

## Embracing Diversity in English Language Expression

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Non-native English speakers face the challenge of communicating the ‘standard’ form of English in publications or academic works. Attention has been drawn to my English linguistic deficit in these areas. You might pick a couple of mistakes in my expression in this piece. I get rejected or downgraded for *unsatisfactory* expression of the English language. As an educator, I encounter learners whose language background is mine and downgrade their works for ‘non-standard’ English language expression. The table has turned!

I will address these concerns by defining language, positioning language as an instrument of domination, highlighting challenges non-native English speakers face, questioning fairness in assessing non-native English learners and exploring ways of embracing diversity in expressing the English language.

Language can be understood as how humans express or communicate thoughts and emotions. I express what I think and feel in words or a form of language, which others give meaning to. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein alluded to this as ‘our inner processes require outer criteria’ (Starks, 2016; pg. 59). Language is the medium for hearing, reading or making sense of what we process within us. Humans start with a single native or first language, while others are imposed on us for social or economic reasons.

My native language is Mende, while English and Krio are my survival languages. The British colonial teacher who visited my village enforced the English language as a tool for educational, administrative and social success. The Krio language, an adulterated English language, a legacy of slavery and colonialism, and the lingua franca of my country, was a social imposition. These three languages infuse the expression of my thoughts and emotions, although I cannot express their ‘perfect’ or ‘standard’ forms. In the case of the English language, which dominates my expression, I cannot discern its standard, British, or Southern England form. These variations are problematic!

Global domination of the English Language is harmful to other languages and cultures. Acquirers or persons coerced to adopt English as a second language can go beyond learning the language to forming an identity as an English speaker and losing their cultural identities (Mohammed, 2020). This form of cultural discrimination is referred to as linguicism, that is, the unequal

relationship between languages. The British, like the French and Spanish, have used their language to control, dominate, denigrate and cause the demise of other cultures. Language continues to have contemporary entanglement with coloniality and imperialism. Hence, linguicism is a matter of social justice!

Schools of Nursing enrol learners whose first language is not English. These learners face the problem of expressing in English the thoughts and feelings that originate from their native languages and cultures. These learners' historic educational and social experiences provide a proficiency level in speaking and writing the English language, albeit tainted with native languages. Their proficiency differs from that of native English learners. However, learners of all backgrounds are assessed at similar proficiency levels, especially in academic works like essays or reflective journals. These assessments emphasise linguistic rules and dismiss historical and cultural influences on thoughts and emotions. It disregards the concocted and adapted forms of a language that lacks a pure version, save to perpetuate the dominance of one form over others. It raises the question of equality versus equity of assessment!

I want to tease conversations about the illusive nature of standard English due to the influence of histories and other cultures. This discourse argues for learner's self-understanding of the accuracy of the meaning they convey in their expression. Similarly, it supports the idea that educators must understand and assess the content and context of expression rather than linguistic rules. The idea is to make space for diverse English language expression. This enables learners and educators to acknowledge the communication of thoughts and emotions from diverse cultures and histories. It is better to understand than be understood!

Nursing courses often give equal weight to the practice and academic elements but not to language expression. In scholarly works, clarity of expression is judged by applying rules of standard English. On the contrary, practice area assessment focuses on communicating compassion and respect in delivering care to people from diverse cultures.

Language prejudice in nursing is an unacknowledged form of cultural racism and an issue of equity, diversity, and inclusiveness (Abu, 2025). There is scant knowledge about the disguised and sophisticated ways language prejudice works in nursing education. I am interested in exploring language as a hindrance or opportunity for embracing diversity in nursing. I am keen to hear views about best practices in using language to promote fairness in assessing the works of learners and scholars whose first language is not English or other dominant languages.

**Keywords:** Nursing Education, English Language, Language Diversity, Non-native Students, Linguicism, Social Justice

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