

Western Interdisciplinary Student Symposium on Language Research



March 5th, 2021

1:00pm-8:30pm

Online, Zoom

Western University



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Overview of WISSLR 2021 Conference

Event Location & Time:

Zoom 1:00pm – 8:30PM EST

Meet and Greet: 1:00PM – 1:25PM

Session 1: 1:30PM – 3:00PM

First Break: 3:00 PM – 3:15 PM

Session 2: 3:15PM – 4:45PM

Second Break: 4:45PM – 5:30PM

Keynote Presentation: 5:30PM – 6:30PM

Final Break: 6:30PM – 6:45PM

Session 3: 6:45PM – 8:15PM

Closing and Final Remarks: 8:15PM



WISLR 2021 Schedule

Friday, March 5th, 2021 <i>Location: Online</i>	
1:00PM-1:25 PM	<i>Registration</i>
1:25PM-1:30 PM	Opening Remarks
1:30 PM -3:00 PM	Session 1
1:30 PM	Irish Consonant Mutation in English Loanwords Diana Hamel University of Toronto
2:00 PM	Strategies to Sign Fingerspelled Double Letters in American Sign Language Lin Fei Kang University of Toronto
2:30 PM	Quenya Prosodic Structure Alexander Stainton University of Toronto
3:00 PM-3:15 PM	<i>Break</i>
3:15 PM -4:45 PM	Session 2
3:15 PM	Acquisition of Hindi Grammatical Gender System by Bilingual Children in Delhi Meghna Bose University of Delhi
3:45 PM	English Practice and Language Policy in Tunisian Tertiary Education: Suggested Methodology Aicha Rahal Pazmany Peter Catholic University, Hungary
4:15 PM	Are Multilinguals Better Adult Learners of Novel Language Morphosyntax? Martha Black Western University
4:45PM-5:30PM	Break
5:30PM- 6:30PM	Keynote Presentation The Importance of Sound in Language Revitalization Dr. Keren Rice University of Toronto
6:30PM-6:45PM	<i>Break</i>

6:45PM-8:15PM	Session 3
6:45 PM	<p>“Keeping Language Work Going” Indigenous Language Revitalization on Twitter in Canada during the Coronavirus Pandemic</p> <p>Laura Gallant Western University</p>
7:15 PM	<p>“And They Were Like ‘That’s So Cool’”: Quotative and Intensifier Variation in Guided Narrations</p> <p>Diane de Zuviria Abbate Western University</p>
7:45 PM	<p>Confronting Linguistic Necropolitics: Translanguaging in Hip Hop Space</p> <p>Adesoji Babalola Queen’s University</p>
8:15PM	Closing and Final Remarks





Abstracts

Keynote Presentation:

The Importance of Sound in Language Revitalization

Keren Rice, PhD | University of Toronto

Often when we talk about language revitalization, we talk about structure and meaning, of pragmatics and culture. Yet for many people who are interested in language revitalization, sound is of great interest. Learners of their languages are often criticized for not sounding right- there are sounds they cannot make, there is variation that they are not aware of, prosodic features may make them not sound like a speaker, sounds in words in isolation may be very different from words in context.

Understanding sounds can be of tremendous value to speakers, and it can also be of value to phonologists and phoneticians. In this talk, I will provide examples from *Dene* languages whose speakers I have been fortunate to work with, focusing on phonetic and phonological properties that these speakers recognize as important in speaking the language, and thus important for learners to understand.



Keren Rice is a Professor of Linguistics in the Department of Linguistics, and Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives at the University of Toronto. Her recent work has focused primarily on Language Revitalization and Phonology.

Session 1

Irish Consonant Mutations in English Loanwords

Diana Hamel | University of Toronto

One of the most unique features of the Irish language (as well as its sisters, including Scots Gaelic and Welsh) is the morpho-phonological system of initial consonant mutation. Irish has two principal mutations: lenition, which converts plosives to fricatives (while preserving voicing) and debuccalizes or deletes radical fricatives; and eclipsis, which replaces voiceless plosives with voiced plosives, voiced plosives with nasals, and fricatives with glides. These two mutation paradigms are robust in modern Irish and both apply to nouns, verbs, and adjectives to encode a variety of grammatical information: compare a cat ‘her cat’ and a gcat ‘his cat,’ which differ only in initial mutation, with the first having no mutation and the second undergoing eclipsis (/k/ → /g/).

