Abjad Journal of Humanities & Education, 2026
Vol. 4. No. 2. pp. 160 – 184, https://doi.org/10.62079/abjad.v4i2.156

CENTRE FOR LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES
CLCS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Native Speaker Authority to Algorithmic Authority: A Decolonial Analysis of Algorithmic Authority and Linguistic Legitimacy

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Received: June 25, 2026 / Revised: July 31, 2026 / Accepted: July 31, 2026

Abstract

The decolonial critique of English Language Teaching has long described native-speakerism as a colonial ideology. A similar kind of authority is emerging, unperceived, unquestioned, and rationalised by the idea of technology as neutral, as AI-driven tools are increasingly deployed in EFL classrooms to assess language, provide feedback, and teach writing. The paper introduces the notion of algorithmic recolonisation to describe the transfer of authority from the biological native speaker to the computational program. Drawing upon a decolonial and critical post-humanist framework, this paper undertakes a comparative conceptual analysis to explore the structural parallels between native-speaker authority and algorithmic authority across four shared mechanisms: invisibility, idealisation, marginalisation of peripheral voices, and institutional legitimisation. It claims that AI systems are mostly trained on Western English data and reproduce the epistemic hierarchy marked by native-speakerism, now encoded rather than embodied. The paper calls for a critical and ideologically conscious pedagogy, one neither lulled by techno-utopianism nor dismissive of AI's genuine affordances. It argues that without such vigilance, the decolonised classroom and the algorithmically governed classroom risk becoming indistinguishable.

Keywords native-speakerism; algorithmic recolonization; algorithmic authority; EFL writing; decolonial pedagogy.

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Abstrak

Kritik dekolonial terhadap pengajaran bahasa Inggris telah lama memandang native-speakerism (paham yang mengutamakan penutur asli) sebagai sebuah ideologi kolonial. Kini, muncul bentuk otoritas serupa—yang luput dari perhatian, tidak dipertanyakan, dan dirasionalisasi oleh anggapan bahwa teknologi bersifat netral—seiring dengan semakin luasnya penggunaan perangkat berbasis kecerdasan buatan (AI) di kelas EFL untuk menilai kemampuan bahasa, memberikan umpan balik, dan mengajarkan keterampilan menulis. Makalah ini memperkenalkan gagasan "rekolonisasi algoritmik" untuk menggambarkan peralihan otoritas dari penutur asli (sebagai sosok biologis) kepada program komputasi. Dengan menggunakan kerangka kerja dekolonial dan pasca-humanisme kritis, makalah ini melakukan analisis konseptual komparatif untuk mengeksplorasi kesamaan struktural antara otoritas penutur asli dan otoritas algoritmik melalui empat mekanisme bersama: ketakterlihatan, idealisasi, peminggiran suara-suara dari pinggiran (peripheral voices), dan legitimasi institusional. Makalah ini menyatakan bahwa sistem AI umumnya dilatih menggunakan data bahasa Inggris Barat dan mereproduksi hierarki epistemik yang dicirikan oleh native-speakerism, namun kini dalam bentuk kode digital alih-alih perwujudan fisik manusia. Makalah ini menyerukan penerapan pedagogi yang kritis dan sadar ideologi—pedagogi yang tidak terlena oleh utopia teknologi, namun juga tidak mengabaikan potensi nyata yang ditawarkan oleh AI. Argumen yang dikemukakan adalah bahwa tanpa kewaspadaan semacam itu, kelas yang telah didekolonisasi dan kelas yang diatur oleh algoritma berisiko menjadi tidak dapat dibedakan satu sama lain.

Kata kunci *penutur asli; rekolonisasi algoritmik; otoritas algoritmik; penulisan EFL; pedagogi dekolonial*

Introduction

The decolonial turn in English Language Teaching (ELT) has seriously challenged the persistent dominance of the native speaker as the only arbiter of linguistic legitimacy. This ideal has long been an invisible benchmark for evaluating non-native English-speaking educators and learners alike and is rooted in colonial power dynamics that favour Western knowledge over perspectives from the Global South (Holliday, 2006; Madany-Saá, 2025; Phillipson, 1996).

This paper raises a more specific question than the one expressed above: Does the increasing use of AI-mediated assessment and feedback in EFL writing replicate the colonial hierarchy supported by native-speakerism, or is it a real departure from it? While the critical literature on AI and language ideology continues to grow, there is, as yet, no work that has examined, from a decolonial perspective, the structural continuity between native-speaker authority and algorithmic authority, nor has it offered a framework to

assess whether AI represents an epistemic rupture or a digital reiteration of this hierarchy. In particular, this paper seeks to fill this gap by introducing the concept of algorithmic recolonisation.

Fedorova and Kaur (2022) point to three factors that perpetuate native-speakerism: hiring practices, educational resources, and institutional policies that align "authentic" English with Inner Circle varieties. Graddol (2006) had anticipated this point of conflict, arguing that the demographic basis for native-speaker authority would break down as English became a widely used basic skill. However, the algorithm has become a new arbiter of linguistic authority at a time when decolonial scholarship has begun to challenge this authority, arguing that what Graddol (2006) framed as the impending demographic irrelevance of the native speaker has become an ideological migration: from the embodied native speaker to the encoded algorithm instead.

Massive language models and AI-enhanced educational systems are increasingly being implemented in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes for language instruction, assessment and feedback tasks. Budiarti and Saehu (2023) explain that AI has become increasingly popular in EFL classrooms because many students struggle to identify grammatical errors, which can lead to misinterpretation of the text; AI-based tools are consequently viewed as a quick remedy for such linguistic barriers. Therefore, reliance on AI might eventually transfer the seat of linguistic authority from teachers and students to algorithmic systems.

Therefore, these systems are mostly trained on English-centric datasets, representing the Western epistemic dominance that decolonial pedagogy seeks to dismantle (Albeihi & Rice, 2025; Nyaaba et al., 2024). The combination poses an important theoretical question: if the native speaker was the custodian of linguistic colonialism, does the algorithm replace it?.

This question carries substantial theoretical weight for decolonial ELT scholarship. When AI is selected as a setting in EFL contexts, it may reproduce the same colonial patterns that decolonial pedagogy tries to dilute. AI-generated content often uses grammatically complex yet culturally vacuous language that fails to convey local values and indigenous knowledge systems, thereby re-colonising schools under the guise of technical neutrality (Albeihi & Rice, 2025; Zheng & Stewart, 2024).

