocked to hear, “But they kept shouting, ‘Crucify, crucify him!’” [56] (Luke 23:21). I was applying to join the Chinese Communist Party back then and, by the Party's decree, should have taken a strict atheistic stance. Nonetheless, I could not help thinking about the meanings of life and death. Marxist philosophy and Chinese communism left in me a void that Christian literature began to fill. The crucifixion story awakened in me a strong sense of human injustice. “Jesus did not do anything wrong. Why should he suffer like this?” I wondered. I also noticed a shared theme between my family history and Jesus's life. My grandfather was killed by the powerful other, who had the power to first label him as a class enemy and then legally remove his humanity and life. Similarly, the religious leaders of Jesus's time had the power to

label Jesus as a blasphemer and crucify him by using one of the cruelest and most humiliating human technologies. For a scholar growing up in an atheistic environment, the cross challenged my former worldviews, as well as my monologic valuing of English at the cost of my heritage languages. I began to question my all-out investment in learning English because the Bible says, “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” [56] (1 Corinthians 13:1). I began to see people who speak less prestigious languages as equally valuable as those who speak dominant languages, for all will be “standing before the throne and before the Lamb” [56] (Revelation 7:9). My monologic worldview and language ideology began to give way to a more cosmopolitan vision; or more precisely, a heavenly vision of all humanity as a united family.

Additionally, the cross symbolizes forgiveness and redemption. On the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” [56] (Luke 23: 34). That prayer greatly baffled me in my college years. I just could not, from my Chinese mind, imagine anyone so forgiving. Chinese tradition taught us, “君子报仇, 十年不晚” (A gentleman will avenge himself, even if it takes him ten years). Therefore, I think my father must have wrestled between revenge and forgiveness in much of his life. On the day his own father was executed due to false accusation, he and his twin brother had to perform songs on their erhu—praise songs for the violent other. Yet, he never expressed hatred in his life. In fact, he did not want me to hate either. By delaying his relating of this part of the family history until I was an adult, my father kept me from developing hatred and turning into a bitter person. In this way, he kindly avoided destroying my relationship with a friend whose father had played a part, perhaps unwittingly, in my grandfather’s death. My acceptance of Christianity in 2000 and my father’s conversion in 2008 both attest to our own journeys of salvation through faith. Our visions of self and the world were expanded beyond what a singular bounded cultural tradition could provide.

I believe this story of expanded visions is important for literacy educators to consider as we explore ways to decolonize technology. A technology, whether as sophisticated as ChatGPT or as crude as a cross, can be used either to induce or to reduce social injustice. It is a matter of whose vision, voice, and values are magnified through the chosen technology. In other words, to decolonize technologies is not simply to remove anything external that bears colonizing features or resemblance. To do so is to pay only lip service to a more radical mission of restoring humanity to the “人” on both sides of the cross. The colonizing ways typically oppress, exploit, and misrepresent the cultural and linguistic other as less than humans, turning them into slaves and forcefully removing them from their home(lands) [57,58]. The main strategy entails demonizing and objectifying the other. In research, it can be translated into positioning marginalized individuals and groups only as data providers and consumers of knowledge. The decolonizing ways, in contrast, are honoring, sharing, and collaborating [32]. The core strategy is dialogue and that which links the self and the other together as equally valuable and contributing partners. Although power differentiations will always exist, it is distributed to humanize both as agents for better alternatives.

## 5. Decolonizing Technologies through Emergent Translanguaging Literature from the Margins

A wide range of technologies were mentioned in this poetic autoethnography: from microphones to Google Docs. Although neither I nor my students helped to decolonize any of the technologies from the engineering end, we decolonized them through emergent translanguaging literature, i.e., our translingual poems, stories, and reflections. For instance, in my teaching of senior seminar, I decolonized technologies such as Microsoft Teams and Google Docs by using them to facilitate my students’ writing and sharing of their literacy autobiographies. Such translingual writing [32] from a Global South context defies colonial relations. It documents how my students and I wrestled with, externalized, and challenged colonial views of the self and other, saturated with monolingual ideolo-

gies. Our emergent translanguaging literature disrupted the ongoing dominance of our mind by the English language and English-speaking other. Together, we began a process of shattering the shackle of monolingualism in our lives and turning to a translanguaging vision of ourselves. The in-house publication at the end of the semester signaled my students as co-contributors of new knowledge about language, literacy, and identity in a classroom setting. The refracted poems in this poetic autoethnography is another step to publish emergent translanguaging literature. One successful publication by one student in *MEXTESOL Journal* showcases multilingual students not as data providers but independent researchers and authors. Several students' submissions now under review will continue that process. Moreover, I hope to publish another book with my students' literacy autobiographies featured under their own names. To decolonize technologies, in essence, is to allow students of English language to develop a fuller capacity for life-enriching and self-empowering identities by producing and possibly publishing such emergent translanguaging literature. By producing such literature, we "the condemned" are turned into "the epistemological and political subject capable of forging such a [better] world" for all [59] (p. 18). Our emergent translanguaging literature illustrates how EFL writing teachers can turn an online EMI class into a translanguaging space [60] where we—both the teacher and the students—can "grapple with language ideologies that marginalize [us] and to voice [our] translanguaging sensibilities" [36] (p. 298). Through this emergent translanguaging literature, we are no longer voiceless; we have raised our collective voice under a translanguaging banner to reconsider multilinguals as knowledge makers.

A writing teacher can thus play an important role in decolonizing technologies by taming them with a translanguaging mindset. As I reflect on the senior seminar course, I feel relieved that I did not insist on a monolingual pedagogy as I used to when I first started teaching English in a Chinese university about two decades ago. I have changed. I no longer regard language and literacy education as a modernizing tool, devoid of sociopsychological involvement of the learner, as positioned by official dictum, nor did I treat the dominant language as a magic wand for personal upward social mobility. I have come to see English language and literacy education in its true nature: with both its colonizing baggage and a decolonizing prospect. By embracing a translanguaging perspective of languages as fluid, tempered by a dialogical deliberation, I have developed my own "坐" epistemological position toward the self and the other. I have also come to see my students, and their experiences, linguistic and knowledge traditions, not only as relevant, but as critical to my writing class. They serve as the powerhouse for innovative research and academic writing. I have thus responded to the call to embrace a political aspect of translanguaging by turning my own and my students' "rich and diverse and social experiences and practices" as new centers "to provide alternative points of reference, horizons, and perspective for knowledge production and at the same time to transform [our] subjectivities" [29] (p. 179). This is a ground-level as well as a ground-leveling project.

As Tyler wrote, in conclusion to her ethnographic study of bilingual science learning in the multilingual South Africa, "We need a vision of *decolonial learning*—where students draw on their full semiotic repertoires to confidently make their voices heard in the borderlands and lend these to shape future knowledge creation" [53] (p. 146, emphasis in original). Hopefully, emergent translanguaging literature from the margins, like that shared in this poetic autoethnography, may increasingly widen the "decolonial cracks" [53]. May it illustrate a zhongyong approach to decolonizing educational technologies. Lastly, may it contribute to the ongoing project of rethinking language [61], teaching [6], and knowledge making in the global context, but particularly from the Global South perspective [19].

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