In this text I map a Deleuzian-inspired journey through language, de/territorializations, and processes of becoming. This journey follows several rhizomatic lines of flight to lure an elusive colonial monster, the English language, from the closet; and to think about my relationship to language and the implications of this relationship for my pedagogical work as an English language teacher. I voyage through this text with a poststructural suspicion of
language and the nomadic thinking of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Taking a Deleuzian stance means I avoid making a point. Rhizomatic journeys on smooth spaces privilege the lines in-between, not the points. The transformative processes of movement and nomadic wandering are what interest us here, not endpoints. “Arrival at a final destination is always postponed” (Bayne, 2004, 306).

What am I trying to talk about then? What might happen in this text? Writing this text was, at least in part, an attempt to escape (if only for a moment) the territories of Glunks (Doel, 2000). Doel (2000) explains that ideological Glunks are beasts summoned into being when our Thinker-Uppers shift into high gear, and once summoned, these Glunks are very difficult to dislodge. In a Deleuzian sense then, a Glunk is an ideological force, living in language, which striates space and freezes thinking. I join Doel in his quest to un-glunk “a devilish fiend: The Glunk With No Name” (2000, 119) which he calls pointillism. Yet, Glunks may be Un-thunk through the “affective power of space and spacing” (118); in-between, in the fold, in the AND instead of the is. In this way “whatever is given as ready-made … is deterritorialized from its habitual actuality” (2000, 117) and sent into “a delirious movement of immanent and expressionistic creation” (2000, 117). This signals the un-glunking of thought and a shift towards nomad, rhizomatic thinking that opens up to a manifold of possibilities.

So what is the value of this text? For me, writing this text prompted a Deleuzian deterritorialization that disrupted the way I think about the English language and my role as a teacher of English. What will it do for the reader I cannot know. Will it de/stabilize, de/territorialize? Will it be a transformative experience? Possibly. But be mindful when embarking on a nomadic journey: “Consider the language use of nomads…—an endless, one-way journey of translation away from the mother tongue” (Kohso, 1998, 100). The affects of this on mind and body (no longer suffering the Cartesian cleaver) are “unknown consequences—a [potentially] fatal leap” (Kohso, 1998, 101). And so I offer this warning to fellow travelers: “Voyaging smoothly is a becoming, and a difficult, uncertain becoming at that” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 482).

Spoken By Languages That Are Not Mine

“… understand the anxiety provoked by the hybridising of language… where do you draw the line between languages? between cultures? between disciplines? between peoples?”

—Bhabha, 1987, 10

What language then is mine? Is it English? Is it this language that I claim to teach? I used to think of myself as a so-called native speaker of English. I once considered myself, by natural birthright, one of the self-elected, “the custodians of standard English” whose authenticity and authority were unassailable (Widdowson, 1998 239). But a jarring experience arrives, unexpected and uninvited, to deterritorialize, this time in the form of an Oxford scholar who boldly denounced my Canadian version of English as sub-standard in the presence of my students. I deeply resented the way his imperialist attitude rendered me an unsophisticated

A visiting scholar from Oxford, part of an international delegation, visited my classroom in China one day. Such interruptions were typical at my school, but frankly not always that welcome. Replacing me at the lectern, this visitor began to (mis)inform my Chinese students that Canada was a colony of Great Britain (not since 1982!) and that if they went to study at...
hick from the colonies and my language a mere shoddy tracing of his idealized standard British English.

Is this deterritorialization of my relationship with the English language somehow made more intelligible by Derrida’s discussion of the ambivalence of the monolingual’s mother tongue?

He writes, “I only have one language, yet it is not mine” (Derrida, 1998, 2). There is a paradox here that disrupts and enacts the “performative contradiction of enunciation” (1998, 3).

I too have only one language, English, yet it is not mine. This became appallingly clear to me in the preceding anecdote. I have this language in the sense that it is the language I have inherited through a British colonial past, through British roots of my immigrant grandparents. Yet it doesn’t belong to me. To better elaborate the performative contradiction of using a language that is not yours, Derrida states, “When I said that the only language I speak is not mine, I did not say it was foreign to me. There is a difference” (1998, 5). In my case then, English is not foreign to me. I know it better than any other language, but still I can not lay claim to it.

