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Neuroqueering for hospitable futures in language education
Lou Harvey

This chapter presents an argument and a framework for challenging neuronormative conceptions of communicating and understanding in language education. It starts from the premise that a broader view of communication, which engages with the *unsayable* and the *non-understandable* as productive aspects of learning and being in the world, are necessary for moving towards more epistemically and existentially just futures in language education. It offers *neuroqueering* as a paradigm for bringing such possibilities into being.

Two language learning vignettes

I would like to open with vignettes from the lives of two English-language learners: Yichen and Joanne (from Harvey 2014).

> In China, Yichen was a happy and successful English learner. When he moved to the UK for his PhD, he was able to use English to meet his daily needs and in his academic life. However, when he went to the pub with friends he was shocked by his inability to understand their conversation. He responded by leaving those situations and not attending any more social events. He felt unable to fully 'live' in English and depressed by the effort he felt it would take him to engage, especially as he did not consider himself to be an especially sociable or talkative person.

> In Romania, Joanne was a very successful English-language learner and was excited and confident about moving to the UK for her undergraduate degree. However, she found life very difficult socially and struggled to speak in English in case she said something wrong and 'sounded stupid'. She had a painful awareness that if she did not speak, she would come across as 'shy' and 'dumb', unable to portray herself as the clever, well-informed person she perceived herself to be.

Many readers will recognise and empathise with Yichen's and Joanne's experiences and anxieties. What I want to draw particular attention to is a) Yichen's reaction to not understanding; b) Joanne's fear of not being seen as the clever person she understood herself to be, and c) how utterly unprepared they both were for these reactions, despite years of formal and informal English learning. From having been successful English-language learners and speakers, they now felt voiceless, and an experience they had expected to be enjoyable and successful, became traumatic. I posit that this destabilisation, and their lack of preparation for it, stem from the implicit *neuronormativity* in which language education—as practised in contexts in, and which orient towards, the global north and west—is grounded. By neuronormativity, I mean a set of cultural assumptions and social expectations which treat a particular style of neurocognitive functioning as the standard or ideal, often implicitly framed as the 'normal' way to think, feel, behave, and be (Walker 2021). Neuronormativity is socially constructed, not biologically inherent; enforced through institutions, which privilege certain cognitive styles while pathologising others; and intertwined with other systems of oppression, including white supremacy, capitalism, and colonialism (Walker 2021; see also Chapman 2023). Neuronormativity leads to the exclusion of neurodivergent individuals—those with non-normative cognitive, emotional, and sensory processing, which might be inherent (e.g. autism, dyslexia), acquired (e.g. through trauma, dementia, meditative practices, drug use), or culturally determined, where behaviour, speech, or cognitive processes relating to affiliation with a cultural group may be seen as divergence from the neurological norm (Bartlett and Irish 2025)—and upholds a narrow definition of *being human* which aligns with dominant cultural norms of communication, specifically the communicative ideologies of *sayability* and *understanding* (Harvey forthcoming). In what follows I will present a history of how these ideologies came to prevail. Taking as an ontological premise Bakhtin's claim that 'to be is to communicate' (Bakhtin 1984: 287), I will unpack how communication became conflated with what is *sayable*—that which is permissible and possible to consciously express and verbalise (The May Group 2025: 45)—and what is *understandable* in the global north and west; how language education as a field has started to address this problem; and how a *neuroqueering* orientation to self in language education offers potential for a wider range of voices to be expressed, heard, included, and brought into being. My hope is that the cultivation of a neuroqueering orientation

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may better prepare learners like Yichen and Joanne to both accept non-understanding as a normal and necessary dimension of the encounter with the linguistic Other, and to respond to that encounter with radical hospitality towards themselves, in the service of their own voices and wellbeing.