Nyaaba et al. (2024) argue that generative AI centralises technological infrastructure, training data and authority in the Global North, creating a 'AI gap' similar to exploitative economies during colonial times. When an AI program flags a learner's English as non-standard, it is not a neutral corrector but a normative judgment rooted in

biased training data. This research argues that the algorithm has quietly performed the native speaker's ideological function.

There is a growing research exploring AI and language teaching from critical perspectives (Bozkurt, 2025; Zheng & Stewart, 2024) and evidence that native-speakerism continues to be a barrier in contemporary English Language Teaching (Kiczkowiak & Lowe, 2024) But no one has applied a decolonial lens to examine the structural continuity between native-speaker authority and algorithmic governance, nor has the field developed a theoretical framework to evaluate whether AI represents a genuine epistemic rupture or a digital replication of colonial linguistic hierarchy.

Three bodies of scholarship have attended to adjacent problems. Decolonial ELT studies have thoroughly theorised native-speakerism as an ideology that reproduces colonial hierarchies of linguistic legitimacy (Canagarajah, 2023; Holliday, 2006; Phillipson, 1992). Critical AI research has begun to examine how algorithmic systems encode Western epistemic dominance through training data and governance structures (Mohamed et al., 2020; Nyaaba et al., 2024). Moreover, a small but growing literature has scrutinised AI in second-language writing contexts, identifying tendencies toward cultural homogenisation and normative standardisation (Albeihi & Rice, 2025; Zheng & Stewart, 2024).

What remains untheorised is the structural relationship across these three domains: the conceptual continuity between native-speaker authority and algorithmic authority as historically successive but ideologically homologous mechanisms of linguistic legitimacy. Existing work names this problem in pieces, as bias, as recolonisation, as digital colonialism, without a unified framework for why the shift from biological to computational authority reproduces rather than disrupts the colonial difference.

This paper makes three interrelated contributions to the critical study of language, ideology, and technology. First, it conceptualises algorithmic authority as a distinct and analytically necessary category of linguistic authority, one that operates through invisibility, idealisation, marginalisation, and institutional legitimation in ways that are structurally homologous with native-speakerism yet qualitatively different in their opacity and scalability. Second, it explains how AI-mediated language systems simultaneously challenge the embodied regime of native-speaker dominance and reproduce its underlying epistemic hierarchy in encoded form, a dynamic the paper terms algorithmic recolonisation. Third, it proposes an analytical framework for examining linguistic legitimacy in AI-mediated contexts, one that integrates decolonial theory, critical posthumanism, and language ideology studies, and that equips scholars and practitioners to ask not only whether AI tools are effective, but whose conception of

correctness, authority, and discourse they enact. These contributions extend the decolonial project of Canagarajah (2023) and Mignolo (2021) into the domain of algorithmic governance, while providing the field of critical applied linguistics with vocabulary adequate to the ideological complexity of the current conjuncture.

Literature Review

What remains untheorised is the structural relationship across these three domains: the conceptual continuity between native-speaker authority and algorithmic authority as historically successive but ideologically homologous mechanisms of linguistic legitimacy. Existing work names this problem in pieces, as bias, as recolonisation, as digital colonialism, without a unified framework for why the shift from biological to computational authority reproduces rather than disrupts the colonial difference.

The intersection of decolonial theory, English Language Teaching (ELT), and artificial intelligence (AI) is one of the most important and least studied areas of research in applied linguistics today. This paper is based on three different but related areas of research: (1) the critical tradition that looks at native-speakerism as a colonial ideology in ELT; (2) the growing body of work on using AI in second language (L2) writing education; and (3) the new decolonial AI research that questions the ideological foundations of algorithmic systems.

Each stream has produced important insights on its own, but the structural relationship between them, whether AI-powered EFL tools reproduce the same colonial hierarchies that native-speakerism used to maintain, has not been systematically theorized. This literature review covers all three streams in depth, shows where they converge, and makes the case for algorithmic recolonisation as a needed theoretical intervention.

The review proceeds in four parts: foundational research on linguistic imperialism and native-speakerism; evidence that native-speakerism persists in contemporary ELT practice; research on AI in L2 writing, separating techno-optimist from critical perspectives; and decolonial AI scholarship, which connects these strands and sets up the case for algorithmic recolonization.

Linguistic Imperialism and Native-Speakerism: Foundational Studies

Phillipson (1992) frames English as an instrument of geopolitical and economic hegemony that installed native-speaker norms as the institutional default in ELT, a diagnosis Holliday (2006) extends by naming native-speakerism as the belief system that idealises the native speaker as the benchmark for legitimate usage. Graddol (2006) gave

this critique a demographic edge, projecting that non-native users would soon outnumber native speakers and that English would become a basic global skill rather than an Inner Circle possession; on this logic, native-speaker authority should have eroded. That it has not is the more telling finding: native-speakerism persists despite, rather than because of, demographic reality, which raises the question this paper pursues - whether that same authority has simply migrated into algorithmic form. Canagarajah (2012, 2023, 2024) responds to this persistence by arguing for translingual and decolonial pedagogies that treat Southern epistemologies as valid knowledge, while cautioning that AI-based EFL tools trained on standardised norms risk reproducing the very hierarchies such pedagogies seek to dismantle.

Native-Speakerism in Contemporary ELT

Native-speakerism continues to structure ELT at both institutional and pedagogical levels. Kiczkowiak and Lowe (2024) find that conference organisers are markedly more likely to invite native English speakers as plenary speakers, evidence that the native-speaker advantage now operates through who is recognised as an authority rather than through overt exclusion. Fedorova and Kaur (2022) similarly show that recruitment, materials, and institutional policy still favour native speakers, but under ostensibly neutral labels such as "communication skills," "accent," and "global standards," a shift from open bias to a normalised, harder-to-contest inequality. Truong and Nguyen (2024) extend this to teachers themselves: Western-trained Vietnamese educators internalise transplanted TESOL norms even while recognising their tension with local context, so that native-speakerism is reproduced not only institutionally but through practitioners' own sense of legitimacy. Taken together, these studies indicate that if native-speakerism operates through normalised, largely invisible standards, then AI systems trained on the same dominant corpora do not introduce a new bias so much as automate and scale an existing one.