Ownership of a language is apparently far more complex than Widdowson (1998) supposed and the stakes are high because the so-called masters or colonists or native speakers can not claim natural ownership of the language either! This means that they must jealously guard their apparent ownership by any means necessary. Derrida (1998) describes the trick this way:

Because language is not [the master’s, or the colonist’s] natural possession, he can, thanks to that very fact, pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as ‘his own.’ That is his belief; he wishes to make others share it through the use of force or cunning; he wants to make others believe it, as they do a miracle, through rhetoric, the school, or the army.

(23)

This is the territorialization that my Oxford classroom visitor may have been up to: attempting to convince me and my students of his naturalized claim to the English language; a claim that was more valid than mine by right of his British birth. Did this mean that English was not mine at all? No. This is Derrida’s second trick: by believing in the so-called master’s natural claim to the language, I am freed “from the first [trick] while confirming a heritage by internalizing it, by reappropriating it—but only up to a certain point” (italics added, Derrida, 1998, 24). The complexities of these semblances of possession of language are what lead to various forms of linguistic violence and terror.

We are in the middle now and picking up speed in the space of becoming; running between the and… and… and… “Speed turns the point into a line. Be quick even when standing still!” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 24).

Language Monster-In-The-Closet

[English] is not an imaginary but an actual monster…
—territorializing our mind and body to the fullest.
—Kohso, 1998, 103
Inside language there is a terror, soft, discreet, or glaring; that is our subject.
—Derrida, 1998, 23

How can language, a hidden monster-in-the-closet, terrorize? English, with its privileged status as a lingua mundi today, is often cited as the exemplary language monster. It has become monstrous by transforming into one of what Skutnab-Kangas calls “killer languages, monsters that gobble up others, when they are learned at the cost of the smaller ones” (2003, 33). English speaking people have been accused of imposing English on the entire world—through the political, technological, and economic forces of globalization—and thus affecting a kind of linguistic terrorism and territorialization that seeks to dominate and accomplish an imperialistic agenda (Adamo, 2005). Such condemnation stands in sharp contrast to two other positions: (1) an earlier stance that assumed benign linguistic effects of globalization; and (2) more recent perspectives that “have begun to see the spread of English as altogether too complicated to be considered benign or evil” (Block, 2004, 76).

This story of the English language monster has a long history. Pennycook (1998), situated within the latter camp of those who attempt to attend to the ambivalent complexities of the spread of English around the globe, argues that the historical traces of colonialism persistently inhere in the discourses of the English language. In doing so they keep alive colonialist discourses that continue to shape language policies and practices in (post)colonial contexts today and that construct and maintain binaries of Self and Other and thus perpetuate “images of Us and Them, of Our [italics added] language and culture and Theirs” (1998, 30). From this postcolonial perspective, language may become an object to be possessed; a tool of demarcation and oppression to be wielded by dominant groups against subaltern others.

English as such does not automatically convey an imperial or colonial charge, its embeddedness within various pedagogical and disciplinary regimes of subjugation (whether these relate to colonization, neo-imperialism or migration) … mean that it cannot function neutrally as a worldwide lingua franca. (Gunew, 2004, 51)

In this case, it is not English itself that terrorizes, but rather what the colonizer does with it. When “they shape it to become a territory [italics added] that limits and defines, … they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize” (hooks, 1994, 168).

In addition to this territorialization of the mind, the healing of the Cartesian mind/body split has brought to the fore the importance of the body as a politicized and constituted object in language education and research (Huckaby, 2004; Luke, 1996). In this line of inquiry, Gunew asks: “What corporeal effects does one encounter in English when English becomes a kind of virus inhabiting the body?” (2004, 61). One possibility is a kind of linguistic corporeal violence where language is used to construct the body as a colonized space, a territorialized body. Pennycook (1998) also describes how English is “written onto the bodies” (207) of learners in such a way that it becomes “the language in which they are racially defined” (4).

But if language is the tool by which subjects are...
linguistic hybridity, but my French teacher—knowing perhaps all too well the hybrid consciousness of the nomad—sagely remarks, “Maintenant, vous avez deux coeurs” and lets my “Xie xie” be.