Privileging the *sayable*: Language as a system of signification

> Language has long been tied to judgments of a person's capacity and intelligence, and by extension their humanity. (Henner and Robinson 2023: 9)

In the modern global north and west, the human voice, in order to be understandable, must be understood to carry logos, or language as a system of signification (Cavarero 2005). This is what Aristotle called *phone semantike*, signifying voice (Aristotle 2013), which separates humans from animals – its role is to make the signified audible, and the audible understandable, rather than a mere sign (of, for example, pain, fear, pleasure). In this view, the acoustic aspect of speech, or *phone*, is always already bound to signification, or *semantike*. This conflation of *voice* with signification came about from the ancient Greek hierarchy of the senses, in which sight was considered to be the sense closest to language and thought, and was therefore epistemically privileged over the other senses (Lipari 2012): what could not be seen was considered secondary, and associated with lack or loss. Things could be known when they could be seen: seeing was linked to presence, implying something 'there', linked in turn to truth and certainty, and what could not be seen, was secondary. In this way, knowing became linked to representations of objects, properties and actions in the material world which could be seen as present in the mind, and on which human beings inscribe meanings (Marshall and Alberti 2013). In this logic, these meanings are represented by language, a signifier of some truth beyond itself which all participants in communication can see, and where the perceiving, 'languaging' subject (the *self*) is separate from the perceived, 'languaged' object (the *other*) (MacLure 2013). In this way, this logic simplifies difference as a binary relation and holds such binaries—seeing/seen, self/other, human/nonhuman—in place. The static, abstract, and hierarchical nature of representational logic therefore risks categorising, reducing and objectifying the other, and at worst, does not allow the other to exist at all (Levinas 1969/2007; MacDonald and O'Regan 2013). This 'colonising logic' (Barad 2014) materialised with appalling clarity in the Early Modern period, which saw

extensive genocides and epistemicides as colonising logic met emerging capitalist logic and technologies of exploration (Grosfoguel 2015). These genocides/epistemicides provided the 'socio-historical structural condition' for the epistemic privilege which found its apotheosis in Descartes and his pronouncement *cogito ergo sum*—I think, therefore I am—in 1637 (Grosfoguel 2015: 28; see The May Group 2025 for an expansion of this argument).

Descartes' ontological dualism, the premise that the mind and body are fundamentally different, separate substances, posited the human mind as the source of objective, universal knowledge, holding a God's-eye view without the encumbrances of the body. The vehicle for the articulation and production of this knowledge is the voice of the mind, able to think oneself at the centre of the world because the world has already been conquered and the knowledge of others destroyed (Grosfoguel 2015). This laid the foundation for the Enlightenment, in which the issue of understanding—so fundamental to Yichen and Joanne's destabilisation—was fundamental.

The Enlightenment: The centrality of *understanding*

The European Enlightenment (1688-1815) marked a pivotal shift towards humanism, emphasising the uniqueness of human agency, autonomy of thought, self-determination and control over one's actions and desires, and the perceived superiority of human cognition and communication over other living beings (Grayling 2013). A key tenet of the movement was the relationship between language, speech, reason, and the advancement of civilisation (Finnegan 2015). A quote from Thomas Astle, an 18th-century antiquary and paleographer, encapsulates this:

> The noblest acquisition of mankind is SPEECH, and the most useful art is WRITING. The first, eminently, distinguishes MAN from the brute creation; the second, from uncivilised savages. … Without speech we should scarcely have been rational beings. (1784, cited in Finnegan 2015: 16)

This egregious example of colonising logic illustrates signifying voice—*phone semantike*—as a boundary marker not only between humans and animals, but also among humans themselves. In this logic, *logos*, as language and reason, enables speaking humans to articulate the contents of their minds with agency and intention (MacLure 2013). This is with a view to being *understood*, as Enlightenment philosopher John Locke pointed out:

> The chief End of Language in Communication being to be understood, Words
> serve not well for that end … when any Word does not excite in the Hearer, the
> same Idea for which it stands in the Mind of the Speaker. (Locke 1690/1975,
> cited in Eco 1995: 21)

This idea is perhaps given its most famous articulation in Ferdinand de Saussure's notion of telementation (1922/1983). Derived from Ancient Greek *tele*, 'far away', and Latin *mens*, 'mind', telementation describes communication as the act of transmitting mental concepts from one person to another via language, and specifically through speech. Saussure's theory, visualised in the image of the 'Talking Heads', exemplifies Western communicative ideology: that understanding is normative, desired, and central to successful interaction, while misunderstanding signals communicative failure (Bailey 2004).