This paper concerns the case of English words loaned into Irish and the degree to which speakers incorporate them into these mutation paradigms. Theoretically, we can understand that Irish speakers encountering English loans could incorporate them into their morpho-phonology in one of two ways: either by leaving the English words untouched or by treating them like Irish words and mutating them as necessary. Previous studies of conversational and elicited data, like Nancy Stenson’s 1990 survey of Ráth Cairn Irish, established that different initial consonants are mutated at different rates in loans, but go no further in attempting to explain why the consonants differ in this regard. My reading of Stenson’s data demonstrates that, although all segments accept eclipsis fairly readily, there are three levels of resistance to lenition: those segments which do not significantly resist lenition (namely /p/ → /f/, /b/ → /v/, /m/ → /w/, /k/ → /x/, and /g/ → /ɣ/, which are realized in 75% or more of tokens), those that resist it partially (/t/ → /h/, /d/ → /ɣ/, and /s/ → /h/, which are realized in 30-50% of tokens) and those that resist it strongly (this last group consisting only of /f/ → /∅/, which occurs in only 6% of tokens).

I propose an Optimality Theory analysis to account for these differences, positing that the intermediate class of consonants resist



lenition because they violate a high-ranked faithfulness constraint (namely IDENT-PLACE) in the process of mutating into their lenited forms. I further posit that /f/ resists lenition even more thoroughly because the mutation violates an even more highly-ranked constraint which prohibits consonant deletion. I also address the unique sociolinguistic landscape of Irish in the modern day and consider some of the interesting questions at the intersection of language revitalization and this phonological phenomena: seeing as Stenson's data is nearly 30 years old, how might the trends of mutation changed in the interim? Ideally, a large study obtaining conversational data of Irish speakers from different parts of the country (and even in Northern Ireland) could yield fascinating results and serve to either corroborate or question my conclusions here.

Strategies to Sign Fingerspelled Double Letters in American Sign Language

Lin Fei Kang | University of Toronto

Each letter of the English alphabet has an equivalent handshape for fingerspelling in American Sign Language (ASL), but signers do not fingerspell double letters simply by redoing the letter's handshape. Double letters are two instances of the same letter immediately following each other in a word (*e.g.*, *c* in *account*). For letters whose handshape does not involve path movement (every letter except -J- (J) and -Z- (z), as they have their own strategies; Barlow 2017), signers such as those in Lapiak (2020) tend to use one of three signing strategies: the slide, the tap, or the saccade. In the sample collected from Lapiak (2020), the choice of strategy seems to be motivated by a need to minimize the amount of signer effort while maximizing the viewer's perception to make sure they understand which letters are being fingerspelled. From an Optimality Theory perspective, signers balance markedness and faithfulness constraints.

The 'slide' strategy is characterized by a very perceptually salient movement, as the signer moves their forearm away from their body while keeping their elbow steady. This strategy thus appears to require the most effort on the part of the signer. On the other hand, the 'tap' strategy requires only finger movement, and involves a quick tap of the fingers. For instance, when signing a double -D- (d) with a tap, as in FS-RIDDLE1 , the signer quickly taps their thumb and middle

finger. This strategy requires little effort and movement but as a result might be missed by the viewer. Also, signers seem to only use the tap when the fingers necessary to distinguish the handshape (the ‘main’ fingers) touch, so double letters such as a double -C- (c), as in FS-SUCCULENT, are not signed with that strategy. A possible concern to the signer is that if a double -C- were signed with a tap, the viewer might confuse the tap with a signed -O- (o), as its handshape require the thumb and the index to be touching. Instead, signers do a ‘saccade’, which is a very short back and forth movement with the forearm. This requires more effort than the tap, as it involves the forearm, but is still less effortful than the slide.