Artificial Intelligence in Second Language Writing Education

The swift incorporation of AI into L2 writing education has produced a significant volume of research, predominantly marked by techno-optimistic perspectives that emphasise pedagogical efficiency over ideological examination. Feng et al. (2025) and Luo et al. (2025) conducted systematic reviews that demonstrate that the predominant research in this field occurs in EFL undergraduate settings. The focus is on the benefits of AI tools, such as better feedback, more accurate language, and more student engagement, in automated writing evaluation systems, large language models, and writing helpers that are specific to a subject.

One major shortcoming is that they repeatedly fail to present explicit theoretical frameworks, and they ignore ethical, cultural, and ideological issues. Technological oversight is a structural requirement in the first place; the field has focused on AI's capacities rather than its representations and reproductions.

This gap is directly challenged by a recent critical study analysing the ideological outcomes of AI-generated content. Zheng and Stewart (2024) investigate the AI-generated writings within Chinese EFL settings; the outputs are characterised by grammatical complexity, but the local cultural nuances are persistently ignored, and the outputs are aligned with the inner circle English standards. This is referred to as "recolonisation" when AI tools become the norm for defining the Western language and curating the norm, to the exclusion of other forms of self-expression.

Albeihi and Rice (2025) substantiate this argument by showing that large language models are more likely to choose standardised American and British English than other English varieties, since they are trained on Western corpora. This shows that bias is not just a slight flaw but an integral aspect of AI systems. This is in line with the idea of the global organisationorganisation of language in relation to uneven power relations (Phillipson, 1996). This critique is underscored by Crano (2025), who situated AI in education more within the realm of political economy. He illustrates how techno-pros invoking things like "AI literacy" mask the real-world forces driving the rise of AI. Prevents the consolidation of technological power in the North, and exploitation of labour in the Global South.

The capabilities of artificial intelligence to democratize language learning are entangled with the colonial setting of its production. Bozkurt (2025) describes this as an "algorithmic panopticon," in which students are encouraged to covertly utilise standardised linguistic forms in AI-mediated schooling. He calls this "modal collapse," the idea that writing is less expressive when it follows the rules of the standard. This encounter illustrates Holliday's (2006) native-speakerism as an ideological ideal, in which AI outputs become a new, computationally determined norm of validity.

There are two probable uses of AI identified in the literature. Tlili et al. (2023) elucidate this contradiction by painting AI as a "guardian angel" and a "devil". They emphasise the potential of AI to enhance accessibility, personalisation and feedback, while posing difficulties of bias, dependency and epistemic standardisation. Lim et al. (2023) describe AI as "reformation or Ragnarök", depending on the educational and institutional environments in which it is applied, and as either transformational or destructive. This paper argues that dual framing may overlook the structural inequities

embedded in AI systems; without critical intervention, the default trajectory is not neutral but rather one that reinforces existing hierarchies.

Lakshmi's (2025) notion of the "rebranding of empire" exemplifies the disruptive impact of generative AI systems on language and cultural representation. They re-interpret non-Western stories in Western modes and ideas. In L2 writing instruction, this means that AI tools are more than grammar checkers: they are active agents in shaping what counts as meaningful, suitable and valid conversation. Synthesizing these perspectives, I argue that AI in L2 writing should be understood not only as an innovative pedagogical tool, but also as an evolving infrastructure that sustains, exacerbates, and institutionalises native-speakerism and colonial hierarchies, transforming historically contingent standards into algorithmic norms.

Decolonial AI: Algorithmic Authority and the Persistence of Global Inequality

Decolonial AI studies offer an important perspective on viewing AI beyond a neutral technology. Rather, they show how AI reproduces existing power relations. According to Mohamed et al. (2020), the coloniality of power impacts AI systems through digital territoriality, data extraction and control over knowledge. Their approach highlights that AI infrastructure follows a colonial pattern: the Global North holds most of the technological power and resources, while the Global South provides data and is often excluded from critical conversations.

This changes how we see AI. It is not only a tool anymore, but a system that shapes knowledge and establishes Western ways of thinking as the norm. Mohamed et al. propose solutions like critical technical practices, reverse mentorship, and collaboration on political issues. These ideas show that fixing AI bias is not a matter of minor technical changes, but of bigger systemic changes.

Nyaaba et al. (2024) extend a structural critique to education with the introduction of the notion of the "AI gap," which reveals the unequal relationship between Global North producers and Global South consumers of AI systems. The inequality mirrors colonial extractive economies, where the Global South provides linguistic and behavioral data but is excluded from decisions on the design and governance of AI or the sharing of profits. This difference has a direct impact on EFL teaching. In the classroom of the Global South, AI technologies are not only imported from elsewhere but also configured to fit datasets, conventions and communication standards that resemble those of the Global North. Hence, the use of AI in language teaching is not simply a personal preference, but a way for the digital reproduction and normalisation of historical center-periphery dynamics.

This critique is extended by Langmia and Sani (2023) by reference to the idea of "decolonising the digital mind" in relation to subjectivity and everyday practices. They argue that contemporary digital ecologies, including AI systems, are a tool for epistemic control that structures knowledge and communication to promote Western perspectives as universal and to marginalise other epistemologies. This conclusion is especially important for second language writing instruction: AI technologies help students write correct sentences and teach them how to use language correctly and effectively and appropriately without actually saying so. Here are sites of talk about knowledge. The rules of language are very much linked to cultural and ideological beliefs.

When synthesised together, these frameworks point to an important conclusion: AI systems do not produce new forms of inequity but instead amplify and translate existing colonial relations into computational forms. In EFL contexts, this means that the native-speakerist hierarchies found in previous studies are not only maintained but enacted through data, infrastructure and algorithmic standardisation. Decolonising AI for language education means rethinking who creates AI systems, what knowledge they encode, and how we determine what is linguistically correct.

Transitioning from Established Critique to Algorithmic Recolonisation as a Theoretical Intervention

Recent work combines ideas that were previously treated separately. In today's world, native-speakerism is widely perceived as a structural ideology in English Language Teaching (ELT). It is based on colonial hierarchies that established the standards of Western language and knowledge (Holliday, 2006; Mignolo & Escobar, 2010; Phillipson, 1996). Despite constant criticism, this ideology still affects the functioning of institutions, recognition of professionals, and the development of teaching methods today (Kiczkowiak & Lowe, 2024; Truong & Nguyen, 2024).

