

## The English Language and Linguistic Imperialism: The Trojan Horse?

*I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?*

Derek Walcott, *A Far Cry From Africa* quoted in Canagarajah (1999)

### Linguistic imperialism

The global spread of the English language can be seen as linked to linguistic imperialism, in particular, where English becomes dominant at the expense of indigenous languages. The spread of English may marginalise other languages since English can be a gatekeeper to education, employment, business opportunities and popular culture. Pennycook (1995) is suspicious that the spread of English is beneficial but points out that the language can also be appropriated and changed, in many cases (2001). Cooke (1988) uses the metaphor of the Trojan horse to describe the way that English may be welcomed initially in a country but then cause concern as it dominates the native language(s) and cultures. The English language, however, may be appropriated by other cultures. The emergence of new forms of World Englishes, with new rhetorical styles, has implications for language acquisition and language teaching. The pedagogic implications are important as different varieties of English become the norm for communication. In the Australian context, the varieties might be Aboriginal English(es) or Australian English.

Linguistic imperialism is an ever-present threat arising from the global spread of English, even when English is welcomed as a *lingua franca*. Phillipson's working definition of linguistic imperialism is that 'the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution

of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages' (1992 p. 47). On the other hand, there is constant reciprocity between globalization and localization (Pennycook 2001, p. 5). Language teachers, accordingly, should try to empower their students so that English does not exert a hegemonic influence over local cultures.

Linguicism is defined as ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (Phillipson 1992, p. 47). In the field of English language teaching (ELT) there is a demand for both kinds of resources.

## **World Englishes**

World Englishes are the global varieties of English in their distinctive cultural and sociolinguistic contexts. These fertile varieties of Englishes demonstrate the widespread influence of the English language. The rise of World Englishes has been investigated by Kachru and Nelson (1996) who point out that Asian and African nations have expanded the role of English, adding 'grammatical innovations and tolerances, lexis, pronunciations, idioms, and discourse' (p. 72). There are many dialectal varieties of English e.g. Australian, Canadian and American English and these can be regarded in a negative way if compared to Standard English (SE) or Received Pronunciation (RP). Yet Standard English is, after all, just one dialect amongst many. Indeed, Trudgill has pointed out the wide dialect distinctions evident in modern British English (1990 p. 328). *The Macquarie Dictionary* (1981) conveys the distinctiveness of the Australian accent in the pronunciation of words e.g. *garage* and in the lexis (or word choice) e.g. *drongo* (the name of a racehorse in the 1920s which never won a race). These differences are reflective of the changing nature of the English language in different contexts.

Niño–Murcia, from the University of Iowa, relates some recent attitudes towards World Englishes:

a nearly universal ideology in Peru manifests itself in the belief that “hard currency” cultural capital in the form of English competence is needed for technological advancement, employment opportunities, national progress and international travel. In education, there are increasing but ineffectual investments in public schools and a mushrooming private school industry. The struggle for linguistic distinction generates a low-level language war, where colonially rooted anxieties about race and class come into conflict with popular aspirations for social mobility’ (2003 p. 121).

Here, there are reasons stated why English may be favoured as an entrance into a more privileged world, contrasted with the desire to maintain local languages.

### **The English language as a Trojan horse**

Cooke (1988) uses the metaphor of the Trojan horse to describe the way that English may be welcomed initially in a country but then cause concern as it dominates the native language(s) and cultures. The metaphor builds on the historical story of the giant wooden horse, which concealed Greek soldiers who wanted to invade Troy. In modern computerese, Trojan horse programs are called Trojans (or remote access Trojans or trapdoors) where hidden programming is concealed which can later destroy data when they escape into other programs. Where antivirus software is used to combat computer Trojans, language teachers must find other resources. Cooke’s (1988) metaphor is a valid one, suggesting that colonialism and class interests threaten indigenous languages and act as a gatekeeper to employment and economic opportunities. There is inner conflict in the learning of English since it may carry unwanted ideologies and cultures, like a Trojan horse (Canararajah 1999, p. 3).

### **Implications of the spread of English**

Since language is the 'production, distribution and circulation of knowledge, linguistic and cultural capital (Dua 1994, p. 89) then there is the danger that vernacular languages are marginalised. The spread of English causes language change, often to the extent that indigenous languages are 'killed'. However the dominance of English can also provoke a resurgence of interest in local languages (cf. Welsh). Language change may be a conceptual change. Muhlhausler (1996 pp. 236-37) illustrates the conceptual differences in the perception of time as a cycle and time as an arrow: 'Culture in the former case is geared towards understanding seasons, lifecycles and the inherent nature of being whilst the arrow view emphasizes progress change and evolution. The latter is the standard view of literate Western societies today' (Muhlhausler 1996, p. 236). He points out that English may be introduced without thinking of the ramifications for the real needs of the indigenous populations, focusing only on the perceived needs of the government. The indigenous languages may lose prestige and this may lead to gradual language attrition.

Muhlhausler (1996) deplores the decline of linguistic diversity in the Pacific region: 'Linguists share the very human trait of not realizing that something is being lost until it is gone. I hope that they will grasp the last opportunities to learn from traditional languages and cultures before these are irretrievably lost' (1996 p. 308). He is quite specific about the effects of the spread of English, noting the erosion of languages and the loss of linguistic diversity: 'indigenous languages of the Pacific and Australian area are declining and dying at an alarming rate. Others, under the influence of video, mission and near universal schooling in English or French, are being progressively Westernized, particularly in their semantics' (1996 p. 337).