In the data, the ASL signers used the slide strategy for short words with four letters or less (as in FS-FOOT). Presumably, since those require less effort overall than longer words, signers can afford to spend more effort on the most perceptually salient strategy. In contrast, longer words tend to be signed with the tap or saccade strategy, depending on whether the main fingers touch when doing the double letter’s handshape. It is possible that signers rely on the numerous surrounding letters to provide enough context for the viewer to understand which word is being fingerspelled in case the slight movement of the double letter is missed, and thus are more comfortable using a less effortful strategy. Interestingly, longer words such as FS-SEAGULL are signed with a slide, contrary to the expected saccade strategy (as the main fingers for -L- (l) are not touching; *cf.* FS-TRILLION, which is signed with a saccade). This could be explained by the idea that word boundaries are important to mark visually to help the viewer’s comprehension, so double letters at the end of a long word still merit spending more effort.

Quenya Prosodic Structure

Alexander Stainton | University of Toronto

High fantasy literature introduces its readers to vast and exciting new worlds from the imaginations of talented authors. These worlds can include new cultures, races, kingdoms, customs and even languages. Constructed languages, sometimes called conlangs, are perhaps some of the most intricate and complicated systems that an author can hope to invent for the purposes of their fantasy world, and few such languages exist in a fleshed out and developed capacity.



Some examples of developed constructed languages are High Valyrian from the popular series *Game of Thrones* and Klingon from *Star Trek*. This paper focuses on another constructed language, Quenya, invented by renowned English author J.R.R. Tolkien for the elves of his *Legendarium*.

Quenya is a language that has received very little study relatively speaking, with much of the language's internal processes being unknown to most people. This is not entirely surprising, given the fact that Quenya is an artificial language and therefore not a living language, the focus of most linguists. Despite its artificial nature and under-studied position, the Quenya language is a very interesting language to study; it displays a wide variety of phonological, prosodic and grammatical processes that also appear in living languages today. This paper attempts to present an introduction to Quenya prosodic features, including syllables, primary stress and non-metrical secondary stress. The paper also examines and evaluates two proposed prosodic processes that occur in Quenya, namely prosodic lengthening and syllable shortening. Optimality Theory is key in this study, as it provides both faithfulness and markedness constraints that interact to ultimately provide optimal candidates for inputs that need adjustments.

This paper draws data from *Eldamo.org*, the most thorough lexicon of the Tolkien languages engineered and compiled by Paul Strack, who also put forward the aforementioned processes of prosodic lengthening and syllable shortening. While his data are crucial in the study of Quenya and his suggested processes extremely insightful, this paper suggests that thanks to Optimality Theory, both processes can be summed up and conflated into one overarching principle which is the avoidance of ultimate stress assignment. Since Quenya is a quantity sensitive language, Quenya avoids word-final heavy syllables that would attract stress. I outline an Optimality Theory analysis that captures this generalization.

Most of the studies devoted to Quenya have been rudimentary and for the purposes of learning the language itself, not necessarily for academic purposes. Because of this, most sources of information regarding this language will seldom address the objectives of an

academic study of Quenya and will use norms and language that is not in line with those of the academic linguistic community. These obstacles do however present to whomever is interested in studying Quenya an interesting and engaging challenge which makes coming to conclusions all the more satisfying

Session 2

Acquisition of Hindi Grammatical Gender by Bilingual Children in Delhi

Meghna Bose | University of Delhi

Introduction:

This is a preliminary study on the rules of acquisition and the principles used in the Hindi grammatical gender system among the 1st and 2nd generation locally born children of Bengali (L1) speakers in Delhi. The study exhibited stem phonology, animacy, language, the speaker's background, quality, and the quantity of input by bilingual children and prioritizing them for assigning gender.

Background:

Children entirely acquire grammatical Gender in L1 by the age of 4 or 5 with an acquisition rate of 90% or higher, while bilinguals acquire it by the age of 6 or 7 (Müller 2000; Mills 1986; Bewer 2004; Montanari 2014). Bilingual children with one language being genderless (Unsworth et al. 2014; Corbett 1991) show acceleration or delay effects due to factors like transparency, frequency of the morphological cues in the grammatical gender system, and input language development, stage of acquisition- simultaneous or sequential bilingualism. The grammatical gender system of Hindi, like many other languages (Cucerzan and Yarowsky, 2003; Carroll 1999:45), is based on both semantic and form, which draws importance to meaning and the morphological cues and is realized by assignment (nouns) and agreement (verbs, postposition & adjectives).