Studies on AI in second language writing have shown that AI tools perpetuate these hierarchies by using training data, evaluation standards, and outputs that privilege standard Western English over local languages and cultures (Feng et al., 2025; Albeihi & Rice, 2025; Luo et al., 2025; Zheng & Stewart, 2024). Decolonial AI research demonstrates that such trends are not coincidental but are embedded in the very fabric of AI systems as they continue to reproduce the hegemony of knowledge from the Global North (Lakshmi S, 2025; Langmia & Sani, 2023; Nyaaba et al., 2024).

However, despite these converging conclusions, the literature has not developed a coherent framework that explicitly theorises the structural continuity between native-speakerism and algorithmic authority. Recent studies help clarify some aspects of this

relationship, such as recolonisationrecolonisation, language imperialism, or algorithmic normalisationnormalisation, but they are not conceptually coherent. What the field still lacks is an analytical vocabulary for treating AI not merely as a biased tool, but as a continuation of the colonial logic that has long determined what language counts as legitimate. This gap has real-world effects. Failing to have a lens to identify and analyze this phenomenon can undermine the decolonization of ELT by uncritically deploying AI systems that reproduce, at mass scale and with greater opacity, the very hierarchies that these initiatives seek to dismantle.

In this paper, we advance the concept of algorithmic recolonization, conceptualized as the recurrence and reinforcement of colonial linguistic inequalities under the guise of technological neutrality in AI-based EFL tools. This concept extends and builds on previous research. It draws on Robert Phillipson (1992) and Adrian Holliday (2006) to show that native-speakerism is a system that perpetuates inequality while appearing to be neutral; Walter Mignolo (2010) and Mohamed et al. (2020) to explain epistemic coloniality as the process through which Western knowledge becomes universal; Nyaaba et al. (2024) and Langmia and Sani (2023) to provide context for AI within ongoing global power imbalances; and Zheng and Stewart (2024), Albeihi and Rice (2025) and Bozkurt (2025).

It is important to distinguish algorithmic recolonisation from algorithmic bias. Bias is a correctable disparity within a mostly fair system, whereas recolonisation is a feature of the system. The problem is not only that AI systems rely on inaccurate data, but also that they are part of an epistemic hierarchy that determines what counts as "standard" English. Technical improvements, such as expanding databases, refining assessment measures, or incorporating World Englishes, are important but not sufficient. A genuinely decolonial approach requires us to challenge the authority of AI: we need to ask why we treat the algorithmic judgements of language correctness as objective, and we need to question the conditions that enable these systems to act as gatekeepers of legitimacy in EFL education.

This theory repositions AI in L2 writing, not as a neutral educational tool but as a novel system that automates, stabilizes, and masks colonial linguistic hierarchy. However, this requires not only technical adjustments but also changes in our political attitudes and actions.

Methods

Research Design

This research is based on a conceptual research design grounded in a decolonial and critical posthumanist paradigm. It does not produce empirical data. Rather, it generates knowledge by systematically constructing, juxtaposing, and integrating theoretical concepts and scholarly arguments (Jaakkola, 2020; Varpio et al., 2020). Conceptual analysis is especially appropriate for the study of under-theorised phenomena in which empirical observations lack sufficient analytical vocabulary. In this paper, the concept of algorithmic recolonisation is used to theorise the structural reproduction of colonial linguistic hierarchies in AI-mediated EFL contexts. This research does not aim at empirical validation but at providing a conceptual basis for future empirical research. A systematic review was considered and set aside as the primary method because systematic review protocols are designed to synthesise the state of empirical evidence on a defined question. In contrast, the present problem is definitional and theoretical: no settled construct of "algorithmic authority" yet exists for a review to test claims against. Conceptual analysis, by contrast, is the appropriate tool for building such a construct in the first instance, after which its empirical claims can be tested systematically, a task this paper leaves to future research.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis draws on two complementary traditions. First, decolonial theory (Canagarajah, 2024; Holliday, 2006; W. D. Mignolo, 2021; Phillipson, 1996) allows us to conceptualise native-speakerism as a structural ideology that sustains epistemic hierarchies in ELT. Second, critical posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013) provides us with the tools to examine how such hierarchies are inscribed in sociotechnical systems, including AI. Together, these frameworks enable the study to understand algorithmic authority not as a neutral technological function but as a continuation of traditional power structures rooted in digital form.

Critical posthumanism is not only a background lens here; it does specific analytical work in what follows. Following Braidotti (2013), the analysis treats linguistic authority as an effect of assemblages that distribute agency among human and non-human actors, rather than as a property possessed in isolation by a single teacher or algorithm. This move matters in two ways. First, it lets the paper describe algorithmic authority without either overstating AI's agency, as if the model were an autonomous coloniser, or understating it, as if the model were a neutral conduit for pre-existing human bias: the authority in question is distributed across training corpora, model architecture, institutional adoption decisions, and the teacher or student who defers to the tool's output. Second, it licenses the paper's central comparison of a human institution, native-speakerism, with a sociotechnical one, algorithmic authority, on the same analytical footing, since posthumanism's decentring of the human subject is precisely what makes

a person and a system comparable as two historically situated arrangements of authority, rather than as unlike categories. The four mechanisms introduced below, along with the discussion that follows, apply this assemblage view directly rather than leave it at the level of citation.

Sources of Data

In conceptual research, the data are scholarly literature. The analytical corpus of this paper was built from three domains: (1) decolonial and critical scholarship on native-speakerism in ELT, (2) research on AI in L2 writing and language education, and (3) decolonial AI studies that analyse the ideological construction of algorithmic systems. Sources were selected for their relevance to the research questions, academic credibility, and recency (largely from 2020 onwards), with seminal works included to inform the theoretical framework. To minimise selection bias, the corpus includes studies that offer critical or alternative perspectives on AI in language education.

Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

Because this is a conceptual rather than an empirical or systematic review study, the corpus was not assembled through a single database protocol; nonetheless, its construction followed an auditable and replicable search strategy. Records were retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science using combinations of the keywords native-speakerism, algorithmic authority, decolonial AI, linguistic imperialism, AI in second language writing, and algorithmic recolonisation, cross-referenced with generative AI and EFL/ELT. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and major institutional reports published in English from 2020 onward, with earlier foundational texts (Phillipson, 1992, 1996; Holliday, 2006) retained for their continued theoretical centrality to the field. Sources were included if they addressed at least one of the three domains outlined above and offered a theoretical or critical, rather than purely descriptive or promotional, treatment of their subject. Sources were excluded if they were not peer-reviewed, addressed AI in education without reference to language or linguistic authority, or discussed native-speakerism without any bearing on technology or assessment. Titles and abstracts were screened first for topical relevance, followed by a full-text review of the remaining records for theoretical fit. Exact screening counts were not logged at each stage, consistent with the conceptual rather than systematic-review nature of the study; approximately 51 candidate records were identified across the three domains, of which 23 met the inclusion criteria and constitute the final analytical corpus listed in the Bibliography.

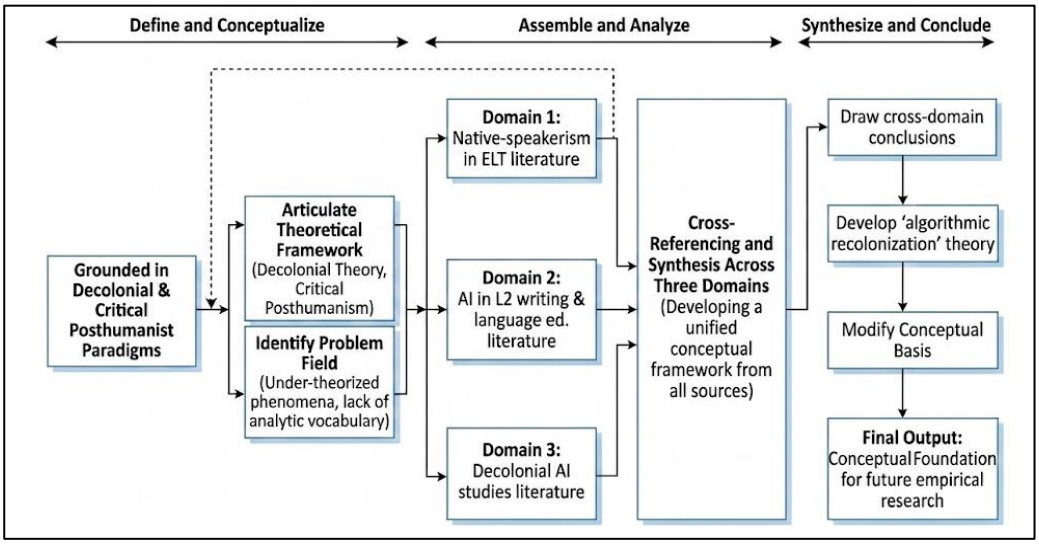

Figure 1. Methodological workflow for decolonial concept formation.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection involved the purposeful, theory-driven selection of literature, which was progressively read and cross-referenced across the three domains. Sources were chosen based on theoretical significance, methodological rigour, and their connection to controversies around language ideology or AI-facilitated learning. This ensured a homogeneous interdisciplinary data set consistent with the study's analytical phase objectives.

Data Analysis

In this conceptual study, data analysis primarily involved synthesising the findings of the literature review through a systematic conceptual analysis and reconstructing the relationships among concepts to develop a new analytical framework. The analysis was carried out in three phases, in line with the three research questions. Native-speakerism and algorithmic authority were analysed comparatively as ideological systems along four analytical dimensions: invisibility, idealisation, marginalisation and institutional legitimation. This stage explored the structural parallels between the human-centred and the algorithmic versions of linguistic authority.

Second, the study examined the shift in linguistic authority from biologically native speakers to computational systems in EFL writing contexts. This shift is not considered a neutral technological replacement but a furthering and escalation of colonial logic, especially in its re-encoding in training data, evaluation metrics, and generated outputs.

Third, the insights from the previous stages were synthesised to formulate the concept of algorithmic recolonisation. This is not so much a repackaging of existing concepts as a reorganisation that brings linguistic ideology and algorithmic governance together within a single analytical framework. It is defined, distinguished from related concepts (e.g., algorithmic bias, linguistic imperialism, digital colonialism), and situated as analytically and pedagogically relevant. Analytical rigour was achieved through iterative source comparison, use of a consistent set of analytical lenses, and explicit linking of conceptual claims to the literature. The framework serves as a foundation for critically assessing AI-assisted writing practices and guiding decolonial pedagogical interventions in EFL contexts.

Table 1. Mapping of the analytical corpus (N = 23) to the four mechanism of algorithmic recolonisation.

Source	Mechanism(s)	Basis in the text
Albeihi & Rice (2025)	Idealisation; Marginalisation	LLMs favour standardised American/British English over other varieties
Bozkurt (2025)	Institutional legitimation	"algorithmic panopticon" and "modal collapse" in institutional AI adoption
Budiarti & Saehu (2023)	Invisibility	motivates uncritical AI adoption for EFL error correction
Canagarajah (2012)	Cross-cutting (RQ2–RQ3)	translingual practice as decolonial counter-pedagogy
Canagarajah (2023)	Cross-cutting (RQ2–RQ3)	decolonisation as pedagogy; theoretical extension
Canagarajah (2024)	Cross-cutting (RQ2–RQ3)	decolonising academic writing pedagogies
Crano (2025)	Invisibility	algorithmic judgment insulated from direct challenge
Fedorova & Kaur (2022)	Marginalisation	native-speakerism persists under neutral institutional labels
Feng et al. (2025)	Idealisation	systematic review: AI training privileges Western English
Graddol (2006)	Institutional legitimation	Authority migrates despite the demographic decline of native speakers
Holliday (2006)	Invisibility	native-speakerism as an unexamined, naturalised assumption
Kiczkowiak & Lowe (2024)	Institutional legitimation	native-speaker advantage in conference plenary invitations
Lakshmi (2025)	Idealisation	"rebranding of empire" – non-Western content reframed in Western modes
Langmia & Sani (2023)	Marginalisation	AI as epistemic control marginalising non-Western epistemologies
Lim et al. (2023)	Institutional legitimation	institutional framing of AI as transformational or destructive

