IMAGINING SoTL

# Decolonizing Public Speaking

Carlos de Cuba, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY, United States
Cheyenne Seymour, Bronx Community College, CUNY, United States
Poppy Slocum, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY, United States

## ABSTRACT

This paper takes a critical approach towards public speaking assignments and courses that perpetuate colonial perspectives and values. We explore how standard language ideology creates disadvantages for students from marginalized language backgrounds while privileging Western communication norms. In this context, we investigate the tension between speaker authenticity and audience adaptation, particularly for diverse student populations navigating academic and professional contexts. The paper proposes concrete alternatives to behaviour-based assessment through outcomes-based rubrics and reflective self-assessment practices that honour linguistic and cultural diversity while maintaining academic rigor. By reimagining public speaking pedagogy through a decolonial lens, educators can create more equitable learning environments that value diverse communication styles without sacrificing effectiveness.

*Keywords:* decolonizing pedagogy, linguistic justice, speaker authenticity, public speaking assessment

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29173/isotl886

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

# INTRODUCTION

Just as every public speaker should consider their audience, those approaching the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) should consider the core principles of the field. In the video "Key Characteristics of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," a number of scholars discuss how to proceed with SoTL work. The primary recommendation is to reflect on our teaching along with student learning and find things that may trouble us or please us. We should then create a solid research question followed by study of the issue and public sharing of the results (Center for Engaged Learning, 2013). In this paper, we follow this framework and examine the problem of how to decolonize public speaking classes to make them more beneficial to student learning. Our work focuses on decolonizing speech assignments and public speaking courses by enhancing consciousness of implicit coloniality in teaching practices. As a diverse group of scholars with experience working with diverse students, we have examined our own positionality, consciousness of implicit bias, and white supremacy in the teaching of public speaking.

In approaching this work, we understand coloniality as defined by Maldonado-Torres (2007):

> Coloniality … refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. … It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. (p. 243)

This definition guides our recognition of how coloniality persists in academic standards, pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices in American public speaking education. European colonization in the US has long involved efforts to police communication styles.[1] This is most vividly seen in the history of Indian boarding schools in North America, in which Indigenous children were punished (often brutally) for speaking their native languages (Feir, 2016). It is also endemic, however, to the history of public speaking education in the US, which has espoused white assimilationist goals since its inception (Foley & Gehrke, 2023; Gehrke, 2009). In modern times, the need to decolonize speech assignments and public speaking courses is evident from pedagogical research in the field (Riccio & Sokolski, 2025; Zidani, 2020) as well as the experiences of the authors.

Scholars assert that race, ethnicity, and culture play a critical role in both verbal and nonverbal communication (Greene & Stewart, 2011; Reaser et al., 2017), yet public speaking classes in the US teach a narrow and ethnocentric view of what

[1] This statement is likely true of many colonial processes (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2025), but we recognize that colonial practices have differed greatly in various time periods and locations. This paper is restricted to the US context.

de Cuba, C., Seymour, C., & Slocum, P. (2025). Decolonizing Public Speaking. *Imagining SoTL, 5*(2), 2-18. https://doi.org/10.29173/isotl886

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

makes an effective speech (Gehrke, 2024; Key, 2022). Little room is allowed for diverse cultural perspectives, and there is little acknowledgement that different communities embrace varying styles of public address. Furthermore, most public speaking textbooks, guidelines, and rubrics in use in American colleges and universities are ableist in nature: they value specific vocal qualities, gestures, and eye contact, and they penalize the use of adaptors (Gehrke, 2016; Morreale et al., 2015). In short, courses are often taught from a colonizer's perspective. One aspect of this view that particularly impacts minoritized students is the emphasis placed on use of a standardized variety of American English. The questionable role of standard language ideology in public speaking courses has been well documented, but remains pervasive in teaching practices (de Cuba & Slocum, 2020; Key, 2022). As the movement to decolonize pedagogy across academia grows, a reevaluation of traditional praxes is sorely needed.