<mark>*Talking Heads image*</mark>

This idealised communicative model, often depicted as an exchange between two white, male-presenting individuals (by the standards of the time), reflects an Enlightenment ideal of humanity that was never truly universal (Pennycook 2018). This is evident in myriad communicatively and epistemically exclusionary practices, such as the marginalisation of neurodivergent and non-speaking people, who are frequently mischaracterised as cognitively impaired and treated as lacking full personhood (Sequenzia and Grace 2017; Yergeau 2018); those whose speech challenges linear assumptions of biological and biographical coherence (Wolf-Meyer 2020; Yergeau 2018); those who speak non-dominant languages, or who speak in the 'wrong' accent (Piller 2016); those whose speech communicates queerness (Fasoli et al. 2021); and children, to whom Plato denied logos, and whom Enlightenment thinking treated as evolving towards rationality and maturity (Mill 1859; see also Wright 2020 on adultism). Thus language becomes intertwined with ableism and neuronormativity as well as ageism/adultism, race and gender, with lower epistemic value assigned to those without (the right kind of) oral, verbal speech (Henner and Robinson 2023; Harvey forthcoming).

These inequalities remain embedded in Western communicative practices and beliefs about personhood: ultimately, voice communicates what is *sayable*; what is

sayable is what can be *understood*; and what can be *understood* is what is of concern in a) knowledge-making, and b) human being (The May Group 2025; Harvey forthcoming). This underpins Yichen and Joanne's deep existential and ontological shock: suddenly unable to understand others, or to speak and be understood themselves, they felt they were not the people they had thought themselves to be, and they no longer knew *how* to be, for their prior language education, and indeed their education and experience more broadly, had not equipped them for the lived realities of English in the UK. I therefore turn to a consideration of how language education has responded to these concerns.

The response of language education

      'Put words in their place.' (Perry 2024: 144)

Language (in) education has therefore been based on two assumptions about language and communication: a) that the central purpose of communication is understanding, or mutual comprehension; and b) that in order to communicate well, we need to share a language (Pennycook 2018). Thus we might say there is a general assumption that 'understanding is the result of speaking the same language and misunderstanding the result of speaking different languages' (Pennycook 2018: 91). I suggest that when it comes to work on language (in) education, we are still broadly working within a communicative ideology that to 'understand' is normal, and to 'misunderstand' represents a breakdown or failure of this normality (Bailey 2004). There are branches of work in language (in) education which have started to engage with these concerns and their implications. Critical language education focuses on supporting learners to develop and use their understanding to become conscious of, and challenge, the ways in which power relations and structures play into communication, social relationships, and their lives (e.g. Crookes 2021; Porto 2022); work on multilingualism and translanguaging has highlighted the fluid and dynamic nature of negotiated meaning-making (Blackledge and Creese 2019; Li 2018; Pennycook 2018), mapping new ontological and epistemological territory in examinations of collaboration and transformation through complex communicative practices (Bradley et al. 2018; Moore et al. 2020).

However, these perspectives are still based in the realm of the *sayable*: as Milani points out, the 'limits of the sayable' have not yet received sufficient attention in

educational linguistics, perhaps because to do so would be question 'the very centre on which a whole discipline is built' (Milani 2014: 13). This is because the fields of applied and educational linguistics are based on an *ontic* view of the world. The ontic dimension concerns our everyday existence, empirical facts and observable realities, and our mastery of the factual world through concepts, methods, skills and ideas, which we might then use as means - for example, for sociopolitical, psychological, performative, feminist, and pedagogical purposes (Visse et al. 2019: 4). The ontic dimension is based on propositional knowing (knowing *that*) and procedural knowing (knowing *how*), and—fundamentally—sayability. Yichen and Joanne's language learning had been based in the ontic realm: they mapped their knowledge of their familiar contexts into the new, unfamiliar one, and accordingly transferred across all their expectations.

