Critical Language Awareness and Student Vulnerability: The Case for Contextual Rhetorical Propriety

Cole Bennet
Abilene Christian University

Responding to recent articles on Critical Language Awareness (CLA), this essay considers local linguistic environments alongside attributes of moral philosophy from Adam Smith, humanist scholar and rhetorician. I introduce the term “contextual rhetorical propriety” to describe the significance of rhetors’ local contexts and circumstances, arguing that our field’s top-down emphases on translingual and antiracist pedagogies are eliding important considerations of propriety. I then recommend, as a pedagogical solution, the use of Smith’s Impartial Spectator as a critical interlocutor to help writers employ the appropriate blend of propriety and persuasion for their audiences.