Luo et al. (2025)	Idealisation	systematic review: AI outputs privilege standard Western English
Madany-Saá (2025)	Cross-cutting (RQ3)	Southernizing ELT: theoretical extension
Mohamed et al. (2020)	Institutional legitimation	coloniality of power inscribed in AI infrastructure
Nyaaba et al. (2024)	Institutional Legitimation	"AI gap" reproduces colonial center–periphery structure
Phillipson (1996)	Idealisation	native speaker as the composite norm, all others are measured against
Tlili et al. (2023)	Institutional legitimation	dual framing of AI adoption across institutional contexts
Truong & Nguyen (2024)	Invisibility	Teachers internalise transplanted norms as self-evidently correct
Zheng & Stewart (2024)	Idealisation	AI writing: grammatically complex, culturally shallow, Inner-Circle-aligned

Discussion

Comparative conceptual analysis yields three interrelated findings, each corresponding to one of the three research questions guiding this paper. Together, they support algorithmic recolonisation as a coherent and necessary theoretical construct for decolonial ELT scholarship in the AI era.

Structural Homology: Four Ways Linguistic Gatekeeping is Common (RQ1)

To summarise, the analysis shows that native speaker authority and algorithmic authority are structurally similar, arising from the same colonial logic of power. This similarity occurs through four mechanisms. Both operate by invisibility in the first place. In English Language Teaching systems, native-speakerism is so embedded as an unexamined assumption that it is rarely questioned (Holliday, 2006). This concealment is repeated in algorithmic authority through the discourse of technological neutrality. When an AI tool evaluates a learner's writing, it provides a normative assessment that is presented as objective truth but, in fact, masks the ideological bias of its training data. Here, Foucault's (1977) concept of normalisation is important. Both types of power produce norms that are represented as natural and universal, concealing their constructed, contingent and politically contentious character.

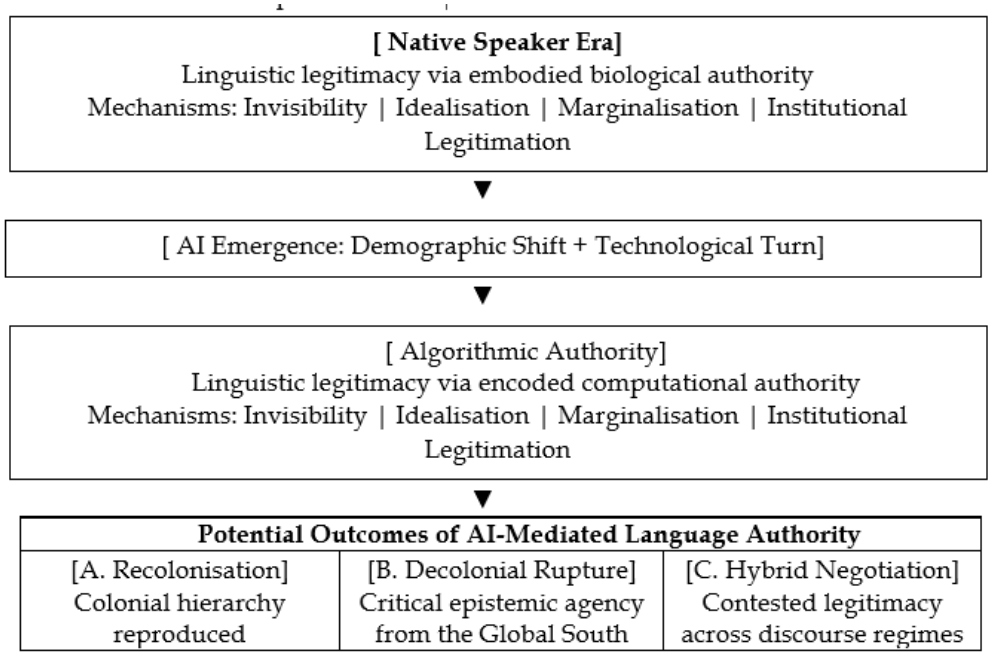

Figure 2. A Framework of Linguistic Authority and Algorithmic Legitimacy.

Second, both require an impossible idealisation. Native speakers constitute a composite norm to which all non-native speakers are found wanting (Phillipson, 1996). Many artificial intelligence systems, trained predominantly on Western English corpora, appear to construct a linguistic ideal that few real writers fully embody. Zheng and Stewart (2024) reported that AI-generated EFL writing exhibits grammatical complexity but lacks cultural depth, following a shallow native-speaker standard while minimising students' authentic voices.

Third, they both marginalise peripheral varieties: native-speakerism classifies World Englishes and locally inflected usage as aberrant (Fedorova & Kaur, 2022). Artificial intelligence systems continue this marginalisation by drawing on training data that is heavily weighted towards Inner Circle varieties, privileging Western norms and excluding or exoticising non-Western cultural references.

Fourth, they authenticate both. According to Bozkurt (2025), the integration of AI tools in universities, assessment systems and language schools shifts the algorithmic standard into a pragmatic educational policy, creating a new panopticon of algorithmic surveillance that inhibits student expression and homogenises intellectuals. Read through a posthumanist lens, this is not simply an institution choosing to trust a tool; agency for determining linguistic correctness is redistributed across an assemblage of

vendors, training corpora, procurement offices, and classroom practice, none of which alone decides the standard, which is precisely what makes the resulting authority so difficult to locate and contest.

This homology of four mechanisms points to the importance of structural similarities between native-speakerism and algorithmic authority: as Mignolo and Escobar (2010) argue, the colonial difference in the epistemic hierarchy that defines Western knowledge as a universal standard is now mediated through both biological and computational pathways.

Each of the four mechanisms is specified here precisely enough to function as an operational test, not only a general critique, so that a given AI tool can be assessed rather than assumed to qualify. Invisibility is present when a tool's normative judgments are delivered without disclosed criteria, such that a user cannot see which standard is being applied; a tool that documents its grading rubric or flags its own uncertainty is not operating through invisibility even if its output still favours one variety. Idealisation is present when a single variety functions as the implicit target against which all output is corrected, rather than one option among several; a tool that offers a given standard as one selectable target among equally supported World Englishes options is not idealising in this sense. Marginalisation is present when non-standard varieties are flagged as errors rather than represented as legitimate alternatives; a tool that distinguishes dialectal variation from grammatical error is not marginalising. Institutional legitimation is present when a tool's adoption forecloses debate about whose standard should govern assessment, typically because it is adopted as a default rather than negotiated; a tool adopted through a process that included teachers, students, and explicit debate over its normative defaults would not satisfy this criterion even if its output still leans toward Inner Circle norms. Together, these four tests allow the framework to be applied to a specific AI tool rather than functioning only as a general critique.

