

Decentring linguistic hegemony in peer review: relational epistemology, affect and ethical becoming

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper introduces Onto-Epistemic Mutual Becoming as a relational, affective and ethical approach to peer review. It critiques dominant epistemic and linguistic gatekeeping practices in traditional reviewing, particularly their marginalising effects on non-Anglophone scholars. Drawing on Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, Indigenous and affective epistemologies, we reimagine peer review as dialogic, inclusive and co-constructive. Through translanguaging, intergenerational narratives, we call for publishing practices premised on ethical responsibility, interpretive generosity and epistemic justice.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper applies a narrative inquiry approach and draws on Deleuzian and Eastern relational ontologies to propose a transversal, ethically attuned peer review approach. Through the experiences of three multilingual scholars – early-career (Xingxing), mid-career (Nashid) and senior (Sender) – we illustrate affective harm, epistemic exclusion and transformative alternatives grounded in translanguaging, mentorship and dialogic reciprocity. Theoretical lenses include Ren, Wu Wei, Pratityasamutpada and collective Indigenous accountability.

Findings – Traditional peer review often enacts affective and epistemic harm through linguistic regulation and methodological policing. However, relationally grounded, translanguaging-friendly and mentorship-based approaches disrupt dominant norms and foster inclusion. Experiential narratives show how scholars actively resist marginalisation and co-create epistemic spaces of care, reciprocity and plural recognition.

Research limitations/implications – Based on a small set of narrative accounts, this study prioritises depth and transferability over objectivity and generalisability. Nonetheless, its theoretical innovation opens pathways for empirical inquiry into affective justice and inclusive peer review across contexts.

Practical implications – We propose education in epistemic justice, dialogic mentorship and translanguaging-affirming review models. Editorial policies should decentralise monolingual norms, diversify reviewer pools and support relational feedback.

Social implications – This approach promotes equity in knowledge production by challenging epistemic hierarchies and amplifying plural traditions. It empowers marginalised scholars and nurtures scholarly ecosystems of care and ethical co-becoming.

Originality/value – This is among the first papers to theorise Onto-Epistemic Mutual Becoming in peer review. By weaving Eastern, Indigenous and feminist philosophies with lived narratives, it reimagines peer review as an ethical, transversal and relational practice.

Keywords Peer review, Linguistic hegemony, Epistemic injustice, Decolonising academic publishing, Relational epistemology

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction: the crisis of linguistic and epistemic hegemony in peer review

Once valorised as a neutral and rigorous mechanism of scholarly validation, peer review is now increasingly problematised as an onto-epistemic filter that privileges Anglo-



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Eurocentric, monolingual and colonial knowledge traditions (Canagarajah, 2002, 2024; Pennycook, 2017, 2024; Kubota and Lin, 2006). Dominant review practices tend to reify Standard English and uphold Western rhetorical norms, rendering non-Western, Indigenous and translingual epistemologies illegible within the academic publishing landscape (Phillipson, 1992; Nigar, 2025). This linguistic hegemony shapes what counts as valid scholarship and entrenches epistemic hierarchies by marginalising alternative ways of knowing (Pennycook, 2017; Dovchin, 2020). Yet beyond the discursive violence of linguistic exclusion lies a deeper, underexplored terrain: the affective politics of peer review. Scholars from non-dominant backgrounds routinely experience emotional and epistemic labour through linguistic scrutiny, methodological gatekeeping and repeated demands for assimilation (Lillis and Curry, 2010; Kubota, 2004). These experiences are not merely personal burdens but manifestations of affective violence embedded within a system that positions relational, spiritual and narrative modes of knowing as inferior (Illesca, 2023; Kubota, 2004; Nigar and Kostogriz, 2024).

Despite growing critique of academic coloniality and calls for linguistic justice, most interventions treat peer review as a procedural or technical domain, rather than as a relational, ethical and affective ecology. Existing literature has thoroughly documented exclusionary practices (Canagarajah, 2011; Kubota and Lin, 2006), yet there remains a significant gap in theorising peer review as a site of mutual becoming – one that affirms epistemic multiplicity, affective labour and intercultural care. What is missing is a holistic approach that reimagines review not as a regulatory checkpoint but as a co-emergent space of dialogue, discomfort and diffractive transformation.

Addressing this gap, this paper asks: How can peer review processes be reconceptualised to decentre language dominance and foster epistemic justice through relational, affective and ethical engagement? In response, we introduce the orientation of Onto-Epistemic Mutual Becoming, which reconceptualises peer review as a dialogic and affectively attuned space for co-producing knowledge. Drawing on Eastern relational ontologies – such as Confucian reciprocity (Ren; Hall and Ames, 1987), Daoist attunement (Wu Wei; Jullien, 2004) and Buddhist interdependence (Pratītyasamutpāda; Garfield, 2015) – as well as Indigenous philosophies of collective responsibility (Wilson, 2008), affect theory (Wetherell, 2012) and feminist care ethics (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), this approach foregrounds attunement, relational precarity, and interpretive generosity as central to ethical reviewing. It frames affect not as an ornamental dimension but as a constitutive force – orienting scholars toward one another through listening, storying and shared becoming (Ahmed, 2004; Gunaratnam, 2009).

This ethical bearing resists the regulatory figure of “Reviewer 2” – the often-invoked archetype of epistemic violence – and instead proposes a pluriversal knowledge ecology where legitimacy is cultivated dialogically rather than enforced. Through empirical narratives from multilingual scholars – including Nashid, Sender and Xingxing – this study illustrates how peer review is lived as both trauma and possibility. These accounts highlight the erasures produced by dominant academic conventions and simultaneously gesture toward inclusive alternatives: translanguaging-friendly, mentorship-based and iterative review practices that hold space for diverse epistemologies and emotional registers (Cenoz and Gorter, 2020; Canagarajah, 2011; Nigar *et al.*, 2024a, b, c; Samson *et al.*, 2024).