Design & Result:



14 speakers were chosen for the study (five from Hindi L1 and nine from Bangla L1). The study was elicitation-based tests where the children were shown pictures and videos of inanimates and animate daily and were then asked to describe the changes in the pictures or the scene. The speakers were coded for their L1, age, and siblings, for example, B;5s (Bangla speaker aged five s- sibling of B;10s). The findings show that both Hindi and Bengali speakers seem to follow the same overall acquisition pattern. However, the Hindi grammatical gender system's accuracy rate concerning age is faster in Hindi speakers than in Bangla speakers. The results demonstrate that the older speakers of both the Hindi and the Bangla speaking groups have a higher accuracy rate in the Hindi grammatical gender system.

% of nouns assigned as expected / L1 Speakers	Human biological gender	Biological animate nouns	Other animates	Inanimate nouns	'a' ending nouns	'i' ending nouns	Consonants ending nouns	Nouns ending in other vowels
Hindi	75	79.34	82.32	64	81	76	67	75
Bangla	90	68.19	67	58	64	68	59	62

Table 1: Accuracy rate of grammatical gender of Hindi nouns by Hindi and Bangla L1 groups

Hindi grammatical gender system is marked covertly without proper assignment rules; thus, it is evident that the speakers are taking much longer to acquire the grammatical gender system as they have to learn most of them instead of formalizing them over-generalization. Human nouns with biological gender pairing ('laRka'- boy, 'laRki'- girl, et cetera.) are the most transparent and hence, are acquired first by the speakers, followed by animacy ('billi'- cat, 'kutta'- dog, 'kursi'- table, 'paer'- tree, 'aag'- fire, 'haath'- hand, et cetera.). Vocalic cues determining gender are acquired at a higher rate than gender in nouns with a consonant ending. Stem phonology comes close, where 'a' ending nouns have the highest acquisition rate ('kapRa'- cloth, 'chhaataa'- umbrella). The oldest speakers of the Bangla families show a high split assignment for many nouns, which mapping complications might cause. English or Hindi nouns might also influence the grammatical Gender of Hindi.

English Practice and Language Policy in Tunisian Tertiary Education: Suggested Methodology

Aicha Rahal | Pazmany Peter Catholic University, Hungary

English has now become the “global language” (Crystal, 2003, p.1). It encompasses “a unique cultural pluralism and a linguistic heterogeneity and diversity” (Kachru, 1985). The multilingual reality of English and its global status raise many issues related to English and language teaching, English and language policy, etc. This thesis believes in the multilingual profile in Tunisia. It supports the claim of Sayahi (2011) who states that “Tunisia represents a rich sociolinguistic laboratory with a long history of bilingualism and language contact” (p.1). It seeks to explore the pedagogic reality of teaching English in Tunisia. It is an attempt to investigate the status of English in Tunisia, to show how English is presented in English national curriculum, how it is performed in tertiary classrooms and how it is perceived by both teachers and students. In other words, the present thesis allows us to analyze the pedagogical stakes related to English practice in Tunisia because its linguistic situation is characterized mainly by diversity (Payne, 1983). It also sheds light on the language policy in the Tunisian tertiary education. Additionally, the research highlights the need for teachers’ and students’ perception regarding the recent situation of English in Tunisia. This research methodologically opts for several methods. It purports to use mixed methods for the purpose of giving in depth analysis and reliable results. It is a qualitative study with a quasiethnographic approach. It is based on different research instruments, including observation, questionnaires and interviews. In this presentation, I will give an overview of the linguistic profile in Tunisia and the different language policies. Then, I will focus on the methodology; I will present my suggested questionnaire and interview schedule.

Are Multilinguals Better Adult Learners of Novel Language Morphosyntax?

Martha Black | Western University

Bilingual and multilingual speakers have an empirically-demonstrated advantage when it comes to the task of learning a third or additional language in lexical (e.g., Kaushanskaya & Marian, 2009), phonological (e.g., Tremblay & Sabourin, 2012), phonetic (e.g.