We recognize, following Laenui (2000) and Betts and Betts (2004), that decolonization is a complex and multifaceted process. Following Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2025), our approach centres language and communication styles as an initial step. In *Decolonizing Language,* Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that "Decolonization must be at the heart of any balanced and inclusive education" (p. 12). Central to this educational decolonization is dismantling what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls "linguistic feudalism"—the hierarchical ranking of languages and cultures that positions some as inherently superior to others (p. 12). This hierarchy manifests when dominant groups insist that marginalized communities must abandon their native languages and communication practices to access education and power. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o critiques the false premise "that the problem in any one country or the world is the existence of many languages and cultures" when the real issue lies in "their relationship in terms of hierarchy" (pp. 12–13).

While we aim to validate Indigenous perspectives that were systematically marginalized, we also make space for the diverse communicative traditions and rhetorical practices of all communities that have been excluded or devalued by traditional white, male, European educational models. By creating space for multiple ways of knowing and speaking, decolonized public speaking pedagogy recognizes that effective communication has always existed in countless forms across cultures, challenging the notion that there is a single "correct" way to engage in public discourse (Boromisza-Habashi et al., 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to share the findings of a collaborative effort to research decolonization and explore the impact of this process on public speaking assignments. The basis for this paper is a research project that grew out of a Black, Race, and Ethnic Studies Initiative Grant managed by the Research Foundation of the City University of New York (CUNY), which invited faculty to explore matters important to our diverse New York City campus communities. Our project, "Decolonizing Public Speaking Courses," involved six faculty members from three community college campuses across the CUNY system. We set out to answer the

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

question, "How can decolonizing principles be implemented to improve public speaking courses?" As part of our project, we researched curriculum decolonization, critically sustaining pedagogies, linguistic discrimination, and ableism in higher education as they pertain to the public speaking classroom. We used close reading (Manarin, 2018) to analyze existing teaching material such as rubrics and textbooks in a decolonizing context. We presented panels in our educational community to share our findings and also invited experts in the field to conduct workshops for faculty to explore the implementation of decolonizing practices.[2] Based on this research, in this paper we present a critical lens on public speaking instruction, assignments, and assessment.

## FINDINGS

For the purpose of this research project, we examine three areas involving the decolonization of public speaking. We begin by exploring the fundamental issues of linguistic discrimination and standard language ideology that underpin many problematic practices in public speaking education. We examine how these ideologies disadvantage students from marginalized language backgrounds and reinforce colonial power structures. We then address the tension between authentic communication and audience adaptation, considering how students can maintain their cultural and linguistic identities while developing practical communication skills for academic and professional contexts. Finally, we propose concrete alternatives to traditional assessment methods, offering two specific approaches—outcomes-based rubrics and reflective self-assessment practices—that honour diverse communication styles while maintaining academic rigor.

### *Linguistic Discrimination in Public Speaking*

When examining the public speaking classroom, we must start with a broader discussion of linguistic discrimination that is commonplace around the world, with the US being no exception (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2025). In *The Standard Language Is Myth*, Lippi-Green (2012) explores the belief that there is such a thing as a standard language (there is not) and the belief that this mythical standard language is superior to any other variety of language (it is not). Lippi-Green highlights that most people hold beliefs consistent with standard language ideology, which she describes as "a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class" (p. 67). This brings us to a core tenet of linguistics: "No variety of a language is inherently better in terms of its logic, its systematic structure, or its ability to express creative and complex thought" (Reaser et al., 2017, p. 3). For close to 60 years there has been wide agreement in linguistics

[2] Along with our colleagues Jamie Riccio, Joan Schwartz, and Patricia Sokolski, we presented at the CUNY Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (C-IDEA) Conference in 2023 and the Symposium for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in 2024.

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

that all languages and dialects are equal and other disciplines dealing with language have come to the same conclusion.[3]

In 1974, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) adopted the position statement "Students' Right to Their Own Language," which affirms "the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style" (CCCC, 1974, p. 1). The statement further declares that "the claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another" and calls such claims "immoral advice for humans" (p. 1). This foundational position statement recognizes that linguistic diversity should be celebrated rather than suppressed, yet educational institutions continue to privilege certain varieties over others. Despite all of these scholarly findings, American students are still often expected to conform to this one variety with no scientific basis that it is superior in any way. In a recent study of public speaking textbooks, de Cuba and Slocum (2020) found that 71% of the textbooks surveyed in their study gave examples of dialectal variants when discussing pronunciation or grammatical errors (e.g. aks for ask). As discussed above, there is no linguistic grounds for considering such variants to be errors. These are clearly dialectal differences, not linguistic deficits. This puts students who grow up speaking a marginalized variety that differs from the so-called "standard" language at a disadvantage, having to navigate learning through a new dialect while other students can just use their home language.