All considered, this paper calls for systemic reforms across journal policies, reviewer training and editorial cultures. It challenges institutions to move beyond tokenistic diversity statements and toward practices that recognise relationality, care and affect as epistemic imperatives. Storytelling is treated not as anecdotal supplement but as a legitimate method of rendering the political, emotional and ontological textures of academic life visible (Nigar, 2025; Pennycook, 2024). In doing so, this work contributes a transformative model of peer review grounded in intercultural ethics, decolonial praxis and epistemic justice – one that reorients scholarly evaluation toward co-becoming, rather than conformity.

2. Linguistic hegemony and affective politics in peer review

Peer review, often positioned as a neutral mechanism of academic rigour, in practice functions as a gatekeeping apparatus that disproportionately privileges Anglo-Western linguistic norms and epistemic traditions. The dominance of English in academic publishing is not a neutral or benign development but reflects entrenched systems of epistemic injustice and colonial legacies (Canagarajah, 2002; Dovchin *et al.*, 2023; Nigar, 2025; Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson, 1992). Scholars from postcolonial, Global South or transnational contexts are often expected to mould their work to fit the rhetorical and stylistic expectations of dominant Anglo-American academia. These expectations silence epistemic difference, reinforcing linguistic hierarchies and positioning deviation from “standard” English as deficiency rather than a legitimate alternative (Kubota and Lin, 2006; Nigar, 2025).

2.1 *The coloniality of language in academic publishing*

The coloniality of academic English functions as a key mechanism through which linguistic hegemony is maintained. Despite increasing recognition that English itself has become both a multilingual and multilingua franca (Makoni and Pennycook, 2006), dominant publishing venues continue to valorise a narrow set of monolingual, standardised norms, largely drawn from elite academic institutions in the Global North. As Phillipson (1992) notes, English operates as the epistemic currency of global academia – establishing what counts as legitimate knowledge, and by whom.

These linguistic regimes are particularly exclusionary toward scholars working across translanguaging practices, oral traditions and alternative rhetorical structures. Such epistemologies, deeply rooted in community, relationality and embodied knowledge, are often erased or labelled as “incoherent” or “unscholarly” within dominant peer review structures (Pennycook, 2002; Dovchin, 2020). Nigar *et al.* (2024a, 2025) document how this silencing is often racialised and gendered, with non-Western scholars framed as “inarticulate” or “unclear” rather than differently articulate – revealing a deep entanglement between language, power and epistemic exclusion.

As Lillis and Curry (2010) argue, scholars from non-Anglophone contexts frequently undergo extensive linguistic revisions not to improve clarity, but to align with dominant epistemic codes. This produces a homogenising effect, where codified norms of argumentation, citation and structure are prized over intellectual innovation or contextual relevance. The implicit message is clear: to be taken seriously, one must speak (and think) like the Global North.

Canagarajah (2011) calls this dynamic “epistemic exclusion”, where scholars are forced to self-censor, code-switch or domesticate their ideas into a format palatable to Western audiences. Translanguaging – offering a fluid, ever-shifting model of multilingual scholarship – challenges these constraints, but is rarely accommodated in mainstream peer review (Cenoz and Gorter, 2020; Dovchin *et al.*, 2023). The persistent marginalisation of translanguaging reflects an institutional resistance to epistemic diversity and a narrow framing of rigour that privileges form over content, and compliance over creativity.

2.2 *The affective structures of reviewer feedback*

Alongside colonial language imposition, peer review enacts affective forms of regulation. It operates not only as an assessment process but also as a profoundly emotional terrain shaped by desire, marginalisation and disciplinary power. The affective economy of peer review is governed by two intersecting dynamics: the reviewer’s desire for authority, and the author’s longing for recognition (Canagarajah, 2002; Lillis and Curry, 2010). Within this asymmetrical exchange, reviewers often occupy the role of gatekeepers, while authors – especially those from non-dominant backgrounds – are positioned as epistemic outsiders seeking validation.

Although promoted as constructive feedback, reviewer commentary frequently functions as a tool of epistemic policing. Scholars from postcolonial and multilingual contexts routinely encounter vague, dismissive or demeaning reviews that frame linguistic variation as

intellectual inadequacy (Kubota, 2004). Rather than fostering scholarly dialogue, these interactions reproduce disciplinary orthodoxy and discourage intellectual risk-taking. Dovchin (2020) highlights how peer review comments often amplify linguistic insecurity among NNES (non-native English-speaking) scholars, leading to internalised perceptions of deficiency and illegitimacy.

Nigar *et al.* (2024a, 2024b, 2024c) further reveal how such affective exclusions are intertwined with professional identity formation. Reviewer comments that question language competence often do more than critique syntax – they erode scholarly confidence, entrench hierarchies and delegitimise alternative epistemic traditions. The result is an affective economy of fear, self-censorship and epistemic conformity.

For many multilingual and racialised scholars, peer review becomes a source of repeated affective injury rather than intellectual engagement (Lillis and Curry, 2010; Dovchin, 2020). Over time, these microaggressions accumulate into a broader pattern of epistemic exclusion: authors withdraw from publishing, avoid particular journals or silence aspects of their identity to avoid further harm. As Sender and Nashid's narratives of their lived experiences over time illustrate, these exclusions are not isolated incidents but structural patterns that shape how knowledge is produced, validated and circulated.

The toll is not merely emotional; it is intellectual and institutional. A culture of affective violence undermines diversity in scholarship by punishing difference and rewarding assimilation (Nigar, 2025). As Pennycook (2002) argues, such systems of gatekeeping hinder not only whose knowledge is heard but how knowledge itself is conceptualised. Dominant models of scholarly rigour prioritise individualism, linearity and disembodied abstraction, while dismissing dialogic, situated or affective modes of ontological knowing (Nigar, 2025; Pennycook, 2024).

2.3 Toward epistemically and affectively inclusive peer review

To resist such exclusionary structures, scholars such as Spivak (1988) call for an “ethical responsibility” to listen to and amplify subaltern voices – not as tokens, but as epistemic agents. Reimagining peer review as an affective and relational process requires moving beyond extractive feedback loops toward dialogic engagement situated in care, fluidity and epistemic creativity (Canagarajah, 2011; Cenoz and Gorter, 2020; Dovchin *et al.*, 2023).