Antoniou et al., 2015), and syntactic (e.g., Klein, 1995) domains. However, the present study is motivated by a notable lack in previous research that examines the effect of multilingualism on acquiring a specific grammatical structure, particularly in the domain of morphosyntax. This study therefore aims to examine how knowledge of an additional language beyond L1 English and L2/L3 Spanish may affect accuracy scores with grammatical gender as a problematic feature for the late acquisition of morphosyntax (e.g., Fernández-García, 1999; McCarthy, 2008; Montrul et al., 2008). Participants consisted of two groups of adult learners ($N = 24$) in the instructed context: 1. those with bilingual experience ($n = 10$) in L1 English and L2 Spanish; and 2. those with multilingual experience ($n = 14$) in L1 English, L2 other language (e.g. French, Arabic, Mandarin, German), and L3 Spanish. The effect of language processing modality was investigated via two task types: 1. a self-paced (planning time) written task to examine performance during the ‘offline’ modality; and 2. a speeded (no planning time) oral picture description task to examine the ‘online’ modality. These varied task demands were designed to investigate to what extent processing modality may modulate the effect of multilingual experience on grammatical performance. The effect of three linguistic variables inherent to grammatical gender is also investigated by comparing scores across both categories on the following binary variables: gender class (masculine or feminine), domain of agreement (determiner, adjective), and noun morphology (overt or non-overt gender marking). Results demonstrate a positive and significant effect ($F(22) = 4.723$, $p = .041$) of multilingual experience thus suggesting that even novice-level multilingual exposure beyond the native language and the current target language affords significant advantage in performance with a problematic feature for adult learning of morphosyntax. Moreover, this advantage produces a significant effect only during online/speeded processing ($F(22) = 9.344$, $p = .006$). The observed multilingual advantage cannot be directly related to other language typology since multilingual participants both with ($n = 7$) and without ($n = 7$) binary grammatical gender instantiated in their additional language were not significantly different in their performance (M difference = 4.4%, $SD = 8.2$; $F(12) = 0.816$, $p = .385$). Furthermore, no significant difference was detected in Spanish proficiency ($F(22) = 1.640$, $p = .222$) nor metacognitive awareness scores ($F(22) = 0.634$, $p = .436$) between

bilingual and multilingual participants. Therefore, we argue that the multilingual advantage observed here may be attributable to differentiated processing cues and language representation such that learners with multilingual exposure demonstrate enhanced use of overt noun morphology as a processing cue ($F(22) = 10.128, p = .005$), are less dependent on the masculine class default form as a compensatory strategy as demonstrated in higher accuracy rates with feminine nouns ($F(22) = 6.317, p = .021$), and have potentially more developed procedural/implicit linguistic competence, as reflected in higher accuracy scores with online processing during the speeded oral production task ($F(22) = 9.344, p = .006$). The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the effect of multilingualism on the late acquisition of morphosyntax and further relate this multilingual effect to specific features of the target structure and language processing modality.



Session 3

“Keeping Language Work Going” Indigenous Language Revitalization on Twitter in Canada during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Laura Gallant | Western University

Research Context:

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a pandemic (Government of Canada 2021). At the time of this writing (January 8, 2021), there have been 635 134 reported cases of COVID-19 in Canada with 16 649 reported deaths (ibid.). In addition to the threats to health, employment, and financial security, COVID-19 has complicated and precluded many Indigenous language revitalization (LR) efforts in Canada, many of which involved inperson gatherings. Many LR practitioners in Canada have been using Twitter to safely connect with others in order to facilitate (continued) Indigenous language teaching and learning.

Methods:

In my presentation, I will describe some adaptations and innovations to Indigenous LR in Canada throughout the pandemic that have allowed language learners and teachers to continue, or begin to embark on, their revitalization activities safely and remotely. I will select examples from a Twitter dataset containing Tweets about Indigenous LR in Canada that I collected from March to November 2020 as part of my MA project. I will provide examples of language pedagogies evident in the Tweets including online/distanced language classes, land-based learning, and innovations.

Research Questions:

1. How have people involved in LR in Canada been promoting and engaging in Indigenous LR on Twitter during COVID-19?
2. How are Indigenous languages in Canada being used on Twitter throughout the pandemic?

Main Arguments and their Significance:

LR advocates and practitioners are using Twitter to engage in language teaching and learning in a multitude of ways, including shifting to Zoom classes, engaging in land-based learning, and finding new ways to engage people in LR activities (e.g. the use of TikTok, online Bingo, podcasts, chatrooms, etc.). I found that 45.5% of the Tweets in the corpus include one of more Indigenous languages in use (spoken, written, or signed). This language usage plays a key role in promoting revitalization, minority language visibility, as well as disseminating important information, including linguistically- and culturally-appropriate health promotion resources for COVID-19. This presentation seeks to acknowledge how LR practitioners continue to accelerate and innovate their methods and pedagogies even when facing a global pandemic.

