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# Knowledge is power is knowledge: Can we break the cycle of epistemic and epistemological injustice?

Johanna Ennser-Kananen

*The title of this year's Edistykseen päivät was "Knowledge is power". In her presentation, Johanna Ennser-Kananen addressed problems of epistemic and epistemological injustice in the areas of teaching and research. She identified the dominance of white, male, Anglo-American/Eurocentric academic traditions of doing research and teaching as one central problem. According to Ennser-Kananen knowledge questions are power questions, which means that many researchers representing non-dominant cultural and academic traditions struggle to receive and maintain academic legitimacy.*

## Legitimacy

As an applied linguist, I study the ways in which language is used and what role it plays in social and societal interaction. For some parts of my research, I use a framework of legitimacy, which refers to *the social acceptance and validation that is discursively constructed and negotiated*. This means that when I approach phenomena that I study (such as particular linguistic practices), I don't stop at asking "What is this?", but instead focus on questions such as "Under which circumstances is this (e.g., a particular way of speaking in a second language) legitimate?", "How does it become legitimate?", "Why does or doesn't it become legitimate and for whom does it or doesn't it?" These questions rely on the work of many scholars who have enabled and inspired criticality across academic disciplines, Bourdieu being one of them. He described "legitimate language" (1977, p. 650) as follows:

[I]t is uttered by a legitimate speaker, i.e. by the appropriate person ... it is uttered in a legitimate situation, i.e. on the appropriate market ... and addressed to legitimate receivers; it is formulated in the legitimate phonological

and syntactic forms (what linguists call grammaticalness), except when transgressing these norms is part of the legitimate definition of the legitimate producer.

(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 650, emphasis removed)

Based on these foundations, I have developed my concept of discursively constructed legitimacy and shown that establishing such legitimacy is a continuous process and often hard work for language learners. Two reasons for the difficulty of establishing legitimacy are its fleeting character (i.e., it can be withdrawn by the social environment within a moment), which makes it difficult to retain it, and its sensitivity to ideologically charged social dynamics, which means that establishing linguistic legitimacy tends to follow hegemonic power structures that are difficult or impossible to overcome for an individual (Ennser-Kananen, 2018a).

## Epistemic legitimacy

What is true for linguistic legitimacy could also be adapted and applied to knowledge, which would then, based on Bourdieu, sound something like this:

Legitimate knowledge is discovered by legitimate researchers, i.e. by the appropriate person ... published in a legitimate channel, i.e. on the appropriate market ... and addressed to legitimate receivers; it is realized through legitimate theoretical frames and methodological forms (what academics call research design), except when transgressing these norms is part of the legitimate definition of the legitimate producer.

If we frame epistemic legitimacy in this way, it becomes clear that the range and variety of knowledges included in such an understanding is fairly narrow. This is especially evident in places where knowledge is constructed, assessed, and negotiated on a daily basis, such as schools. What might epistemic legitimacy look like in practice, for instance when it is negotiated in classrooms? The following excerpt is one example from my ethnographic study in a community college (kansalaisopisto) context that offers a 2-year adult basic education (ABE) program for adults in small-town Finland. The topic of this English class was Social Media. One young man, a refugee from a Central African country, shared some opinions about the content and the language that were presented by the teacher ("ope") as legitimate knowledge.

Ope: [explaining the phrase "to prefer something to something else"] Prefer something to something else. I prefer for example

Facebook to to Twitter, or to WhatsApp. To.

Student: Ope, mutta ei kukaan sano se.

Ope: Ei kukaan?

[Several students talking]

Student: Ei, ei, ei! [walks to front of room, points to board] Tämä me e-ei emme sano. Ja Snapchat, ei ole hyvä, viestit vain menee pois, kaikki pois, en voi lukea, se on tosi paha. Whats-App on paras.

[Students laughing, agreeing and disagreeing]

Ope: OK, kiitos. Nyt, kiitos, ja istuhan alas. [to class] Hei kaikki!