This shift entails both conceptual and structural transformations. Codemeshing and translanguaging must be legitimised as scholarly practices, not merely tolerated as linguistic quirks. Reviewer training programs should include critical reflection on epistemic privilege, linguistic imperialism and the politics of affect. Journal editors must actively diversify their reviewer pools and research paradigms, and develop guidelines that prioritise equity and inclusion alongside rigour.

Crucially, as Pennycook (2002), Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (2017) and Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us, the politics of language in academia are not separate from broader colonial systems – they are their extension. Linguistic discrimination is often a proxy for deeper structures of racial capitalism, settler governance and Anglo-Eurocentric valuation. Accent, idiom and rhetorical form become sites of geopolitical sorting, entrenching North–South hierarchies even within so-called global scholarship.

Decolonising peer review, therefore, is not just about language – it is about reworlding the epistemic infrastructures that shape academic life. It demands a pluriversal stance: one that honours diverse knowledge systems, recognises language as relational and situated and foregrounds the material conditions that shape scholarly production. As Nigar *et al.* (2024a, 2024b) emphasise, this reworlding is not abstract. It is lived, negotiated and often precarious. But it is also deeply hopeful.

By transforming peer review into a space of ethical and affective responsibility, we open possibilities for a more just, plural and dialogic academy – one in which difference is not a problem to be fixed but a resource for collective reimagining (Nigar and Kostogriz, 2025).

3. Onto-epistemic mutual becoming: reimagining peer review as relational, affective and ethical engagement

Moving beyond epistemic policing requires a fundamental reimagining of peer review as a process of *Onto-Epistemic Mutual Becoming* – a relational, affective and ethical practice that fosters co-constructed knowledge rather than reinforcing hierarchical validation (Figure 1). This orientation challenges entrenched norms of knowledge evaluation by embracing reciprocal engagement, hybridity and collective meaning-making. Rather than functioning as a filtering mechanism that disciplines scholars into rigid linguistic and epistemic norms, peer review is repositioned as a space of relational knowledge creation – attuned to difference, care and epistemic dignity.

These traditions are not complementary in the sense of a seamless integration. Instead, they offer a field of epistemic tension – held together not by synthesis but by mutual resonance. Their onto-epistemic force lies in their differential proximity, which disrupts the colonial desire for coherence. Following transversal ethics (Braidotti, 2019; Icaza and Vázquez, 2025), their co-presence is not aimed at harmony or convergence, but at enacting epistemic hospitality – an ethics of proximity that resists epistemological enclosure. Each tradition – Confucian *Ren*, Daoist *Wu Wei*, Buddhist *Pratītyasamutpāda* and Indigenous onto-relationality – resonates with the others without demanding equivalence. This approach affirms their differential fluidity while refusing reductionist synthesis often expected in Western theoretical architectures. Held in productive tension, Confucian ethics of reciprocity (*Ren*, 仁) (Hall and Ames, 1987; Tu, 1998), Daoist *Wu Wei* (无为) (Jullien, 2004), Buddhist interdependent arising (*Pratītyasamutpāda*, 缘起) (Garfield, 2015; Williams, 2009) and Indigenous relational

Decentered Peer Review Model of Onto-Epistemic Mutual Becoming

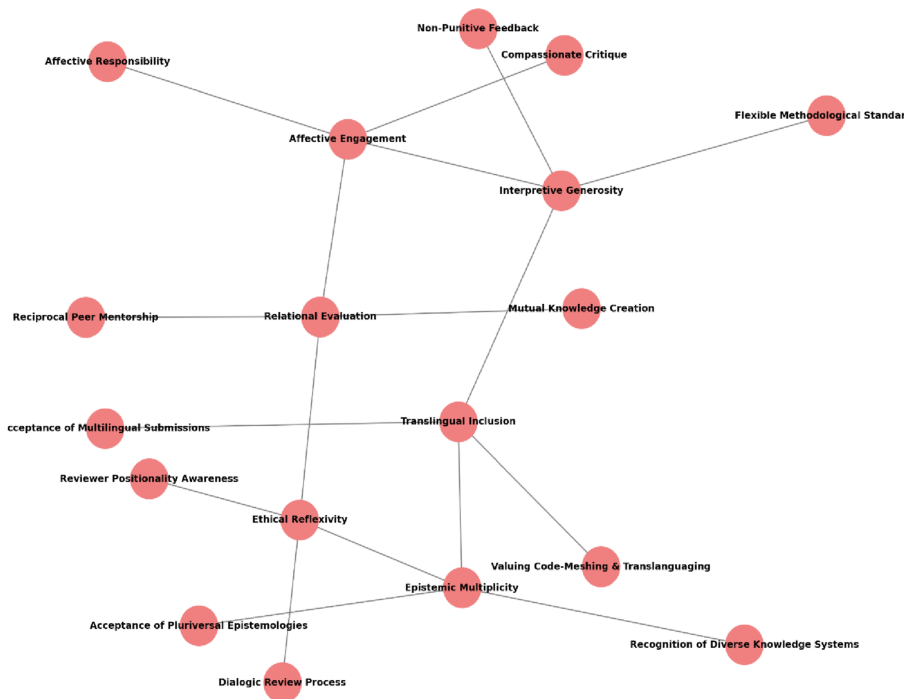


Figure 1. Affective epistemologies and relational peer Review(*Ren*, *Wu Wei*, *Pratītyasamutpāda* and Indigenous Relationality in Transversal Co-Presence)

accountability (Wilson, 2008; Battiste, 2019) offer situated orientations to ethical becoming – highlighting different facets of scholarly practice without flattening their distinctions. Together, they guide a relational knowledge assemblage premised on multiplicity, interpretive fluidity and ethical reflexivity (Tsuda, 2013).