In contrast, the *ontological* dimension indicates the world's 'poetic, mysterious and unfathomable dimensions' (ibid.: 2), and is about learning and understanding through our real, lived experiences of being human — by paying attention to how we feel and move through space and time, how we experience our bodies, emotions, and materiality (ibid.: 5, following Van Manen 2014). In the ontic dimension we may aim to grasp or pin down the other as part of a desire to *know*. However, if we can let go of this desire and cultivate a 'not-expecting-to-know' attitude (Visse 2019: 103; see also Harvey et al. 2021), in which we are open to otherness as a mystery to be seen rather than a problem to be solved (following Marcel 1950), we can engage with listening and expressing ourselves from the ontological realm of our experience, embracing *apophatic knowing* - 'a negating approach to understanding the unsayable, that is, a way of "nonknowing"' (Visse et al. 2019: 1). Sometimes we do not understand, and are not understood, and this may not be resolved or resolvable. Yichen and Joanne had not translated their communicative skills and experience into an awareness that communication is also part of *being* – that knowing 'how to live in English', as Yichen so pithily put it, is also part of the ontological realm. The experience of *being* in the UK could not, of course, be known until they were there.

I therefore posit that bringing the ontological dimension into language education may better support learners to prepare for and accept the destabilisation of being unable to understand, as well as accommodating neurodivergent and otherwise marginalised learners who already understand that language is not always available to them, and that proficiency alone is not sufficient to iron out all communicative

problems. Actively engaging with learners about the discomfort of not understanding offers new potential for accessible language classrooms. Increasingly, applied and educational linguists are looking beyond the sayable (e.g. Busch and McNamara 2020; Busch 2020; Deumert 2023; Thurlow 2016), as are scholars of intercultural education and communication (Ferri 2018; Frimberger 2016; Harvey et al. 2019, The May Group 2025), and literacies (Perry 2024; Lee et al. 2022). There is also an emerging body of work engaging with linguistics through anti-ableist and neurodiversity-affirming lenses: Canagarajah (2023) and Hedman et al. (2025) call respectively for a decolonial crip linguistics and crip literacy in the service of epistemic reciprocity; Blume and Bündgens-Kosten (2023) consider ways to support the agency of neurodivergent learners; Kangas (2021) argues for systemic critique of the ableism and monolingualism that structurally disadvantages disabled English learners; Caldwell-Harris (2022) presents affordances and challenges for autistic adults engaging in foreign language learning; Klein (2024) addresses autism and bilingual socialisation from a language policy perspective; Haycock et al. (2024) call for the promotion and analysis of gestalt rather than analytical language development as neurodiversity-affirming practice; Cohn et al. (2023) argue for the importance of echolalia as a neurodivergent communication style which is important for identity and wellbeing; and Aiston et al. (2025) cite the importance of researching autistic sociality and communicative preferences in order to support communicative and epistemic inclusion. I now offer *neuroqueering* as a paradigm for engaging with the unsayable and non-understanding as a way for language education to look away from a past whose certainties led to the injustices we now experience, and towards more communicatively and epistemically open, hospitable, and hopeful futures.

Towards a neuroqueer future

> Queerness is essentially about a rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world. (Muñoz 2009: 1)

I propose *neuroqueering* as a paradigm for thinking across, through, and beyond the binary structures which underpin the communicative ideologies of *sayability* and *understanding*. I follow Nick Walker's definition of neuroqueering as both dynamic practice and identity, both verb and adjective. At its core, neuroqueering is the intentional disruption of neuronormativity, and is about consciously and creatively

challenging the norms that dictate how minds should function, how communication should take place, and how identities should be expressed. Neuroqueering is based on:

> *neuro-*, meaning *nerve*, acknowledging 'the way the nervous system weaves together cognition and embodiment' (Walker and Raymaker 2021: 4). Thus when neuroqueering we speak not of the mind, but of the *bodymind*, an integrated somatic entity (following Dychtwald 1986)

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> *queering*, meaning to make strange, to resist normalisation: a process of 'generating a relational disturbance of one or several normativities' (Kagan 2020: 278), of 'joyfully estranging', and opening up generative possibilities for alternate desires and modes of being (Kagan 2017: 39).