Why are some languages valued in society more than others? The short answer is power. The elites in society choose their own language as "standard" and impose this standard on the society. Colonial powers often used language as a gate (Hilpert, 2021). Those who speak the so-called standard are lauded, and those that speak varieties that do not conform to the standard are marginalized and made to feel like outsiders who do not belong (Lippi-Green, 2012).

Prioritizing the "standard" language in class causes a myriad of problems for students. For one, treating language differences as deficits often leads to peer pressure and identity issues. Students are forced to speak and write in a language that is not theirs, adopting someone else's voice—usually the voice of the oppressor. Teachers often encourage students to write with their authentic voices but then expect them to speak with someone else's voice in oral assignments. Additionally, students are confronted with negative attitudes of teachers toward speakers of different language varieties, which can create low expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies for students who are told that their language (and by extension the language used by their families and community) is not adequate. Research has shown that these deficit views toward marginalized varieties of English are

[3] Other language-related organizations have also issued position statements regarding dialects including the American Association for Applied Linguistics, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the Linguistic Society of America, and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (see Reaser et al., 2017).

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

detrimental to students' learning and literacy and not effective in teaching the "standard" (Baker-Bell, 2020; Charity Hudley et al., 2024; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairbanks, 1998; Godley, et al., 2007).

While recognizing the problematic foundations of standard language ideology in public speaking education, we must also acknowledge that linguistic discrimination brings real-world consequences for students. The challenge lies in balancing authentic expression with practical communication skills that serve students well beyond the classroom. This next section explores how faculty can navigate the tension between speaker authenticity and audience adaptation while still challenging colonial norms.

### *Authenticity and Audience Adaptation*

Throughout the process of collaboration and research, it became abundantly clear that decolonizing public speaking courses cannot rely solely on the abandonment of all oral communication practices, which often includes a focus on content, organization, verbal communication, and nonverbal communication. One of the many skills speakers still need to master is audience adaptation, which historically has proven to be an effective tool for prominent orators, such as Booker T. Washington and Robert F. Kennedy (Broadhurst, 1963). Audience adaptation invites speakers to determine how they can strategically accomplish their oral communication goals with an approach that considers the demographics, knowledge, and experiences of those collectively receiving a message. It is important to keep in mind that audiences may vary for student speakers. Audiences may consist of peers listening to an undergraduate share a research analysis or deliver a persuasive pitch with a call to action. In addition, some students at a community college are also preparing directly for the workplace after completion of their two-year degree. Therefore, students often want to learn how to address professional audiences, which is often important for both obtaining and maintaining gainful employment.

The importance of achieving speaking goals with each unique audience led to the consideration of how audience adaptation intersects with a speaker's authenticity. Authenticity is defined as being "true to one's own personality, spirit, or character" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Researchers emphasize the importance of knowing oneself, the talking points, and the audience (Danziger, 2024; Morgan, 2008). Moreover, Hardt (1993) explains that authenticity involves understanding the individual in relation to "a world of powerful and competing interests" (p. 50). What makes one speaker's delivery authentic cannot be applied to all others. For example, an analysis of the body movement of Black people led one researcher to conclude not all people within the racial group exhibit the same exact features of nonverbal communication (Johnson, 1996). The practice of authentic communication can place importance on communicating in a manner that aligns with culture, feelings on the subject, and perceptions of the audience, which may depart from European-centric speaking methods and strategies highlighted in many college textbooks. Moreover, when speaking authentically, grammar, syntax, and

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

colloquialism can vary from what is described as standardized American English. Regional languages closely tie into this, so educators should also consider the demographics and location of their institution. For example, the student population enrolled at CUNY in 2021 speaks at least 137 languages (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Hub., n.d.). The vast number of native languages spoken has implications for the CUNY institutions that may enroll high school graduates with varying approaches and experiences with oral communication. Furthermore, many of the traditional speech rubrics used to assess oral communication skills do not include components of authenticity as a goal of speech communication; therefore, speaking authentically may have an adverse impact on students' grades.