A likely objection is that this homology is more metaphorical than causal: native-speakerism was sustained by embodied social relations, whereas algorithmic authority is sustained by statistical pattern-matching, and conflating the two risks overstating the parallel. The distinction is real but does not defeat the argument. What makes the four mechanisms analytically comparable is not that native speakers and algorithms operate through the same physical process, but that both stabilise the same colonial difference, treating one linguistic norm as unmarked and universal while marking all others as deviant. The practical implication is that assessment rubrics, teacher-training curricula, and AI procurement policies that treat bias as a fixable technical defect will miss this deeper structural continuity. It will continue to reproduce it under a more sophisticated appearance of neutrality.

Continuation, Not Rupture: The Transfer of Linguistic Authority (RQ2)

The second finding concerns how the inclusion of AI in EFL writing reproduces or challenges colonial hierarchies. The analysis shows it largely reproduces them, and this reproduction is structural and not fixable with better tool design. The authority of the native speaker was exercised through embodied presence, as teacher, examiner, or textbook author, and this authority was at least potentially contestable through identity politics and hiring equity. The algorithm is authoritative because it is inscribed, an invisible system shielded from ideological interrogation by the discourse of objectivity that surrounds it. Crano (2025) argues that this insulation is structurally more dangerous than human bias: the authority of a native speaker teacher can be challenged in a staffroom, but an algorithm's judgment arrives as an apparently neutral output, insulated from that same kind of direct challenge. This transfer does not dilute the colonial logic; it intensifies it.

The irony here is particularly sharp when read alongside Graddol (2006). His British Council report had projected that the demographic conditions for the native speaker's decline were already in place: non-native users outnumbered native speakers by a growing margin, and English was rapidly becoming a basic global competency rather than a marker of Inner Circle prestige. On this trajectory, native-speakerism should have become untenable. What the present analysis finds instead is that the authority did not dissolve with the demographic majority; it migrated. The algorithm is the native speaker's structural successor: trained predominantly on Inner Circle corpora, invisible in its normative operations, and insulated from challenge by the discourse of objectivity. Graddol (2006) identified the problem of who owns English; what algorithmic recolonisation reveals is that the question of ownership has moved from biological persons to computational systems, while the answer has remained the same.

This is supported at the political economy level by Nyaaba et al. (2024), who show how artificial intelligence systems sustain extractive paradigms dating from the colonial period, with the concentration of infrastructure, data curation, and epistemic decision-making that shape language models in the Global North, and consigning populations in the Global South to a position of mere consumers of standards they had no hand in designing. The use of these systems in EFL classrooms in the Global South leads to the digital re-coding of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1996), described by Langmia & Sani (2023) as the imposition of Western epistemology as a universal truth by algorithmic architecture.

This is not to deny the real affordances of AI. According to Tlili et al. (2023), AI has a double-edged potential, and Lim et al. (2023) called this the paradox of Ragnarök

or reformation, in that the same technology can either liberate or oppress depending on its use. The analysis concludes that, without a clear decolonial framing, the default approach to incorporating AI in EFL continues to reproduce colonial hierarchies—the simplest path, directly through colonial inequality.

This reading does not deny that AI can be deployed in other ways. Technically, corpora that are aware of World Englishes, locally refined models, and evaluation rubrics that recognise translingual creativity are all possible and, when implemented, show that the default is not fixed. The problem is that the default must be actively intervened in and resourced to change it. If we leave it to market incentives and existing training systems, AI-mediated EFL systems will continue to reproduce Inner Circle norms as the normative standard, as this is the path of least institutional and technical resistance. The distinction between recolonisation and correctable bias has pedagogical implications. To view the problem as bias is to see a technical fix that maintains the hierarchy of legitimacy already in place, but to view the problem as recolonisation is to see the more difficult but necessary work of questioning who gets to define correctness in the first place.

Algorithmic Recolonisation: Theorising the Concept and its Contribution (RQ3)

The paper's main theoretical contribution is the synthesis of the above findings. Algorithmic recolonisation is a process through which AI-enabled EFL tools reproduce colonial linguistic and epistemic hierarchies under the guise of technological neutrality. It extends the logic of colonial authority from its embodied form, the idealised native speaker, to its encoded form, the algorithmically determined standard of correct English. Three distinctions mark the concept's novelty and precision, described below.

First, algorithmic recolonisation is not algorithmic bias. Bias is a technical problem that can be fixed with more diverse training data or better-calibrated models. Instead, it is an ideological problem: it is not about skewed outputs, but about the colonial epistemological hierarchy that determines what counts as the standard from which bias is measured in the first place. This problem is not solved by increasing the diversity of the training data if the standard of correctness to which that diversity is calibrated remains a Western English standard.

Second, it extends but modifies linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1996). The agents are no longer exclusively governments and aid agencies, but also technology corporations and automated systems whose authority is more difficult to contest precisely because it is harder to see. Third, it specifies digital colonialism (Mohamed et al., 2020) for the field of language education. Where digital colonialism names the broader pattern of data extraction, infrastructural dependency, and epistemic control that

the Global North exercises over the Global South through digital systems in general, the concept narrows that pattern to a specific mechanism: the reproduction of linguistic legitimacy through the encoded standard of 'correct' English. It is, in effect, digital colonialism's operation within the specific domain of language education, named precisely enough to generate testable claims about EFL assessment and pedagogy rather than remaining at the level of a general critique of technological dependency.

The conceptual innovation is that it provides a cohesive decolonial framework, which is currently absent from the field. Prior work on the phenomenon has explored it in parts: empirically (Zheng & Stewart, 2024), structurally (Nyaaba et al., 2024), and pedagogically (Bozkurt, 2025), but no study has theorised the structural continuity between native-speakerism and algorithmic authority through one analytical lens.