Figure 1 maps peer review as a decentered, relational practice shaped by affective, pluriversal and ethical orientations. Rather than merging Confucian (Ren), Daoist (Wu Wei), Buddhist (Pratītyasamutpāda) and Indigenous relationality, it presents them in differential co-presence – each retaining its specificity while resonating through shared commitments to care, affect and relational becoming. The figure affirms diversity, not synthesis, inviting dialogic movement across distinct epistemic lineages.

3.1 Confucian reciprocity: ethical knowledge as mutual becoming

The Confucian tradition views knowledge as ethical and reciprocal, prioritising collective intellectual cultivation over individualism (Tu, 1998; Jullien, 2004). Unlike Western hierarchical models that enforce competition, Confucian relationality sees peer review as a ethical dialogue rather than exclusionary gatekeeping (Kubota and Lin, 2006). Ren (仁) – often misinterpreted as hierarchical – embodies reciprocity, ethical responsibility and intellectual care (Pennycook, 2002). Applying Ren to scholarship fosters intellectual porosity and inclusive knowledge production (Wilson, 2008).

Peer review, in its current form, often operates as a hierarchical mechanism of gatekeeping rather than a dialogical process. Scholars from non-Western backgrounds frequently face feedback that demands rigid conformity to Anglo-American academic norms, disregarding alternative epistemologies (Canagarajah, 2002; Dovchin, 2020). As Nigar *et al.* (2024a) illustrate, the lived experiences of English language teachers navigating institutional power parallel those of multilingual scholars in academia, who must negotiate their professional legitimacy within structurally exclusionary peer review systems.

A Confucian-informed approach, however, frames peer review as an ethical commitment to mutual knowledge formation. This perspective transforms the reviewer's role from gatekeeper or bully to intellectual mentor, fostering interpretive openness rather than epistemic policing (Li, 2021). When applied to peer review, Confucian relationality emphasizes Li (礼), or ritual propriety, which encourages reviewers to engage in epistemic hospitality – recognising and honouring diverse knowledge traditions rather than enforcing monolithic academic norms.

3.2 Daoist attunement: knowledge as emergent and hybrid

Wu Wei is not passivity, but an epistemic practice of soft resistance – where responsiveness means negotiating rhythmically with critique, not against it. In revising, we allowed discomfort to guide, not dominate – moving with rather than coercing epistemic direction.

Daoist epistemology rejects rigid binaries of valid/invalid or accepted/rejected knowledge, instead emphasising the hybrid and emergent nature of epistemic engagement. Wu Wei (无为), or effortless attunement, resists coercive intellectual control, instead valuing knowledge that unfolds organically through interaction and dialogue (Hall and Ames, 1987).

Western peer review models frequently prioritise methodological rigidity, often discounting non-linear and plurilingual ways of knowing (Pennycook, 2002; Nigar and Hopwood, 2025). This imposition of academic orthodoxy forces scholars, particularly from the Global South, to align their work with Anglo-Eurocentric epistemic paradigms, often at the expense of their own intellectual traditions (Canagarajah, 2011). Nigar *et al.* (2024b) discuss how hybrid professional identities emerge as multilingual educators and scholars navigate these epistemic constraints, demonstrating the necessity of principles that accommodate translingual knowledge production rather than erasing it.

Applying Daoist principles to peer review suggests a shift toward a more fluid, iterative and inclusive model – one that accommodates diverse epistemic formations and recognises the

situated, evolving nature of knowledge. A peer review system informed by Daoist attunement would resist static evaluation criteria, instead embracing knowledge co-emergence as an open-ended, relational process (Makoni and Pennycook, 2006).

3.3 Buddhist co-arising knowledge: deep engagement and ethical care

Buddhist epistemology, particularly Pratītyasamutpāda (缘起), or co-arising interdependence, challenges the notion of knowledge as an isolated, author-centric entity. Instead, it posits that knowledge emerges through relational networks of scholars, methodologies and cultural contexts (Thakchoe, 2007; Tynan and Bishop, 2023).

This perspective reframes peer review as a practice of ethical care, recognising that epistemic engagement carries affective responsibilities. The dominant peer review system often fosters adversarial relations between authors and reviewers, where feedback is framed as correction rather than co-construction (Dovchin, 2020). These adversarial dynamics operate through affective economies of power. Drawing on Gunaratnam (2009), we argue that the emotional labour required to navigate peer review – particularly for multilingual and racialised scholars – is not incidental but constitutes a form of epistemic labour. The desire for recognition, the fear of rejection and the persistence of self-doubt are not merely personal responses but structural affective formations that shape and constrain epistemic legitimacy. This lack of affective engagement is not merely incidental – it constitutes an epistemic boundary that reinforces hierarchies of knowledge through the absence of dialogic care. Alienation, self-censorship and exclusion become not just emotional consequences but structural effects, particularly for scholars from marginalised linguistic and epistemic traditions (Lillis and Curry, 2010). Affect, in this context, is not a secondary register but an organising principle of inclusion and exclusion. As Ahmed (2004) reminds us, emotions do not reside within subjects; they circulate between bodies, shaping who is recognised as a legitimate knower and who is rendered unintelligible.

Nigar (2024, 2025) highlights how the affective labour required to constantly justify one's epistemic legitimacy contributes to burnout and exclusion in academic-professional spaces, reinforcing the need for compassionate, dialogic engagement in peer review rather than punitive critique. A Buddhist-informed peer review model would reframe critique as *karuṇā* (compassion) and *upaya* (skilful means), encouraging intellectual fluidity and multiplicity rather than epistemic policing (Williams, 2009).

3.4 Indigenous relational accountability: knowledge as collective responsibility

Indigenous epistemologies challenge Western academic frameworks that position knowledge as an individualistic, author-centric pursuit. Instead, knowledge is understood as relational, emerging through ethical engagements with community, land and history (Wilson, 2008; Tynan and Bishop, 2023). Indigenous peer review models reject extractive validation in favour of reciprocal knowledge-sharing processes grounded in relational accountability.