(Classroom recording, April 2017)

Even without a deep analysis, we can see several types of knowledge being displayed by this student in this short extract: knowledge about social media apps, knowledge about language use (formal vs. informal), knowledge about classroom dynamics (e.g., how to address a teacher in this context, the possibility of disagreeing, indirectly addressing the class), and knowledge about the classroom space (e.g., the location of legitimate knowledges being in the front of the room). The teacher's priorities in this instance seem to be to regain control of her class, the topic of the lesson, and the space the student entered when claiming legitimacy for his

knowledges. What happens to knowledges in such situations? How are knowledge displays and legitimacy claims dealt with? Is knowledge recognized, valued, taken up or dismissed, ignored, devalued? How, if at all, do knowledges continue to exist as a

consequence? Such dynamics are especially interesting to analyze when participants are members of minoritized populations and attempt to overturn, inadvertently or not, a hegemonic order that is ingrained in social interaction and societal processes within and beyond schools. As I ask these kinds of questions in my work, questions of power are always implicated and accompany them.

## Power (and) knowledge

Asking about power in relation to knowledge has a long tradition. Among others, Foucault addressed the relationship between knowledge and power very explicitly. In his words,

[T]he exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power ... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.

(Foucault, 1980, p. 52)

This intertwinedness of knowledge and power applies of course and maybe especially to scientific knowledge. Scientific instruments, activities, and discourses function as both instruments of knowledge and instruments of power. For instance, in asking or deciding how we classify or analyze our data, we also decide who has the right, or who is legitimate, to conduct these procedures in the appropriate (legitimate) ways, or in Foucault's words "what can be said and thought but also ... who can speak, when, where and with what authority" (Foucault, 1989, p. 49).

Talk about "knowledge is power" is relatively easy to come by, for instance in the form of the belief that having knowledge empowers those who have it. However, the flipside of the coin, "power is knowledge" is less frequently discussed. Foucault has brought the argument that "power is knowledge" to the fore, highlighting also the pervasive nature of "power/knowledge" (Foucault, 1980). He explains that power/knowledge is anything but a trifle, as it "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). It is important to note that power in Foucault's sense does not necessarily mean oppression and subjugation, but something more akin to potential self-empowerment, which can be productive and creative. When we engage with questions of power, we would be well-advised to turn to those who might be more sensitive to the oppressive sides of power than people like me (a white, European, university-educated academic in Northern Europe) who have had the privilege of spending most of their lives and careers on the sunny side of power.

### **"New" knowledges**

To truly understand the intersection of knowledge and power, to explore epistemic legitimacy more honestly and more deeply, we need to listen to those, whose knowledges have been deprived of legitimacy in many contexts. There is a growing community of scholars who are legitimizing

"new" knowledges, and, relatedly, new epistemologies, within academia. I am using the word "new" to mean "not previously recognized by those who work from and represent dominant perspectives" or "not previously acknowledged and legitimate in dominant circles of academia", because, clearly, the commonly perceived "novelty" of these knowledges is due to epistemic injustices and does not apply to those who have owned, created, and used them for a long time. In regards to "new" ways of knowing and theories of knowledge within the field of education, Delgado Bernal has observed:

Indeed, a number of education scholars have begun talking about critical raced and raced-gendered epistemologies that emerge from a social, cultural, and political history different from the dominant race ... These raced and raced-gendered epistemologies directly challenge the broad range of currently popular research paradigms, from positivism to constructivism and liberal feminism to postmodernism, which draw from a narrow foundation of knowledge that is based on the social, historical, and cultural experiences of Anglos. (Delgado Bernal, 2013, p. 390)