It is worth being explicit that the word recolonisation is not new to this literature: Zheng and Stewart (2024) themselves use it to describe one empirical case, AI-generated continuation-writing samples in a Chinese EFL assessment context, where culturally hollow but grammatically complex output risked what they call an unintended recolonisation of the classroom. The present paper's contribution is not the term itself but its generalisation: where Zheng and Stewart identify recolonisation as a possible outcome of one writing task, this paper theorises it as a structural process operating through four identifiable mechanisms, invisibility, idealisation, marginalisation, and institutional legitimation, across assessment, feedback, and pedagogy broadly, and asks not only whether a given AI output looks recolonising but why the underlying system tends to produce that outcome by default. Algorithmic recolonisation, in other words, names the structural tendency of which Zheng and Stewart's finding is one documented instance.

There are two further objections which must be answered face to face. The first concern is one of parsimony: if terms like linguistic imperialism, native-speakerism, digital colonialism and algorithmic bias already exist in the field, is there a need for yet another term? In fact, none of the four elements that currently exist, either individually or collectively, define the process by which authority shifts from a biological arbiter to a computational one while maintaining the same colonial disparity; each identifies a facet of the phenomenon, and algorithmic recolonisation is the term that brings them together. The second objection is that the concept may be unfalsifiable, labelling any AI outcome as recolonisation regardless of the evidence. The risk is real, which is why the framework articulates four observable mechanisms – invisibility, idealisation, marginalisation and institutional legitimation – rather than relying solely on the label. Within this framework, a tool that openly recognises non-standard varieties, justifies its normative choices, and is implemented through negotiated, not imposed, institutional

policy would not be considered recolonising. The distinction provides empirical rather than rhetorical content to the notion.

Algorithmic recolonisation connects decolonial ELT theory and critical AI studies to generate a concept that is analytically rigorous and pedagogically actionable. It gives educators, curriculum designers and policymakers a real and critical question to ask of any attempt to integrate AI: not "Is this tool effective?" but "Does this tool reproduce the colonial epistemological hierarchy that has pervaded ELT for decades?" This reorientation of the evaluative question itself is a theoretical contribution that extends the decolonial project of Canagarajah (2023) and Madany-Saá (2025) to the domain of AI-mediated language education.

These distinctions create different obligations depending on the reader's position. Educators should see feedback from an AI tool as one of many inputs rather than an absolute judgment, specify to students when a "correction" reflects a dialectal preference rather than a grammatical mistake, and include translingual or locally nuanced expressions as opportunities in assessments that the tool may incorrectly identify as errors. Curriculum designers might require that any AI-enabled writing or assessment tool adopted at the program level be audited for the default variety of English it uses and paired with explicit instruction in critical AI literacy, so that students are taught to interrogate, rather than comply with, algorithmic feedback. Policymakers and institutional procurement offices can convert vendor-neutrality claims into a verifiable mandate by requiring AI providers to disclose the regional and varietal composition of their training corpus, instead of accepting the vague claim of being 'trained on data from many countries' as sufficient evidence against bias. They can also finance or require assessment models that recognise World Englishes rather than resorting to penalisation.

Algorithmic recolonisation is much more than the addition of a new term to an already crowded lexicon of critique, as framed by the three contributions discussed in the Introduction. The idea of algorithmic authority as structurally continuous with, but importantly distinct from, native-speaker authority enables investigators to distinguish between superficial bias and the deep-seated perpetuation of colonial epistemic hierarchy. It offers practitioners a simple diagnostic question to ask any AI tool before using it: whose standard of accuracy does this tool reflect, and why? It is important to recognise the limitations of the concept: it is more of an analytical tool than a causally proven claim at the moment, and its explanatory power needs to be assessed in relation to the concrete ways teachers, students and institutions interact with AI tools in specific classroom contexts, which is dealt with in the Conclusion below.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that the introduction of AI-powered tools in EFL classrooms does not represent a decolonisation of linguistic authority but its digital continuation. Through a comparative conceptual analysis within a decolonial and critical posthumanist framework, this paper has shown that native-speakerism and algorithmic authority share four structural mechanisms of colonial power: invisibility, idealisation, marginalisation, and institutional legitimation. The transfer of authority from the biological native speaker to the computational algorithm is a structural intensification of colonial logic, not a rupture with it. This process is here termed algorithmic recolonisation and is provided with the unified theoretical framework that the field currently lacks to evaluate AI integration through a decolonial lens.

This paper is conceptual in nature and does not provide empirical evidence. The analytical framework developed here is grounded in theoretical synthesis and interpretive argument rather than in ethnographic, discourse-analytic, or experimental data. As such, it cannot account for the situated ways in which teachers, learners, and institutional actors actually negotiate, resist, or reproduce algorithmic authority in specific educational contexts. The extent to which algorithmic recolonisation functions as a consistent ideological mechanism across national, institutional, and linguistic settings remains an open empirical question. Future research may productively investigate how discourses of authority and legitimacy are enacted and contested in AI-mediated language practices, how different learner communities relate to algorithmically adjudicated norms, and whether decolonial frameworks can be operationalised in concrete assessment and curriculum design contexts.

We provide three recommendations below. First, decolonial AI literacy needs to be integrated into EFL teacher education, not as an optional critical add-on, but as a key competence that enables teachers to assess AI tools as ideological artefacts rather than neutral instruments.

Second, assessment frameworks in EFL writing need to be reconfigured to explicitly value local linguistic and cultural knowledge in addition to grammatical accuracy, and to resist the institutional legitimation of algorithmic standards as the sole measure of writing quality.

Third, scholars, teachers and learners in the Global South must be positioned as co-producers, not simply as subjects, of the research and policy frameworks governing the integration of AI in their educational contexts. These recommendations enact the decolonial praxis advocated by Canagarajah (2023) and shown by Truong and Nguyen (2024) to be feasible even in structurally constrained settings.

This paper is conceptual, and its claims require empirical validation through classroom-based research across diverse Global South EFL contexts. That empirical agenda is the next logical step. What this paper provides is the theoretical vocabulary to pursue it critically, a vocabulary built on the recognition that the decolonised classroom and the algorithmically governed classroom may look identical from the outside. The difference lies in whether the educators inside it can ask whose standard the algorithm is enforcing. Those gates have not been dismantled. They have been digitised instead.

Disclosure statement

The authors of the article declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement

Not applicable

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