The notion of performativity asks how language becomes the acting subject that can injure in specific and bodily ways by naming and thereby constituting or producing subjects. Butler (1996) refines the concept thus:

> It is important to distinguish performance from performativity: the former presumes a subject. … The notion of performativity, and performative speech acts in particular—understood as those speech acts that bring into being that which they name. … So what I’m trying to do is think about performativity as that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names. Then I take a further step, through the Derridean rewriting of Austin, and suggest that this production actually always happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation. (112)

In these discursive repetitions lies a productive capacity in the spaces of becoming. However, it seems there may be an ambivalence here too in that these can be generative spaces, but also destructive spaces. Language monsters gobble up bodies too! Nabokov evocatively describes the violent linguistic deterritorializations he suffered in-between languages: “My complete switch from Russian prose to English prose was exceedingly painful—like learning to handle things after losing seven or eight fingers in an explosion” (as cited in Ch’ien, 2004, 68).

When I think about the corporeal effects of language inscribed on my own body, I still have the ambivalent feeling that languages live like viruses in my body (Gunew, 2004); not in the pathological sense, but in the sense of foreign, uninvited visitors. Languages that somehow snuck in the back-door, squatted on the couch, and stayed long enough to make themselves at home and become (un)welcome guests.

**Reflections on Linguistic T/Errorism**

> Let us go once again, without any fear, towards the ‘t’
> —Daignault, 1992, 199

The tricky t of teaching can transform t/errorism into errorism with its clever disappearing act and I then ask for an excuse. Can I defend my pedagogical past in the name of naïve complicity in linguistic colonialism? Does this make me a linguistic terrorist or a misguided errorist? Both perhaps. In a postmodern world “we can never get off the hook by appealing to a transcendental Ethics. We are always on the hook, responsible, everywhere all the time” (St.Pierre, 2002, 401).

Everyone knows monsters hide in the safe

---

A pious man explained to his followers: “It is evil to take lives and noble to save them. Each day I pledge to save a hundred lives. I drop my net in the lake and scoop out a hundred fishes. I place the fishes on the bank, where they flop and twirl. ‘Don’t be scared,’” I tell those fishes. “I am saving you from drowning.” Soon enough, the fishes grow calm and lie still. Yet, sad to say, I am always too late. The fishes
anonymity of dark spaces. Language monsters do too. The pedagogical work of English language teachers is harshly criticized by those who seek to illuminate the hidden ideological elements of the education of non-English speaking students, “that generate and sustain linguistic, cultural, and racial discrimination, which represent, in my view, vestiges of a colonial legacy in our democracy” (Macedo, 2000, 16).

For Skuttanb-Kangas (2003) this amounts to a crime of linguistic genocide[4] in which formal education is the main culprit. Language education becomes insidious and unethical through the concealment of its colonalst agendas; hidden in part by curricular and pedagogical practices that systemically inculcate “colonial values and attitudes (Macedo, 2000, 17) in a mis-education designed “to control the mind of the colonized” (Kanu, 2003, 71).

Are all language teachers then fated to become linguistic terrorists? Is it possible to ethically engage in English language pedagogy? Pennycook & Coutand-Marin (2003) respond with a call for an “ethics of disclosure” that makes transparent the political and ideological aspects of language education and language policies. Such an ethics would necessitate a process of careful reflection on the part of language educators to tease out the tacit aspects of colonialist and oppressive discourses that are hidden, even from themselves, in a consciousness raising exercise that would begin to reveal the ways they “act unconsciously, in complicity with a culture of domination” (hooks, 1994, 173).

However, Haraway throws this approach into question by arguing that “reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere” (1997, 16) and so self-vision is not a cure for self-invisibility. We are inevitably “ghosted by the nonknowable” (Clough, 2000, 168).

Nonetheless, it seems critical that teachers of the English language must still be open to experience the difficult and transformative becomings that may occur when we “seek out and question the colonizer within” (Pennycook, 1998, 28) ourselves and to wonder “to what extent we are following in Crusoe’s footsteps”[5] (Pennycook, 1998, 11).

How do deterritorializing experiences happen? One way may be through cultivating what Asher (2002) calls a hybrid consciousness. She conceptualizes this “as a generative force/space which develops in relation to our encounters with ‘difference’ and which allows us to engage our own implicatedness in the very structures of oppression we are attempting to change” (2002, 82). As a generative force, it opens possibilities of transformed practice and more ethical pedagogical relations in Bhabha’s (1987) hybrid Third space. Another way to encounter deterritorializations may be to listen to those who make English stutter.