The decolonization of public speaking courses has professional implications for those enrolled. Many college students are working to attain or improve public speaking skills that will support their professional pursuits. Researchers have found that one of the top skills that convey a candidate's job readiness is speech communication (Baird & Parayitam, 2019; Stevens, 2005). When students can develop effective oral communication skills in an educational setting and later demonstrate them in job interviews, they enhance their chance of securing employment.

However, there are challenges that must be considered when faculty work to weave authenticity in speech communication. When moving away from Eurocentric methods of speech delivery, in favour of a more authentic approach, it is possible that some audiences may negatively assess the speaker's credibility and skill due to bias. Specifically, racial bias can be a factor. A study involving the perceptions of college students revealed that even higher education faculty are subject to an analysis of their credibility in part due to their racial identity. Several student respondents highlighted that it is more challenging for Black professors to establish their credibility on subjects not related to race (Hendrix, 1998). The potential for racial bias exists outside of college campuses as well. Race has been found to play a role when it comes to perceiving an individual's credibility when they communicate regarding both professional and legal matters (Hong & Len-Riós, 2015; Johnson, 1996). Despite the obstacles, the importance of supporting speaker authenticity remains. Faculty tasked with decolonizing public speaking courses must work to help student speakers bridge the gap between practicing delivery methods that centre on authenticity and navigating the potential for bias through audience adaptation.

Having established both the importance of linguistic justice and speaker authenticity in public speaking education, we now turn to the practical question of assessment. Traditional evaluation methods often reinforce the very colonial perspectives we seek to dismantle. The following section proposes concrete alternatives to behaviour-based assessment that honour diverse communication styles while maintaining academic rigor.

## *Decolonizing Assessment of Speech Assignments*

This article has so far identified several issues that need to be addressed when

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

considering how to decolonize a public speaking course or a speech assignment. In this section, we discuss one key approach to address these issues: updating our assessment rubrics. As Gehrke (2024) explains, conventional speech evaluation criteria frequently contain biases that favour white individuals and disadvantage students with various disabilities, as supported by multiple researchers, including Brenneise (2020), Key (2022), Juárez and Rudick (2024), Treinen (2024), and Rouse et al. (2024). Rubrics commonly used to evaluate speech assignments often rely on behaviour-based standards that can perpetuate inequality and privilege certain communication styles over others (Gehrke, 2024). This section examines the problematic nature of behaviour-based assessment in speech assignments and proposes two specific alternatives for fair assessment: (1) outcomes-based rubrics that honour diverse communication approaches while maintaining rigorous standards, and (2) reflective self-assessment practices that incorporate students' perspectives into the evaluation process.

In the US, the National Communication Association (NCA)'s Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form, Second Edition (CSSE) (Morreale et al., 2007) is considered the most authoritative rubric for evaluating public address in higher education, widely used as a reference point for programmatic assessment in basic courses and college-wide assessment of oral ability (e.g., Interlante et al., 2016). Following Manarin (2018), we provide a close reading of a rubric as representative of typical speech assignment assessment and how colonial (racist, ableist, sexist) standards and assumptions are embedded within it. As Manarin states, "Close reading requires us to consider the relationship among writer, text, and reader" (p. 125). In this case, the CSSE is written by an authoritative body, the NCA, for professionals in the field who share an understanding of existing norms in public speaking education. If the NCA intends to challenge those norms, it would have to do so explicitly, but reinforcing or accepting those existing norms is the implicit default position.

The CSSE consists of eight competencies. The seventh competency states that an excellent speaker "has exceptional articulation, pronunciation, and grammar" (Morreale et al., 2007, p. 15). While this might sound like a neutral statement, public speaking textbooks, the next strongest authority, widely interpret it as referring to the use of standardized American English (de Cuba & Slocum, 2020). This criterion reinforces linguistic injustice by privileging certain dialects and language backgrounds while systematically penalizing multilingual students and speakers of non-dominant dialects. Though the language may be ambiguous, the message conveyed is clear: success requires conforming to a narrow definition of "correct" English rather than effectively communicating ideas.