In Delgado Bernal's work, "Anglos" refers to the dominant epistemic and epistemological perspectives that are represented by white, middle-class, English-speaking, European-American heritage scholars. In the following, I will give two examples of non-Anglo knowledges and epistemologies that have recently been pushing for their legitimacy. These "new" knowledges are gaining ground in the fields of education and applied linguistics, two quite white and Eurocentric spaces in the academy, as these numbers illustrate: In a colloquium entitled "Race, parity, and representation in Applied Linguistics: Implications for Knowledge Construction" at the AAAL (American Association of Applied Linguistics) conference in Chicago in 2018, Bhattacharya, Jiang, Canagarajah noted that all editors-in-chief of ARAL, the invitation-only journal of the organi-

zation, had only had white editors-in-chief to that date, and only 7,5% of presidents of AAAL and 15,52% of plenary speakers had been scholars of color (SOC).

What is the consequence of such disparity? For once, it creates epistemic and epistemological injustices. Linking back to the Bourdieu-inspired definition of legitimate knowledge, we may then ask: Who is a legitimate knowledge producer and representer and who resides in the margins of epistemic and epistemological power? What are the consequences of such injustices? Collins (2000) speaks to the latter, explaining that “[f]ar from being the apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why. This directly causes members of subordinated groups to replace individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant group’s specialized thought.” (p. 252). Thus, in the end, epistemic and epistemological inequities lead to knowledges and epistemologies being lost, which undermines the basis for a healthy, productive, and ethical academic community.

### **Raciolinguistics and Borderland Feminism**

What are useful starting points for foregrounding marginalized knowledges? Some examples that have shaped (not only) my disciplinary fields include Culturally Relevant/Sustaining Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies, Raciolinguistics, and Borderland Feminism. I will focus on the last two and provide a small glimpse into their epistemologies.

Raciolinguistics is a relatively new and growing area which, very simply put, tries to understand language through a race lens and race through a language lens. As Rosa and Flores (2017) explain,

Our goal is [...] to envision unsettling the terms of race and language as part of broader efforts toward decolonization and the eradication of white supremacy. Thus, we are not simply advocating linguistic pluralism or racial inclu-

sion, but instead interrogating the foundational forms of governance through which such diversity discourses deceptively perpetuate disparities by stipulating the terms on which perceived differences are embraced or abjected. (p. 641)

As an example of this work, Flores and Rosa (2015a) have challenged the concept of “appropriateness” in the context of language education, specifically long-term English learners in US, showing how the linguistic practices of racialized speakers are perceived as inappropriate despite their innovative and skillful use of their bilingual resources. In their own words,

The white listening subject rejects the legitimacy of racialized language practices in ways that are unrelated to empirical linguistic forms. Instead, it hears linguistic deficiency in racialized speaking subjects even when they engage in language practices that would be deemed normative were they produced by a white speaking subject. (Flores & Rosa, 2015b)

What they call a “catch 22” (Flores & Rosa, 2015b, para 4) is exactly this dynamic of racialized language-minority speakers being expected to comply with white language norms while the “white listening subject” (Flores & Rosa, 2015a, p. 167) does not allow for this to happen. In Flores’ and Rosa’s words, “racialized speaking subjects face a catch-22 in mainstream institutional contexts: ‘You need to sound like me but I will never acknowledge that you do.’” (Flores & Rosa, 2015b, para 4).

Raciolinguists thus bring about new epistemic and epistemological approaches: What has been deemed “natural” such as the truth of the “white listening subject” is being un-naturalized. In turn, discredited knowledges, for example those of racialized multilinguals, are perceived in ways that are legitimizing and sustaining, so that the ideological charge of concepts like “appropriateness” becomes visible and problematic. The “new” knowledges that take center-stage as a result also highlight previously less recognized ways of

studying these knowledges through approaches that grow out of an investment in an agenda of linguistic and social justice.