Peer review, as it currently functions, often disregards Indigenous knowledge systems by imposing rigid Western notions of authorship, objectivity and methodological validity. Scholars working within Indigenous paradigms frequently encounter scepticism regarding the legitimacy of their methodologies, with oral traditions and relational epistemologies viewed as anecdotal rather than rigorous (Battiste, 2019). This epistemic marginalisation reflects broader colonial structures that privilege written over oral knowledge, reinforcing exclusions that marginalise Indigenous scholarly contributions (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

As Nigar *et al.* (2024b) argue, these exclusionary models are particularly evident when professional identities intersect with racialised and linguistic expectations, demonstrating how academic institutions maintain epistemic gatekeeping that disproportionately affects scholars from non-Western traditions (Nigar, 2025; Nigar and Hopwood, 2025).

An Indigenous-informed peer review model reframes evaluation as an ethical act of relational accountability rather than a hierarchical judgment process. This involves:

Recognising citation as an ethical act rather than a mechanical requirement (Wilson, 2008). Respecting Indigenous knowledge protocols, ensuring that epistemic contributions are contextualised within relational networks rather than extracted for academic consumption (Marker, 2006).

Valuing oral and community-based methodologies as legitimate scholarly contributions rather than treating them as secondary to Western academic norms (Tynan and Bishop, 2023).

Reframing peer review through *Onto-Epistemic Mutual Becoming* repositions it from a site of epistemic policing to one of dialogic, relational engagement (Canagarajah, 2002; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Nigar and Hopwood, 2025). Informed by Confucian reciprocity, Daoist attunement, Buddhist interdependence and Indigenous relational accountability (Hall and Ames, 1987; Garfield, 2015; Wilson, 2008), this approach values affective connection and interpretive porosity. It challenges Anglophone dominance and colonial hierarchies in academic publishing (Pennycook, 2002), advocating inclusive practices that support epistemic justice. Translanguaging and codemeshing (Canagarajah, 2011) further open space for valuing diverse epistemologies, making peer review a decentred, reciprocal act of knowledge co-construction.

4. Experiential anecdotes: navigating the terrain of peer review

This section offers situated narratives that reveal how peer review can function as linguistic gatekeeping, onto-epistemic policing and affective rupture – yet also as a site of epistemic becoming (Ahmed, 2004; Gunaratnam, 2009; Wetherell, 2012; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Through collaborative storytelling and autoethnographic reflection, these vignettes unravel the affective labour and structural hierarchies embedded in scholarly publishing (Canagarajah, 2002; Kubota and Lin, 2006). We do not treat these stories as mere illustration, but as epistemic enactments of *Onto-Epistemic Mutual Becoming*, where critique and care entangle. Rather than neutral assessment, peer review is revealed as a space of contestation – where power, marginalisation and refusal co-exist, and where diverse ways of knowing are often silenced or, at times, re-voiced through relational praxis (Nigar and Hopwood, 2025).

4.1 Linguistic gatekeeping and the affective labour of legibility

The peer review process often subjects non-native English-speaking scholars and translingual academics to what Canagarajah (2002) terms linguistic gatekeeping – a practice where academic legitimacy is tethered to conformity with standardised norms of writing, expression and citation (Lillis and Curry, 2010; Baker-Bell, 2020).

Nashid, a South Asian postdoctoral scholar working on migrant English teachers' hybrid professional identities, received a set of peer reviews that left her torn. After countless attempts and refusals over time, one reviewer lauded the paper as “thought-provoking,” while the other dismissed it for “poor clarity” and “lack of readability.” The epistemic terrain on which she stood – one grounded in postcolonial critique, affect theory and Deleuzian perspectives – was deemed “unempirical”, “abstract” “mismatched” and “overly theoretical” (Ahmed, 2004; Pennycook, 2002; Spivak, 1988). What was being evaluated, it became clear, was not only the content but the *form, rhythm and cultural register* of her writing (Canagarajah, 2024; Makoni and Pennycook, 2006).

The repeated critique forced her to invest in a high-cost editor. But even after linguistic polishing, she encountered comments such as, “English still needs editing”. As a consequence, Nashid began to self-censor her writing voice, feeling the need to disembody her political subjectivity and tone down her decolonial and poetic expressions to be “acceptable” within mainstream scholarly spaces (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Canagarajah, 2023). This reflects the emotional and financial toll multilingual scholars shoulder in striving for epistemic legitimacy – what Wetherell (2012) and Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) would describe as the affective labour embedded in knowledge production.

Sender, a multilingual senior academic hailing from Central Asia, observed a similar burden placed on her PhD student's co-authored paper, which was rejected with the terse comment: "Not of interest to the field." The manuscript, which engaged with South–South multilingual teacher experiences, was dismissed on the basis that its English "needed substantial work," even though the conceptual clarity and citation practice were rigorous (Connell, 2020; Kubota and Lin, 2006). The review process became less about ideas and more about linguistic packaging.

These experiences reveal how peer review often functions as a moral economy (Lillis and Curry, 2010), enforcing implicit norms about how knowledge should look and sound. For multilingual scholars, English becomes both the medium and the metric of worthiness, with "standardness" acting as a proxy for value (Phillipson, 1992; Canagarajah, 1999; Nigar and Kostogriz, 2025).

4.2 Epistemic policing and the silencing of situated knowledge

Beyond linguistic discrimination, peer review operates as a gatekeeper of epistemic legitimacy, routinely marginalising research attuned to non-Western ontologies, ethical orientations and relational methodologies (Spivak, 1988; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Connell, 2020; Wilson, 2008).

Xingxing, a Han Chinese cosmopolitan scholar, undertook a deeply ethical approach to analysing Tibet's multilingual curriculum, informed by Buddhist interdependence (Pratītyasamutpāda) and localised knowledge practices (Garfield, 2015; Williams, 2009). Her avoidance of interviews – guided by relational ethics rather than empirical deficit – was not only methodologically deliberate but ontologically situated (Wilson, 2008; Battiste, 2019). Yet, the review process at multiple journals for years failed to recognise this specificity, echoing epistemic policing that dismisses Indigenous and Buddhist ontologies as lacking "rigour" (Ahmed, 2004; Lillis and Curry, 2010; Kubota, 2016).