In a similar fashion, the eighth competency states that an excellent speaker, "demonstrates exceptional posture, gestures, bodily movement, facial expressions, eye contact, and use of dress" (Morreale et al., 2007, p. 15). Eye contact is culturally coded; what constitutes appropriate gaze behaviour varies significantly across cultures. In many East Asian, Indigenous, and other cultural contexts, direct eye contact may be considered rude or confrontational rather than a sign of engagement

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

(Samovar et al., 2011). Additionally, these requirements create barriers for neurodivergent speakers who may process and express information differently (Brenneise, 2020; Rouse et al., 2024).

As these two examples illustrate, assessment of public speaking assignments in the US is modeled on rubrics that implicitly prioritize and value colonial models of excellence. To address this inequity, we recommend two adjustments to public speaking assessment to create more inclusive evaluation practices.

### *Recommendation 1: Adopting Outcomes-Based Assessment Rubrics*

Rather than focusing on prescribed behaviours, we follow Gehrke (2024) in recommending that educators adopt outcomes-based rubrics that emphasize communication effectiveness while allowing for diverse rhetorical approaches. This shift maintains high academic standards while creating space for students to leverage their unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds as strengths rather than deficits.

An outcomes-based approach assesses whether the speaker successfully communicates a clear, coherent message that resonates with the audience. This allows flexibility in organizational approaches—whether through storytelling, anecdotal openings, or gradual thesis reveals—while still evaluating whether the audience understands the central message. Including audience feedback as part of the assessment data provides valuable insight into the actual impact of the communication. Engagement can be achieved through numerous techniques beyond eye contact and bold gestures. Visual aids, strategic movement, vocal variety, purposeful pauses, and audience interaction all serve as potential engagement strategies. Acknowledging cultural and individual differences in communication styles allows students to leverage their unique strengths rather than forcing conformity to a single model. A decolonized rubric might assess whether the speaker maintains audience attention through any combination of effective techniques, rather than prescribing specific behaviours. This approach honours diverse communication styles while maintaining focus on the fundamental goal of engagement.

Rather than privileging standardized American English, assessment can focus on clear, impactful language that effectively conveys ideas. This supports linguistic diversity and authentic expression while valuing rhetorical effectiveness over prescriptive language norms. Additional strategies that incorporate linguistic diversity to enhance communication include code-meshing (blending language varieties), highlighted by Young et al. (2018), and translanguaging (moving between languages), as suggested by Canagarajah (2011).

This approach does not ignore the reality of linguistic privilege in society but rather acknowledges it openly while expanding what counts as effective communication. While not requiring its use in assessments, instructors should discuss how standardized American English carries social privilege and how speakers of other language varieties may experience discrimination. By creating

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

space for honest conversations about language and power, educators equip students with the knowledge to make informed rhetorical choices. This empowers students to decide for themselves when and how to employ different language varieties based on their communication goals, audience analysis, and personal identities, rather than imposing a single standard regardless of context.

### *Recommendation 2: Implementing Reflective Self-Assessment Practices*

We also recommend incorporating reflective self-assessment as a critical tool to include students' perspectives in the evaluation process. Reflective self-assessment encourages students to articulate their rhetorical choices and explain why they made certain decisions. It has been shown that when students analyze the effectiveness of their choices for specific rhetorical situations, they develop transferable communication skills applicable across contexts (Habib et al., 2021). This practice encourages students to become more conscious communicators who can adapt to various audiences and purposes—a skill far more valuable than the ability to follow prescribed formulas. By asking students to defend their choices, instructors gain insight into students' rhetorical awareness while promoting agency.