Another example of “new” knowledges is Borderland feminism, and, within that, Borderland-mestizaje feminism (BMF). The name derives from the literal Latina and Chicana borderlands between Mexico and the US on the one hand and from life behind symbolic borders that, as Elenes (2005) puts it, “divided communities along race, class, gender and sexual orientation lines, academic disciplines, political ideologies, and organizational structures” (p.1) on the other hand. The movement and field understands itself as working “for all those whose voices have been silenced ... and for those whose bodies have been policed, regulated, and medicalized ... through Western lenses” including “ideological and discursive regimes that privilege White maleness” (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008 p. 256). About their methodologies and epistemologies, BMF scholars say:

As a methodology, BMF include the varied ways we rearticulate and reappropriate the hegemonic forms of knowledge, whether it is feminism, postmodernism, and so on in our theorizing, research, and writing. A BMF epistemology is the knowledge we embody that stems from our *cuerpos* and *vidas* as Third World feminists, outsiders, and insiders and guides our variegated understanding of knowledge and power. (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008, p. 257)

These rich lines of work have brought about and fostered important ways of knowing and knowledge theory. One example is Espinoza-Herold's (2007) mother-daughter case study, in which she analyzes “dichos” of familial discourse as cultural funds of knowledge and draws, among other things, on “cultural intuition” (Calderon et al., 2012, p. 518) to bring new and overlooked aspects to the theorizing of the case and reframing a) the

deficit perspective on a school drop-out into one of an empowered individual and b) the notion that Latino families lack knowledge about or lack care for their children's academic resources and success. Without an epistemological approach that allows for such an activation of “cultural intuition”, this would not have been possible. Espinoza-Herold draws on a variety of resources, including her knowledge of community and family life in this context, to deeply understand her data in non-traditional ways that are not usually supported by mainstream academia.

Such mapping of the researcher's experiences onto the ones of the participants has often been considered a fault or risk in research processes and the idea of blurring rather than maintaining clear boundaries (or even binaries) in academic work is still far from mainstream. However, scholars who work under the umbrella of Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) have embraced and legitimized an in-between space that transcends binaries such as insider vs. outsider identities (Calderon et al., 2012). In this “nepantla”, an “overlapping space between dif-

ferent perceptions and belief systems” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 541), researchers are, as Anzaldúa (2002) explains, “more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events and to ‘see through’ them with a mindful holistic awareness” (p. 544). Maybe the BMF approach to doing research within “new” epistemological and methodological paradigms could set an example for many of us of how to undermine academic hegemonies and legitimize new knowledges and epistemologies in our scholarship and professional communities.

### Citation and writing practices

Knowing and learning about knowledges outside of our own culturally and disciplinarily familiar ones can be quite impactful, especially if we learn

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from them, are open to being transformed, and give them credit through our citations. This last point is becoming increasingly important in an academic world where citations act as a currency (Fogarty, 2009). As I have said elsewhere,

Our citations are powerful, they reflect and become our knowledge, our discipline, and, as Sara Ahmed (2013) has pointed out, they are 'ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline and others not even part' (para 4). (Enns-Kananen, 2019, p. 66)

We could also say that citations are a legitimacy tool which (often) marks the citer and the cited (author as well as content) as legitimate. This legitimacy comes too often from routine and disciplinary habits. Hyland (1999)

talks about such disciplinary habits. In his article, he provides evidence that "our routine and unreflective writing practices are deeply embedded in the epistemological and social convictions of our disciplines." (p.

363) Maybe it's time to digress from these convictions a bit, to look for legitimate knowledges and epistemologies outside our comfort zones and break our patterns of habit, to begin to know in non-habitual, maybe even disobedient ways. As we diversify our knowledges and critically look at who is legitimate to represent our disciplines, to be known and read, or to be cited, there is another key part of our work to revisit: who/what we study.

### Who and what do we study?

Already in 2004, Bigelow and Tarone wrote in their appropriately subtitled article "Doesn't who we study determine what we know?":

Most SLA [Second Language Acquisition] research has studied learners who are highly literate in their native language (L1): [...] undergraduates in foreign language programs, graduate students in intensive English programs, or international teaching assistants.