One reviewer's rejection of the manuscript as "unclear" and containing "too many theories" reflects a monolingual bias that privileges Anglo-Eurocentric ideals of clarity and theoretical restraint as scholarly rigour (Canagarajah, 2002; Nigar and Hopwood, 2025; Pennycook, 2002). The discomfort with theoretical plurality reveals an unease toward hybrid or relational ways of knowing. Likewise, Xingxing's ethical withholding of data was read as a flaw rather than a strength, exposing a lack of epistemic hospitality (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

In another instance, our collaborative paper (Nashid and Xingxing), which wove hermeneutic phenomenology with Foucauldian discourse analysis, was dismissed for its "lack of coherence". Reviewers demanded the removal of metaphor and plurilingual storying and recursive interpretation – thus policing not just method, but affective, aesthetic linguistic and interpretive expressions of knowing (Gunaratnam, 2009; Ahmed, 2004; Illesca, 2023; Nigar, 2025). This reflects a tendency within peer review to flatten the plural, poetic hermeneutic and pluriversal into neat epistemic compartments (Makoni and Pennycook, 2006; Canagarajah, 2011, 2024).

Similarly, a Chinese colleague's use of Daoist ethics and *Wu Wei* was rejected until reframed through constructivist learning theory, demonstrating the pervasive pressure to translate situated philosophies into "recognisable" Western terms (Jullien, 2004; Hall and Ames, 1987). This is not an issue of scholarly merit, but one of epistemic injustice and assimilation (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Spivak, 1988; Connell, 2020).

These instances illustrate how peer review functions as a mechanism of epistemic imperialism, privileging "objectivity", "rigour" and "universality" while systematically erasing embodied, relational and locally accountable knowledge practices (Canagarajah, 2023; Phillipson, 1992; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Baker-Bell, 2020; Nigar and Hopwood, 2025). As such, the politics of what counts as "research" remains shackled by Anglo-Eurocentric power-knowledge regimes, rendering certain voices audible only through processes of epistemic translation, erasure or conformity (Kubota and Lin, 2006; Tsuda, 2013).

4.3 *Affective rupture and epistemic disorientation*

These exclusions produce more than academic delays – they inflict affective injuries that shape scholars’ sense of belonging, legitimacy and voice (Ahmed, 2004; Wetherell, 2012). Peer review, often assumed to be a value-free gatekeeping mechanism, is a site where epistemic hierarchies manifest emotionally, particularly for scholars situated in the Global South or working with translingual, Indigenous or affectively attuned methodologies (Canagarajah, 2002; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Nigar *et al.*, 2024b).

Despite being a major grant recipient and distinguished professor, Sender continues to face marginalisation in her research and advocacy on linguistic racism, both locally and globally. Within evaluative systems where she does not know the reviewers—though they likely know her—she remains subject to subtle epistemic exclusion, exposing enduring asymmetries of recognition and Australia’s tall-poppy culture (Udah, 2019). As a linguistically minoritised early-career scholar, she once received a national grant rejection with a single-line comment: “Not suitable for a national grant.” The abrupt and dismissive tone—echoing the “nasty feedback” many minoritised scholars endure—left a mark that lingered, shaping her future engagements with academic evaluation. As Baker-Bell (2020) and Canagarajah (2023) note, such moments do not simply assess merit—they police worthiness and silence those who challenge dominant paradigms.

Xingxing, whose work engages with Tibetan values and multilingual curriculum policies, experienced similar marginalisation. Despite her methodological choices being grounded in ethical caution and Buddhist philosophies of relational interdependence (Garfield, 2015; Williams, 2009), reviewers deemed her project “lacking originality.” This critique, detached from its sociopolitical context, caused Xingxing to begin omitting cultural references and metaphysical approaches from her writing. “I thought perhaps I should just use straight-up critical discourse analysis and drop all mention of Tibetan values,” she said. This is not just self-censorship; it is the internalisation of what Ahmed (2004) calls affective economies – structures of feeling that regulate who can speak, and how.

Nashid, co-authoring another paper with Xingxing, recounted being told by a reviewer: “Is this really a scholarly piece or a poetic outburst?” The remark’s condescension was palpable. Rather than engaging with their methodology – one that braided hermeneutic phenomenology and affective storytelling (Gunaratnam, 2009; Wilson, 2008) – the reviewer dismissed it as emotionally excessive. This expectation to maintain “objectivity” under the guise of rigour reflects what Connell (2020) terms northern theory hegemony, where rational detachment is privileged over situated knowledge and relational epistemologies. It also highlights the epistemic violence entailed in regulating emotionality, a form of emotional conformity that punishes voice and embodiment (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Nigar *et al.*, 2024a).

These are not isolated accounts. They point to a wider structural condition within peer review – an affective economy that enforces emotional restraint and epistemic dispassion. Scholars who write with susceptibility, embodied voice or translingual hybridity are rendered less legitimate unless their work is reframed through dominant Anglo-centric frames of “clarity” and “coherence” (Lillis and Curry, 2010; Illesca, 2023; Nigar and Kostogriz, 2025). This enforces a binary between rigour and reflexivity, where the latter is tolerated only when subordinated to the former.

As Makoni and Pennycook (2006) and Pennycook (2024) assert, dismantling epistemic hierarchies involves more than diversifying topics – it demands rethinking the languages, modalities and affects that count as scholarly. The experiences above illustrate how the peer review process, while claiming objectivity, often performs epistemic policing – disciplining not only what is said, but how it is felt and lived (Spivak, 1988; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Nigar *et al.*, 2024a; Nigar and Kostogriz, 2024).