Reflective self-assessment of public speaking assignments can serve as a powerful tool to counter coloniality in the classroom by shifting evaluative power from institutional authority to student agency. By encouraging students to critically examine their own speaking performances through their unique cultural lenses and lived experiences, self-assessment challenges the traditional Western-centric standards that often privilege certain communication styles and knowledge systems. This approach validates diverse ways of knowing, speaking, and engaging with audiences, allowing students to articulate their own measures of success beyond prescribed colonial norms. When students reflect on how their cultural backgrounds inform their rhetorical choices, they not only develop metacognitive awareness, but also reclaim ownership of their voices in ways that resist homogenization and honour the plurality of effective communication practices across cultures.

These pedagogical shifts align with Peter Felten's (2013) principles for high-quality scholarship of teaching and learning. They are grounded in context by recognizing the specific linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students and acknowledging the situated nature of communication practices. They are methodologically sound, supported by research in sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and composition studies. Furthermore, outcomes-based assessment can be conducted in partnership with students, involving them in defining effective communication and positioning them as active participants through reflection. Most importantly, this approach benefits students by focusing on transferable communication competencies rather than arbitrary rules, building agency and metacognition around communication choices.

As educators committed to equity and inclusion, we must critically examine our assessment practices and their impact on diverse student populations. Behaviour-based rubrics often reinforce structural inequities by privileging Western,

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

neurotypical, and biased communication norms. By implementing our two key recommendations—outcomes-based assessment rubrics and reflective self-assessment practices—we can create more equitable learning environments that honour linguistic and cultural diversity while maintaining rigorous standards.

This approach not only produces more fair assessments, but also better prepares students for communicating effectively in diverse global contexts. When we value multiple ways of knowing and expressing knowledge, we expand possibilities for all students while enriching our academic communities with diverse perspectives and communication styles.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the colonial foundations of public speaking education through three interconnected issues: linguistic discrimination embedded in standard language ideology, the tension between authentic expression and audience adaptation, and the need for more equitable assessment practices. Throughout our analysis, we have demonstrated how traditional approaches to public speaking pedagogy often reinforce power structures that marginalize students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

As we consider the implications of our work, we must address a fundamental assumption that underlies much of public speaking education: that employers universally prefer a singular, homogeneous communication style. While research cited in this paper indicates that employers value oral communication skills (Baird & Parayitam 2019; Stevens 2005), the assumption that these skills must conform to Western, colonial standards deserves critical examination. While Stevens (2005) found that employers wanted college graduates to improve in "self-expression, impression management, and avoidance of slang," we must not assume that employers in 2025 are seeking the same thing (p. 2). The modern workplace is increasingly diverse and global, with teams collaborating across cultural and linguistic boundaries. This raises important questions: Do contemporary employers truly benefit from a workforce trained in a singular communication style, or might they actually value the richness of diverse approaches to communication? More research is urgently needed to understand how employer expectations around communication are changing in response to increasingly diverse workforces and global markets.

As educators committed to decolonizing public speaking education, we must continue to question inherited practices, challenge our own biases, and create learning environments where all students can develop as effective communicators without sacrificing their authentic voices. By reimagining public speaking pedagogy through a decolonial lens, we not only create more equitable classrooms, but potentially better prepare students for workplaces that increasingly value diverse perspectives and communication styles. The path toward linguistic justice in public speaking education requires ongoing reflection, research, and a willingness to transform long-standing practices—work that benefits not only our students, but also the broader society they will help shape through their voices.

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge their funding from the City University of New York's BRESI (Black, Race and Ethnic Studies Initiative) Grant #7W201-1201. This grant was issued to the authors and their colleagues, Jaime Riccio, Joan Schwartz, and Patricia Sokolski.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Carlos de Cuba, Carlos.deCuba@kbcc.cuny.edu, has a PhD in Linguistics and an MA in TESOL. He is an Associate Professor of Speech Communication at Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York. His research focus is in applied and theoretical linguistics, including a focus on linguistic justice.

Dr. Cheyenne Seymour, EdD, Cheyenne.Seymour@bcc.cuny.edu, is an Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York. Her research focuses on public speaking, rhetoric, and social media.

Dr. Poppy Slocum, pslocum@lagcc.cuny.edu, has a PhD in Linguistics from Stony Brook University and is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies at LaGuardia Community College, CUNY. She is committed to integrating sociolinguistic insights into communication pedagogy.