“And they were like ‘that’s so cool’”: Quotative and Intensifier Variation in Guided Narrations

Diana de Zuviria Abbate | Western University

How do individuals of different gender identities tend to speak? While this question has been studied by looking at lexical variation of quotatives and intensifiers (Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2004, Fuchs 2017), this has yet to be done in a way that is inclusive and considerate of non-binary genders, or genders that are outside of being exclusively male or female. Gender-inclusive studies do exist in other areas of linguistics, such as socio-phonetics (Zimman 2017), but there are no such studies focusing on usage of quotatives or intensifiers. Quotatives are used to report speech, as in example one, below, where *be like*, *say*, and *go* are the quotatives.



- (1)
 - a. After that, he was like “it’s hot outside.”
 - b. After that, he said “it’s hot outside.”
 - c. After that, he went “it’s hot outside.”

Intensifiers are adverbs used to increase or decrease the intensity of a modified word, and most often, and adjective. This is shown in example two, below, where really, very, super, and kind of are the intensifiers that modify tall.

- (2)
 - a. That tree is really tall.
 - b. That tree is very tall.
 - c. That tree is super tall.
 - d. That tree is kind of tall.

In this paper, I analyze linguistic data gathered from personal interviews that use guided narration to see if individuals of different genders use different frequencies of intensifiers or quotatives, or if they use more or fewer of specific variants. The personal interviews consisted of a background questionnaire, a picture narration task, a spontaneous dubbing task, and an open-ended narration. Each participant was able to describe their own identity in terms of gender, gender expression, sexuality, and other factors. The interview methodology is based on Koven (2011) and Lara Bermejo (2016), and the analysis in Buchstaller (2006), Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017), and Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005). The interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed in terms of frequency of usage of quotatives and intensifiers in general, as well as looking into specific variants of the intensifiers and quotatives used. The results indicate large amounts of individual variation, with participants using between one and 59 intensifiers each, and between one and 101 quotatives each. However, the highest-frequency users of both quotatives and intensifiers were women, while lower-frequency users being men, whereas non-binary speakers have a wide spread of usage but overall use more intensifiers and quotatives than men but fewer than women. This paper shows that gender-inclusive sociolinguistic studies are possible and important. Future research can follow this ideology and could validate these findings with larger sample sizes and different variables of interest.

Confronting Linguistic Necropolitics: Translanguaging in Hip Hop Space

Adesoji Babalola | Queen's University

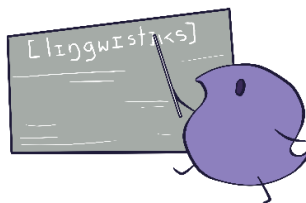
The concept of necropolitics has been popularized by Achille Mbembe (2003, 2019) to designate the social and political power to decree how people may live and how some must die. In furthering this theorization, Mbembe (2003) argues that sovereignty “means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not” (27). If applied to language ideologies imposed on the colonies, such sovereignty defines which language matters and which does not, which is disposable and which is not. Within this linguistic necropolitical frame of language racialization, the languages that matter are usually of the colonial masters or dominant groups, while those configured for disposability are often languages of the colonized or minority people. The implication is that there is an inherent connection between the disposability of these languages and the disposability of the bodies of those who speak them. In Nigeria, pupils and students in public primary and high schools are often flogged by teachers for speaking their indigenous languages in the classroom even in informal gatherings. Those indigenous languages are often labeled vernaculars and highly prohibited. I argue that the practice of forbidding a generation from dialoguing in their ancestral languages by state agents is not only biopolitical but necropolitical in orientation. In this paper, therefore, my aim is not only to theorize innovatively the phenomenon of linguistic necropolitics, but to also demonstrate how translanguaging is confronting such colonial ideology in protest culture such as hip hop music in multilingual Nigeria. Translanguaging which embodies a “discursive practice” in which multilingual features are deployed as “a single integrated system” becomes a politics of hope in representing linguistic cultural identities and freedom in the face of white supremacy embedded in the valorization of English on the colonized.





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