**Iterations In-Between**

*Teaching too was a kind of reincarnation... ‘Look, here we are again.’ They never knew what to make of it; same response every time.*

—Gardiner, as cited in Green, 2004

Experiencing the iterations and repetitions of stuttersers, in the Deleuzian sense (1997), may be a force of smoothness that makes the English language intelligible in the Third space of enunciation (Bhabha, 1987), in the generative space of becoming. Stuttering is a deterritorializing literary practice of skillful authors who “invent a minor use of the major language within which they express themselves entirely; they minorize this language.”
In doing so, they remind that the only language I have is not mine. “Stuttering is not simply the physical acts of hesitation while speaking, but also the mental acts of dissociation from language” (Ch’ien, 2004, 130-131).

In her book *Weird English*, Ch’ien (2004) explores the literature of a weighty company of well accomplished stutterers, from Maxine Hong Kingston to Salman Rushdie. Rushdie’s desire to stutter English is displayed in this comment: “I hope all of us share the view that we can’t simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes” (Rushdie, as cited in Ch’ien, 2004, 264). However, the stutterer that draws me most in Ch’ien’s book is Arundhati Roy. Another postcolonialist writer from India, Roy is an immanent architect of language; tearing English apart, fragmenting it, reorganizing it, and rebuilding it in many iterations to suit her own desires. “Roy makes an art of rule breaking. … By being defiant of the rules that made English English, she directly defies English as a language whose rules require following” (Ch’ien, 2004, 162-163). She makes English stutter according to her own rules, and in doing so opens generative, creative spaces where desire flows from chaos on the plane of immanence.

These authors deterritorialize received conceptions of what English language can be and offer important experiences to English teachers that may help un-Glunk their thinking. They may allow language teachers to live with the tensions that emerge from smooth and hybrid spaces of language and reimagine classrooms as places where there can be simultaneous doubling and different movements between smooth and striated pedagogical spaces.

Because these generative becomings in-between are bound to be difficult and complex, they “demand a response neither despairing nor nostalgic” (Bayne, 2004, 311). The trick is to respond from the middle. This is what Derrida has learned to do: “I finally know how not to have to distinguish any longer between promise and terror” (1998, 73).

Daignault has attempted a pedagogy from the middle. “Thinking happens only between suicide and murder, between miscarried anagrams and applied semiotics, at the letter. Between nihilism and terrorism. The passage is really hazardous” (Daignault, 1992, 199). So I exit with this question: As a teacher of English, can there be ways to live with the ambiguity and tension of working pedagogies in hybrid spaces; between teacher and terrorist, between languages and monsters?

References


Notes:

[1] Notably within the poststructural paradigm used here, the term *transformation* is understood a possible (not assured) outcome of the processes of becoming. Moreover, the nature of this transformation is not known. That is, we cannot know *a priori* if the change will be understood as a positive force, only that something has happened that is different.

[2] Doel suggests that *pointillism* glunks-up the thinking of geographers and spatial scientists, but I believe it may be an affliction of modernist social scientists as well.

[3] Kaustuv Roy usefully summarizes deterritorializing experiences as ones in which the participant is “thrown into differently ordered spatial relations wherein the affective and perceptive orders no longer fully conform to the habitual geographies of identitarian space. And yet this deterritorialization or disorientation is enabling and not disabling” (2005, 31). That is, deterritorializations offer the possibilities of immanent transformations.

[4] Citing the UN International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (E793, 1948): Skutnabb-Kangas argues that most education for indigenous and minority peoples is complicit in committing linguistic and cultural genocide. My initial reaction to this proposition was defensive, but I found there was little I could do to defend my school’s *English-only policy* (a very common practice in English language instruction) in light of her citing of Article III(1) describing an aspect of genocide as: “Prohibiting the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2003, 40).

[5] In his book *English and the discourses of colonialism*, Pennycook (1998) refers to Daniel Defoe’s literary character Robinson Crusoe—a shipwrecked, 17th century Englishman who sets himself to the task of civilizing a ‘primitive’ he names Friday (amongst other things) teaching him English—as a way to link into the colonizing effects of English language teaching around the world today.
About the Author

Monica Waterhouse is a doctoral candidate in the Society, Culture, and Literacies concentration at the University of Ottawa’s Faculty of Education. As an English language educator for over ten years, her research interests are found at the intersection of critical language pedagogies, multiple literacies, peace education, and Deleuzean philosophy. Her current dissertation work focuses on experiences of multiple literacies in connection with the life experiences of adult learners enrolled in the federal government’s Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program.