Neuroqueering resists attempts to conceptualise a normal, or 'neurotypical' mind, positing that neuronormativity is something that we have learnt to perform according to sociocultural expectations, and is deeply entwined with our learnt performances of gender and heteronormativity. Just as queer people may mask their identities in order to appear heterosexual or cisgender, neurodivergent people often mask their traits in order to perform neurotypicality. Both systems demand compliance and conformity through repeated behaviours such as eye contact, speech patterns, emotional regulation, gender presentation, which signal normativity (see Henner and Robinson 2023). And both systems punish divergence: a boy who flaps his hands (a common autistic self-stimulatory behaviour, or 'stim') may be punished not just for violating neuronormative expectations, but also for appearing 'gay' (Walker 2021).

Neuroqueering is therefore about unlearning the ways in which we all perform neuronormativity, and to become more authentic in our expressions of knowing and being, which are inextricably entangled in our bodyminds. Thus to neuroqueer is to engage in an 'intentional creative queering' (Walker 2021: 173) of our own bodyminds, and anyone can do it. Neuroqueering is fluid, relational, and resistant to fixed definitions. Neuroqueering, in the refusal to perform normativity in any of its forms, is a radical act.

Neuroqueering is creative, hopeful, and radically inclusive (Harvey forthcoming). It is radically inclusive because it can refer to any number of practices, such as expressing neurodivergence in ways that also queer one's gender or cultural identity; actively unlearning internalised norms to reclaim one's unique ways of thinking and being; creating art, literature and scholarship that foregrounds neuroqueer perspectives (Walker 2021). It is radically inclusive because anyone can do it, regardless of identity, (non-)diagnosis, or perceptions of 'high/low functioning' (Friedner and Block 2017) - as Walker (2021: 161) points out, 'you're neuroqueer if you neuroqueer'. It is radically inclusive because it eschews performative inclusion by resisting (what may be well meaning) attempts to know. While neurodivergent and disabled visibility is much needed in educational linguistics, neuroqueering is about more than simply bringing those perspectives to the table in order to create legitimacy through accumulationist logics: logics which exhort us to increase our reservoir of knowledge by, for example, burdening neurodivergent people with the task of educating others about their experience and the structural discrimination they face, or of validating the perspectives of non-neurodivergent-identifying 'experts', thereby potentially reiterating 'ways of knowing and being that reproduce hierarchical forms of knowledge' (Orsini 2022: 2). Neuroqueering is not about such epistemic exploitation (following Orsini 2022: 6).

My own neuroqueering academic practice joins work on queering and cripping language (e.g. Milani 2014; Henner and Robinson 2023; Thurlow 2016) to focus on decentring language and enabling hospitable listening. I therefore offer neuroqueering as a paradigm which rejects the need to (cognitively) *know* and *understand*, to engage with the *unsayable* dimensions of communication, and to undertake the linguistic care work (Henner and Robinson 2023) of 'transforming social and cultural environments in order to create spaces, communities, and societies in which all expressions of voice are permitted, accepted, encouraged, and supported' (Harvey forthcoming, following Walker 2021: 163). I will now outline my own interpretation of neuroqueering as method, an underpinning philosophical principle for listening to the unsayable by thinking across, through, and beyond *sayability* and *understanding*; and as a manifesto of creative conceptual strategies for what all of us engaged in intentional thinking around communication might do to bring our desired futures into being (following Harvey, forthcoming).

Neuroqueering as method

> ...hospitality often holds hands with its brother word *hostility*. Both are birthed from *ghos-ti*, their ancient Indo-European root, which meant host, guest and stranger – the trio of roles through which we shift all our lives. So apt that this inescapable flux was once contained in this single word. (Basil 2019, p. 7)