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

## REFERENCES

Baird, A. M., & Parayitam, S. (2019). Employers' ratings of importance of skills and competencies college graduates need to get hired: Evidence from the New England region of USA. *Education + Training*, *61*(5), 622–634. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-12-2018-0250

Baker-Bell, A. (2020). *Linguistic justice: Black language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315147383

Betts, R., & Betts, R. F. (2004). *Decolonization*. Routledge.

Boromisza-Habashi, D., Hughes, J. M. F., & Malkowski, J. A. (2016). Public speaking as cultural ideal: Internationalizing the public speaking curriculum. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *9*(1), 20–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2016.1120847

Brenneise, A. D. (2020). Presuming competence: Troubling the ideal student. *Communication Education*, *69*(3), 317–334. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2020.1770307

Broadhurst, A. R. (1963). Audience adaptation: The determining factor. *Today's Speech*, *11*(3), 11–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463376309385347

Canagarajah, S. (2011). Codemeshing in academic writing: Identifying teachable strategies of translanguaging. *The Modern Language Journal*, *95*(3), 401–417. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01207.x

Center for Engaged Learning. (2013). *Key characteristics of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvDKHHyx7YY

Charity Hudley, A. H., Mallinson, C., & Bucholtz, M. (Eds.). (2024). *Decolonizing linguistics*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197755259.001.0001

Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). (1974). Students' right to their own language. *Special Issue of College Composition and Communication*, *25*(3), 1–32.

Danziger, E. (2024). Cultivating authenticity as a speaker: Learn how to let your true self shine while presenting. *Toastmaster*. https://www.toastmasters.org/magazine/magazine-issues/2024/jan/cultivating-authenticity

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

de Cuba, C., & Slocum, P. (2020). Standard language ideology is alive and well in public speaking textbooks. *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America*, *5*(1), 369–383. https://doi.org/10.3765/plsa.v5i1.4715

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Hub. (n.d.). The City University of New York. https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/transformation/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-hub/

Dyson, A. H., & Smitherman, G. (2009). The right (write) start: African American language and the discourse of sounding right. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *111*(4), 973–998. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810911100408

Fairbanks, C. M. (1998). Nourishing conversations: Urban adolescents, literacy, and democratic society. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *30*(2), 187–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/10862969809547995

Feir, D. L. (2016). The long-term effects of forcible assimilation policy: The case of Indian boarding schools. *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue Canadienne d'économique*, *49*(2), 433–480. https://doi.org/10.1111/caje.12203

Felten, P. (2013). Principles of good practice in SoTL. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, *1*(1), 121–125. https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.1.1.121

Foley, M., & Gehrke, P. (2023). *Intersectional standpoint pedagogy: Resisting the assimilationist legacy in public speaking education* [Webinar]. CUNY Black, Race, and Ethic Studies Initiative on Decolonizing the Public Speaking Course. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIOW8Xj6pWw

Gehrke, P. (2024). Creating more equitable rubrics to reduce discrimination and inequities in public-speaking courses. *Communication Teacher*, *39*(2), 163–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2024.2372345

Gehrke, P. J. (2016). Epilogue: A manifesto for teaching public speaking. *Review of Communication*, *16*(2–3), 246–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2016.1193943

Gehrke, P. J. (2009). *The ethics and politics of speech: Communication and rhetoric in the twentieth century*. Southern Illinois University Press.

Godley, A. J., Carpenter, B. D., & Werner, C. A. (2007). "I'll speak in proper slang": Language ideologies in a daily editing activity. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *42*(1), 100–131. https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.42.1.4

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

Greene, D. M., & Stewart, F. R. (2011). African American Students' reactions to Benjamin Cooke's "Nonverbal Communication Among Afro-Americans: An Initial Classification." *Journal of Black Studies*, *42*(3), 389–401. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934710376169

Habib, A., Abdullatif, M., & Alzayani, N. J. (2021). Use of rubric and assessment to encourage self-regulated learning. *2021 IEEE Integrated STEM Education Conference (ISEC)*, 195–200. https://doi.org/10.1109/ISEC52395.2021.9763942

Hardt, H. (1993). Authenticity, communication, and critical theory. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *10*(1), 49–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039309366848

Hendrix, K. G. (1998). Student perceptions of the influence of race on professor credibility. *Journal of Black Studies*, *28*(6), 738–763.