4.4 *Epistemic becoming: peer review as relational resistance*

Despite the exclusions and injuries outlined earlier, some forms of peer review have the potential to serve as relational, ethical and transformative spaces. These are sites where

scholars – especially those racialised, multilingual or working within decolonial paradigms – can reconstitute their voice and methodology without having to amputate themselves to meet hegemonic expectations (Ahmed, 2004; Canagarajah, 2002; Nigar and Kostogriz, 2025).

After a series of dehumanising reviews that dismissed the legitimacy of affect and voice, Nashid approached feedback with as much ethical openness as she could muster. Yet the accumulation of “nasty” and reductive critiques left its mark, teaching her to seek journals that valued mentorship-based review processes—spaces more attuned to dialogue and epistemic fluidity (Samson *et al.*, 2024). This time, reviewers engaged with her work not to sanitise it but to understand the ethics embedded in its post-colonial, relational stance. They encouraged her to retain her metaphors, reflect more deeply on affective precarity, and expand her commitments to situated knowledge. “For the first time,” she said, “Finally, I didn’t feel like I had to amputate my voice to be published.” Such practices enact what Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) calls matters of care—not as sentiment, but as epistemic practice.

Sender’s submission to a critical applied linguistics and sociolinguistics-friendly journal marked another moment of epistemic becoming. Her writing – which wove together Korean, Mongolian and Japanese idioms – was not erased but embraced. A reviewer wrote, “Your translanguaging enriches this paper’s epistemic landscape. Please keep it”. In stark contrast to earlier experiences, Sender found that multilingual scholarship could be valued when reviewed through a decolonial lens (Canagarajah, 2011; Lin, 2013; Cenoz and Gorter, 2020; Nigar *et al.*, 2024a).

When she submitted her work on nomadic Mongolian pedagogies, she was paired with reviewers familiar with Indigenous and Eastern philosophies. Rather than demanding citations of Anglo-Eurocentric theorists or turning oral traditions into quantifiable data, reviewers honoured the embodied storytelling of the piece (Wilson, 2008; Garfield, 2015; Hall and Ames, 1987). For once, the work was not translated into academic jargon – it was allowed to speak in its own voice, on its own terms (Cadman, 2017).

A moment of epistemic rupture turned reparative emerged when Xingxing and Nashid transformed a paper that was rejected by a top-tier journal into a blog post for *Language on the Move*. The post, written in an affective and autobiographical register, resonated widely with readers across academia and community networks, validating the work far beyond traditional journal metrics. As Illesca (2023) notes, such spaces can offer vital counterpublics where marginalised voices are not merely included but centred. Rather than chasing impact factors, they created impactful encounters.

As an act of relational resistance, the three scholars – Nashid, Sender and Xingxing – have since become peer reviewers themselves. They now approach reviewing as ethical engagement, guided by attentiveness to affect, methodological diversity and positionality. Rather than punishing difference, they act as what Spivak (1988) might call uncoercive rearrangers – interlocutors who help re-shape scholarly voice without erasure. Peer review, in this mode, becomes an affective commons (Nigar, 2025): a space for co-thinking rather than conformity, for dialogic becoming rather than disciplinary disciplining (Cadman, 2017; Gunaratnam, 2009; Makoni and Pennycook, 2006; Kubota, 2016).

This vision aligns with developing calls to reimagine academic publishing through decolonising methodologies (Tuihawai Smith, 2012), linguistic justice (Baker-Bell, 2020) and translanguaging epistemologies (Canagarajah, 2023; Nigar *et al.*, 2024b). It affirms that peer review, far from being a fixed evaluative tool, is a relational and pedagogical process – one that can reproduce harm, or cultivate solidarity (Nigar and Kostogriz, 2025; Nigar *et al.*, 2025).

Overall, these experiential accounts over time urge us to reimagine peer review not as a procedural gatekeeping tool but as a relational, affective and co-constitutive practice – especially for multilingual, migrant and Indigenous scholars whose epistemologies are often marginalised (Ahmed, 2004; Canagarajah, 2002; Lillis and Curry, 2010). In such contexts, peer review becomes a site of epistemic survival and refusal, where knowledge, identity and affect are entangled with power. Reworlding peer review requires a shift toward responsibility, transversal ethics and dialogic engagement (Connell, 2020; Tuck and Yang,

2012; Wilson, 2008). This requires investing in reviewer education, embracing epistemic and linguistic diversity (not merely demographic diversity), and fostering affective accountability. Only then can peer review realise its potential as a practice of care, recognition, and epistemic justice (Kubota and Lin, 2006; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Spivak, 1988).

5. Transforming peer review: ethical and relational practices

Peer review must be reimagined as an affective and relational space – one where susceptibility is transformative, relationality is rigorous and critique is exercised as a form of care. Traditionally, it has functioned as an exclusionary mechanism, upholding Anglo-American linguistic and epistemic norms while marginalising transnational, plurilingual non-Western, hybrid and cosmopolitan scholars (Canagarajah, 2002, 2024; Pennycook, 2002; Phillipson, 1992; Nigar, 2025). To foster a more inclusive and dialogic scholarly culture, peer review must shift from hierarchical judgment to a model of intellectual stewardship – where knowledge is co-constructed rather than policed (Kubota and Lin, 2006; Dovchin, 2020).

We propose Onto-Epistemic Mutual Becoming as an ethical and conceptual reorientation: a lens that repositions peer review as a relational practice grounded in translingual fluidity, intercultural attunement, affective labour and dialogic co-becoming. Informed by Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, Indigenous and poststructural thought, this approach honours epistemic difference without erasure, inviting peer review to become a site of reciprocal transformation rather than assimilation. The next section outlines concrete practices that resist epistemic gatekeeping and cultivate inclusive, pluriversal scholarly engagement.

5.1 For reviewers: from judgment to intellectual stewardship

The role of the reviewer is crucial in determining whether a manuscript is accepted, revised or rejected. However, feedback can either function as epistemic policing – dismissing alternative ways of knowing – or as a form of intellectual mentorship, guiding authors toward constructive engagement (Lillis and Curry, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011). Scholars from minoritised linguistic backgrounds frequently receive overly prescriptive feedback, pressuring them to conform to dominant Anglo-American academic norms rather than refining their own epistemic contributions (Dovchin, 2020; Dovchin *et al.*, 2023; Pennycook, 1994).