We have reviewed all the leading journals that publish SLA research and found that researchers rarely study adult and adolescent immigrant learners with very low literacy in any language. For example, none of the studies published in *TESOL Quarterly* during the past 10 years documents the SLA processes of post-critical period L2 learners who have low L1 literacy. (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004, pp. 689–690)

Although things have somewhat changed since this article, and adult learners with low L1 literacy have become a more visible group in my field, there is still a great imbalance in who we work with and what we study. Some spaces and communities are over-studied, others barely receive scholarly attention, often simply because they are geographically

remote, small in size or number, difficult to access linguistically or culturally, or simply not part of the researchers' (often white European) imagination of potential research sites. This raises important questions about legitimate research topics, sites, and

methodologies. As Willey and Magee (2019) have noted in the context of pre-service teachers, whiteness can be a barrier to cultural sensitivity. Applied to research, this means that one's own cultural lens can and often does limit a researcher's scope and create blind spots not just for the individual but for a whole scientific community. In that sense, as a field, we don't just lack diversity in who represents us or who gets cited and read, but also in who we work with or who we consider legitimate to be part of this work, which in the end is who and what we know. Put differently, do we mainly study and know ourselves and those who are like us?

### Teaching

As an integral part of academic life, teaching is another area that would benefit from being revisited through the lens of epistemic justice. As instructors, what knowledges, ways of knowing, and ways of studying do we make legiti-

mate through our selection of readings, our assignments and assessments, our syllabi, and our classroom interaction? Who and what gets center-staged in our courses and who and what is silenced or resides in the margins? Thinking back to my earlier example of a young man from Central Africa claiming legitimacy for his knowledges, I keep wondering who the people are that would, if they could, run up to the front and tell me “This is not how we do it!” and what my reaction would be. I am not advocating for a classroom where “anything goes”. I am advocating for a classroom where the unusual, the less known, the ignored and its knowers become legitimate and center-staged.

### Disobedient knowing

An important part of my argument is that the legitimization of underrepresented knowledge is not (mainly) a matter of access. Integration or inclusion of non-dominant knowledges and ways of knowing would imply that dominant epistemologies and epistemic hierarchies remain intact with more attention to integrating everyone into these knowledge systems. I argue that it is time to end epistemological and epistemic discrimination, to be epistemically and epistemologically disobedient, to actively know against the grain and make space for those who do. In other words, I believe it's not enough to tolerate new ideas. I think we need to strategically challenge discriminatory epistemic and epistemological injustice (see also Fricker, 2007). In order to effect change, I believe we need to move from a naive and celebratory approach of diversity of knowledge towards one that legitimizes and encourages these disobedient knowledges and epistemologies that think and work against the status quo and help us do the same. As a reader one may ask, why should academy fund or support academic work that challenges the very foundations of its own existence? My response would be, because self-reflexivity, self-renewal, self-deconstruction and -reconstruction are the only way to avoid complacency, self-indulgence, and abuse of power.

Part of this seems to be understood here in Finland because attempts to think of knowledge and knowledge theory in new ways do exist and some even have been funded, which is a great way of legitimizing them. These examples include Kristina Rolin and her team and their project “Social and cognitive diversity in science: An epistemic assessment”, Suvi Keskinen, Aminkeng Atabong Alemanji, Minna Seikkula, Nelli Ruotsalainen, and Amiirah Salleh-Hoddin and their project on “Intersectional border struggles and disobedient knowledge in activism (KNOWACT)” and Rebecca Lund's work “Epistemic injustice: Class, race and gender relations in feminist knowledge production”, to name only a few. One thing has to be clear: While every one of us can contribute to epistemic and epistemological justice (Fricker, 2007), in the end this work of breaking the cycle can't be shouldered by an individual alone and needs to be a community effort (Anderson, 2012).■

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