Hilpert, M. (2021). *What makes a language... A language?* [Video]. TED Conferences. https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_hilpert_what_makes_a_language_a_language

Hong, S., & Len-Riós, M. E. (2015). Does race matter? Implicit and explicit measures of the effect of the PR spokesman's race on evaluations of spokesman source credibility and perceptions of a PR crisis' severity. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *27*(1), 63–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2014.929502

Interlante, L., Riemer, C. D., Tirpak, P., & Palomino, A. (2016). Oral communication competency across the Virginia Community College System: A faculty-designed assessment. *Inquiry: The Journal of the Virginia Community Colleges*, *20*(1), 5–17. https://commons.vccs.edu/inquiry/vol20/iss1/3

Johnson, S. L. (1996). The color of truth: Race and the assessment of credibility. *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, *1*(2), 261–346.

Juárez, S. F., & Rudick, C. K. (2024). Critical race theory interventions for public speaking. In S. M. Munz, T. McKenna-Buchanan, & A. M. Wright (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Public Speaking Research and Theory* (pp. 210–220). Routledge.

Key, A. (2022). Sounds about white: Critiquing the NCA standards for public speaking competency. *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*, *6*(1), 128–141. https://doi.org/10.31446/JCP.2022.1.11

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

Laenui, P. (2000). Processes of decolonization. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 150–160). UBC Press.

Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States* (2nd ed.). Taylor and Francis.

Manarin, K. (2018). Close reading: Paying attention to student artifacts. In N. L. Chick (Ed.), *SoTL in action: Illuminating critical moments of practice* (pp. 123–132). Routledge.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2–3), 240–270. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Authenticity. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authentic

Morgan, N. (2008). *How to become an authentic speaker*. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2008/11/how-to-become-an-authentic-speaker

Morreale, S., Moore, M., Sturges-Tatum, D., & Webster, L. (Eds.). (2007). *The Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form* (2nd ed.). National Communication Association. https://www.une.edu/sites/default/files/Public-Speaking2013.pdf

Morreale, S. P., Myers, S. A., Backlund, P. M., & Simonds, C. J. (2015). Study IX of the basic communication course at two- and four-year U.S. Colleges and Universities: A re-examination of our discipline's "front porch." *Communication Education*, *65*(3), 338–355. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2015.1073339

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (2025). *Decolonizing language and other revolutionary ideas*. The New Press.

Reaser, J., Adger, C. T., Wolfram, W., & Christian, D. (2017). *Dialects at school: Educating linguistically diverse students*. Routledge.

Riccio, J., & Sokolski, P. (2025). Decolonizing the public speaking course: A starting point. *Dialogues in Social Justice: An Adult Education Journal*, *10*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.55370/dsj.v10i1.1790

Rouse, M. N., Schafer, K. R., Griffin, D. J., & Duncan, C. (2024). Verbal and nonverbal communication. In S. M. Munz, T. McKenna-Buchanan, & A. M. Wright (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Public Speaking Research and Theory* (1st ed., pp. 133–143). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003333777-16

*Imagining SoTL, Volume 5(2)* (2025)
*ISSN 2563-8289*

Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., & McDaniel, E. R. (2011). *Intercultural communication: A reader* (13th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Stevens, B. (2005). What communication skills do employers want? Silicon Valley recruiters respond. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *42*(1), 2–9. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2005.tb00893.x

Treinen, K. P. (2024). Whiteness and public speaking. In S. M. Munz, T. McKenna-Buchanan, & A. M. Wright (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Public Speaking Research and Theory*. Routledge.

Young, V. A., Barrett, E., Rivera, Y. Y., Lovejoy, K. B., Genishi, C., & Alvermann, D. E. (2018). *Other people's English: Code-meshing, code-switching, and African American literacy*. Teachers College Press.

Zidani, S. (2020). Whose pedagogy is it anyway? Decolonizing the syllabus through a critical embrace of difference. *Media, Culture & Society*, *43*(5), 970–978. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720980922