A shift toward intellectual stewardship necessitates moving beyond deficit and binary oriented critique. Ethical reviewers should engage in relational and affective accountability, recognising the diverse linguistic and epistemic trajectories of authors (Kubota and Lin, 2006). This requires a commitment to dialogic reciprocity, where feedback is framed as co-construction rather than hierarchical correction (Li, 2021). Reviewer education programs must incorporate awareness of ontologically oriented linguistic and epistemic justice, emphasising that the reviewer's role is not simply to assess, but to mentor and nurture intellectual diversity (Cenoz and Gorter, 2020; Nigar, 2025). Journals should provide guidelines encouraging constructive, non-assimilative feedback that allows for translingual and epistemic multiplicity.

Attending to the affective terrain of peer review requires more than structural reform; it demands an epistemic reorientation – one that recognises affect as a futural force, relationality as rigorous inquiry and critique as a practice of ethical care grounded in diversified and situated knowledges (Nigar *et al.*, 2024b).

5.2 For authors: navigating epistemic exclusion while resisting assimilation

Authors from non-Western and translingual backgrounds often face the difficult task of negotiating their scholarship within hegemonic academic structures that privilege Anglo-centric norms (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 2002). This navigation frequently leads to self-censorship, as their work is either deemed “too unfamiliar” for mainstream academic discourse or pressured into linguistic and epistemic assimilation (Canagarajah, 2002, 2024; Nigar, 2025). Canagarajah (2002) shows that rejection letters to multilingual scholars often cite vague criticisms such as “lack of

clarity” or “unfamiliar structure” – feedback that conceals implicit marginalisations conflating linguistic difference with intellectual deficiency. These exclusionary practices carry a profound affective toll, contributing to experiences of self-doubt, erasure and burnout (Dovchin, 2020; Nigar, 2025).

Hybrid Professional Becoming (Nigar, 2024, a, b; Nigar and Kostogriz, 2025) offers a fluid, negotiated approach for understanding how scholars navigate constraints while preserving epistemic agency across linguistic, cultural and intellectual contexts. Rather than passively conforming to dominant academic norms, hybrid professional becoming involves strategic negotiation, wherein scholars tactically engage with dominant structures while asserting their linguistic and epistemic identities (Makoni and Pennycook, 2006). *Codemeshing* – a practice of interconnecting multiple linguistic and rhetorical resources – offers a means of resisting monolingual constraints while maintaining scholarly legitimacy (Canagarajah, 2011).

To support authors in this process, institutions must invest in writing-for-publication workshops, particularly for scholars writing in English as an additional language (Lillis and Curry, 2010). Such initiatives should not focus solely on linguistic correction but should prioritise epistemic confidence, fostering an environment where diverse knowledge traditions are valued rather than erased (Dovchin et al., 2023).

5.3 For journals and editorial boards: implementing a relational peer review model

Attending to the affective terrain of peer review requires not only structural change but an epistemic reorientation – toward receptivity as proliferative, relationality as rigorous and critique as care. Editorial boards wield significant influence over how peer review functions, from the selection of reviewers to final decision-making. However, conventional journal policies often uphold exclusionary linguistic and epistemic norms, reinforcing barriers for non-Western scholars (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 2002). Moving toward a relational peer review model requires rethinking the role of editorial boards as facilitators of intellectual inclusion rather than as gatekeepers (Kubota, 2016).

Key reforms include.

- (1) **Diversifying Reviewer Pools:** Journals must actively recruit reviewers from diverse linguistic and epistemic backgrounds of experience and practice to ensure a diversity of perspectives in manuscript appraisal (Pennycook, 2002; Canagarajah, 2024).
- (2) **Encouraging Reflexive Reviewing:** Journals should develop ethical reviewer guidelines, emphasising non-hierarchical, constructive feedback that acknowledges experiential-practical epistemic diversity (Nigar, 2025; Dovchin, 2020).
- (3) **Allowing Translanguaging:** Editorial boards should recognise translingual academic writing as a legitimate form of scholarly expression, moving beyond rigid standardised monolingual norms (Canagarajah, 2011).
- (4) **Institutionalising Dialogic Peer Review:** Rather than binary accept/reject decisions, journals should adopt iterative review models that promote dialogic engagement between authors and reviewers (Li, 2021).

No one has yet determined . . . what a body can do. – Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part III, Proposition 2, Scholium (1,677, p. 155)

This provocation reminds us that bodies – textual, affective and intellectual – carry latent capacities for relation, resistance and reworlding (Spinoza, 1677; Ahmed, 2004; Gunaratnam, 2009). Reimagining peer review as a space where silence is heard, listening is rigorous and learning is co-authored across difference invites a more affectively attuned and epistemically transversal scholarly practice (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Canagarajah, 2024). Yet this vision must reckon with entrenched asymmetries of voice, labour and recognition that shape

academic publishing. As [Bhambra \(2014\)](#) and [Mignolo and Walsh \(2018\)](#) argue, standard language ideology is deeply entangled with the broader colonial architectures of knowledge – epistemic extractivism, institutional gatekeeping and capitalist regimes of value that circumscribe whose knowledge counts.

Some journals – *Feminist Review*, *English in Education*, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* and *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* – have begun reconfiguring peer review through multilingualism, relational review and citation decolonisation. Still, such moves often remain tethered to Western institutional logics. Ethical peer review, then, is not a settled endpoint but a situated, relational practice – negotiated within structural constraints and nurtured through multiple traditions of care, accountability and resistance ([Wilson, 2008](#); [Braidotti, 2019](#); [Icaza and Vázquez, 2025](#)). This approach resists reducing decoloniality to language alone and foregrounds how publishing is co-constituted by settler governance, extractive knowledge economies and entrenched North–South research hierarchies.

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