To articulate how neuroqueering can function as method for listening to the unsayable I take as a starting point Bakhtin's claim that 'to be is to communicate' (Bakhtin 1984: 287). In Bakhtin's perspective, our utterances (whether speech, gesture, thought, or otherwise) always respond to what has already been said and use one's own emotional-volitional tone to orient towards a listener. Thus in our utterances we are constantly negotiating our simultaneous entanglement with, and distinction from, others. In this way both self and other are decentred: we are acknowledged as strangers to ourselves, and to each other (Ahmed 2000; Kristeva 1991). This enables the potential for, and entitlement to, mutual understanding to become destabilised: not only is responsibility for communication and understanding necessarily situated with the listener as well as with the speaker (Hillary 2020; Milton, Gurbuz, and López 2022), but understanding of *understanding* itself must change, to be conceptualised as an event which is creative, contingent, ephemeral, unpredictable, dynamic (Harvey forthcoming), in which each participant 'retains its own unity and open totality' (Bakhtin 1986: 7). To listen to the unsayable, then, I propose that we engage neuroqueering—intentionally, creatively queering—as *an ethical orientation to self*, by actively seeking an embodied onto-epistemology of strangeness: making ourselves strange to ourselves, engaging with strangeness as part of both being and knowing, and recognising that feeling strange to ourselves is part of an entangled experience of the bodymind (Harvey forthcoming). Below I offer four creative conceptual strategies for neuroqueering in this way. To reiterate, neuroqueering is emphatically, radically inclusive; at the same time, all four of these strategies may be usefully considered areas in which neurodivergent communicators could play a leading role in transgressing and subverting epistemic hierarchies and hegemonies (Ennser-Kananen, Riuttanen and Ortega 2024).

Neuroqueering as manifesto

1. Decentring language

It is crucial to recognise that words, even in the same language, are no guarantee of understanding; and that the ability to speak words, especially with our mouths, affords us an epistemic and verbal privilege that our non-speaking and non-verbal siblings are often denied. Centring speaking keeps us imprisoned in neuronormative thinking. However, if we accept that we are all strangers to each other, and reconceptualise understanding as creative, dynamic and contingent, we can start to listen to how others might story themselves in ways beyond and besides language. This does not simply mean the non-verbal, as non-verbal modes may also be based in sayability and the ontic realm. In order to engage more fully with the unsayable, we must also address the problem of meaning and signification.

2. Decentring meaning

The body of neurodiversity-affirming work cited above represents an important move towards decentring meaning, or *semantike*, in communication in educational structures, towards a greater engagement with *phone*—the 'nondiscursive materiality of voicing' (Magnat 2018: 434; see also Cavarero 2005). *Phone* moves *voice* beyond mere sound to communicate the unique, situated embodiedness of communication. *Phone*, as an embodiment of voice, shifts attention away from *what* is being said to *who* is speaking, and places us in inescapable relation with the incommensurable *otherness* of others. Voice therefore becomes an *event*, a corporeal, material bridge between speaker and listener (Harvey et al. 2021; The May Group 2025, following Cavarero 2005), no longer limited to the sayable. Therefore, to decentre meaning in communication is to engage with voice as material, embodied phenomenon, not only not seeking meaning, but embracing the potential for/of meaninglessness (Yergeau 2018). But *how* do we do this? What do we listen *to*?

3. Listening to what matters

In short, we aim to listen to *all the things*. If language and meaning are provincialised, we can conceptualise them as parts of communicative assemblages - as just two elements entangled 'in a manifold of forces that are moving, connecting and diverging' (MacLure 2013: 660). These may be persons (other persons and one's own, perhaps feeling particularly rested after a good night's sleep, being bothered by the buzzing of the striplight, or uncomfortably conscious of having eaten something disagreeable for

lunch), spaces (classrooms, lecture halls), materials (pens, paper, fidget toys, assistive devices), events (the scrape of a chair on the floor, the utterance of a classmate, the teacher writing on a whiteboard), affects, silences, imaginings—and they *matter*: they are agents with material force (following Bennett 2010). In conceiving of communicative assemblages it becomes possible to feel what is *produced* in communication, beyond and besides what might be *meant* (see Harvey et al. 2019). Thus we can configure voice as both individual and collective, distributed across and produced in 'a complex network of human and non-human agents that exceeds the notion of the individual' (Mazzei 2013: 738), which enables us to become more ontologically engaged, extending hospitality to the human and non-human connections which support our communication. In this way we can start to *listen to what matters:* to *both* the materiality of the voice in individual utterances, *and* the collective production of voice in and across assemblages. This exists in a non-binary relation of *both/and*, because provincialising language and meaning does not mean discarding them altogether – they are still part of the assemblage. This brings me to the final strategy.

4. Listening transrationally

We want to listen to all the things, *including* language and meaning. This entails conceptualising both/all of meaning and matter, mind and body, individual and collective, as decentred, entangled, and interdependent. This *transrational* approach to learning and communication (Harvey et al. 2021; The May Group 2025) acknowledges the inseparability of the relationship between being and knowing, as enacted through our bodymind; accepts the inseparability of communicating and understanding from materiality and embodiment; and embraces ways of knowing which acknowledge the entanglements of the rational and non-rational dimensions of experience. This can offer a philosophical foundation for a radical conception of solidarity based precisely on our difference from and strangeness to each other, on the creation of a shared world, and a hopeful future (Harvey, forthcoming).

I now offer four practical, broad-brush strategies for neuroqueering language education practice. With the consciousness that teachers work across myriad contexts and constraints, I hope that (some of) these are strategies that teachers are able to incorporate in everyday ways which feel safe and possible.

1. Pro-actively and positively include non-understanding as a necessary and productive aspect of language education, by

- teaching learners that their test scores do not prepare them for the 'living reality' of language (Harvey 2016), and, where possible, influencing institutional structures and wider educational policy in this direction
- teaching learners to face that fear, and be equipped to accept it as part of an existential reality rather than a personal failing
- teaching learners about your own experiences of not understanding – telling them the stories which made you laugh and/or cry, and how you reflect on those experiences now
- teaching critically around standard language ideologies and grammar rules

2. Focus on *voice* beyond and besides language, by (where possible/practical)

- enabling learners to engage and respond through different means – not only speaking in response to questions/discussion points, but also typing, using asynchronous communication, allowing other students to speak aloud for them, and validating echolalia and scripting
- engaging with different modes of expression as part of learning activities—dance/drama/mime, drawing and filming, sculpture with play-doh and plasticine
- having these modes available to learners beyond and besides specific activities, for example by having play-doh on tables for learners to play with as and when they like, encouraging learners to play with stim toys, and enabling them to move around the room freely

3. Challenge ableist (and, indeed, all received) expectations around communication and learning, by

- accepting that 'attention', 'respect' and 'readiness to learn' might look different for different learners (see Hillary 2020), that some students may not be able to make eye contact, sit still or sit up straight, or stop stimming
- move away from behaviourist approaches based on engendering compliance and conformity (e.g. punishment/rewards systems), instead focusing on building (genuine) autonomy, trust, and curiosity

- expand expectations around ability and time, both in assuming that interaction needs to be quick and efficient, and in longer-term assumptions about learners' communicative development according to certain timelines or critical periods (Henner and Robinson 2023)

4. <u>Make (your own) neuroqueering part of your continuing professional development, by</u>
- learning about neurodiversity-affirming, trauma-informed practices in your field
- seeking the stories of marginalised people
- reflecting on your own communicative preferences, what you might need to 'unlearn', and (re-)connecting with your own beautiful weirdness
- consciously engaging in communicative care work: taking time to be patient, to provide communicative resources to others, to claim your own communicative resources, and investing in collective access and belonging (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018; Henner and Robinson 2023)

Conclusion

I have presented neuroqueering as an ethical orientation to self based in the recognition that we are (often) strangers to ourselves, and to each other. This orientation appeals to a hospitality which welcomes people not in spite of their differences, but because of them, and which envisions a future where difference is not a barrier to connection but the very condition of mutual recognition and care—where communicative engagement is not bound by the imperative of understanding, but guided by the invitation to coexist in incommensurability (Harvey, forthcoming). Neuroqueering will emphatically not make non-understanding any less uncomfortable when it occurs – in its unpredictability it will always, necessarily, be that. Yichen and Joanne would always have experienced some degree of shock in their move to the UK. But, in the aftermath of the shock, a neuroqueering orientation may have better enabled them to sit with that discomfort rather than be paralysed by it; to be curious about what that discomfort produced; and to engage with that curiosity as an act of hospitality towards the future. Collectively, a neuroqueering orientation may enable us to move a little closer (following Orsini 2022) to enacting and prefiguring a world in which every person has access to thriving and flourishing.

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