The Western media and the Internet are major agencies, which advance cultural imperialism. However, the Internet in particular can help to preserve

minority languages through its websites and ability to communicate information.

Cultural deprivation may result if the first language 'dies' but the language learner remains incompetent (or even fluent) in English. Speakers may believe they lack competence in both languages and find that this has important ramifications in their lives, affecting their social and employment opportunities. Non-native speakers of English may encounter prejudices: 'National identity should not be a basis of classification of speakers of an international language. The more English becomes an international language, the more the division of its speakers into "native" and "nonnative" becomes inconsistent' (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy 2001, p. 105).

English is increasing in areas of science and education (assisted by the Internet). Non-native speakers may experience discrimination in the field of international scientific publishing where the inner circles have the power. Ammon suggests that 'They should use their growing number as their argument, among others. In face of these numbers, rigorous enforcement of native-speaker standards amounts to the suppression of a disadvantaged majority by a privileged minority' (2000 p. 116). However, journal editors may invite and encourage contributors from minority groups, striving to ensure that their voices are heard.

The politics and pedagogy of appropriating discourses is a complex issue. Canagarajah (1999) writing as a Sri Lankan Tamil, advises the appropriation of English to the vernacular so that it is turned to the advantage of indigenous culture. Rather than rejecting English as the embodiment of colonialism, he advises reconstituting it (1999, p. 2) so that English can be used as the language of empowerment. Code mixing and switching take place for learners of English as they extend their repertoire of English in formal and other contexts.

## Pedagogic implications in the ESOL classroom

The pedagogic implications are important as different varieties of English become the norm for communication. A key question is what kind of English should be taught, gauging the relative need of learners for local varieties and/or Standard English. Intelligibility in communicating information, especially in the social context of informal exchange, should be seen as the initial aim. Adherence to a perceived Standard English may not be attained and/or desired by speakers. The ability to communicate in English is much more than a control of grammatical features and of lexis: paralinguistic factors and pronunciation are also important in communication.

Malcolm (1994) discusses the problems of communication between users of Aboriginal English and speakers of Standard Australian English. Malcolm describes Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) as 'unique at all levels of linguistic description. It is unmistakably English.... It is English adopted by Aboriginal people for the purpose of providing their own construction of themselves for living in a culturally ambiguous world' (Malcolm 1994 p. 291). Examples from urban/metropolitan Aboriginal English share features with English spoken by non-Aboriginal speakers:

1. Non-standard past and participial forms of certain verbs, e.g. *brang*, *ated*
2. have omission with perfect of *be*, e.g. *I been*
3. *was/were* reversed and other instances of non-standard concord, e.g. *I weren't*, *we was*
4. Plural of *you*, i.e. *yous*
5. *me and him*, etc. I subject positions, e.g. *me and him went swimming*;
6. Non-standard reflexives, e.g. *hissself* (Malcolm 1991, p. 73).

Kaldor and Malcolm (1991) indicate how Aboriginal English(es) and, by extension, other varieties of English, might be regarded:

These speech varieties were generally lumped together under such labels as 'pidgin', 'jargon', 'perverted', 'corrupt', 'disjointed' or 'broken English'. At best, they were dismissed as quaint manifestations of valiant but not quite successful attempts by Aboriginal people to speak English, and at worst, seen as varieties to be ridiculed and eradicated (1991, p. 67).

A similar view was evinced in the 1950s (and later) about the status of Australian English as 'a debased or inferior version of English' (Ozolins 1993, p. 14). Malcolm shows that 'despite the apparent isolation of Australian Aboriginal people, their dialect and their ways of using it, have much in common with what has been reported for other world Englishes' (1994, p. 300). However, these out-dated views are seen as out-dated in recent texts such as Crystal's *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

The appreciation of dialects should also acknowledge the recognition that Standard English dialects may be needed in educational and workplace settings. Adding Standard English to the language repertoire may be a goal for some learners if they can see that its possession confers social status and economic advantages. Learning English can be enrichment rather than 'an imposition on their value system, identity, and community solidarity' (Canagarajah 1999, p. 174).

### **Teaching/learning English in the ESOL classroom**

The language teaching profession can play a role by bringing critical awareness to bear on the question of linguistic imperialism. The following

recommendations reinforce teaching practices which can assist the second language learner.

1. Teachers need to show students that English has many varieties. Indeed, there are many varieties in regional accents even where there are relatively homogenous speech patterns, as in Australia. Pauline Bryant (in Romaine, ed. 1991) has shown the regional usage in the lexicon of Australian English. As Kachru states 'It is the vehicle of cross-cultural awareness that can be used not only to teach but to learn, in bi-directional ways, multicultural literatures, customs, and acceptance' (1986 p. 95). Students can check differences in varieties between writers/speakers of the English-speaking world and those where English is a second or other language. This might be done through studying excerpts from the literature of native and non-native speakers (e.g. Derek Walcott).

2. World Englishes reveal the many perceptions of reality and multiple experiences and can thus act as a medium for international understanding. Engagement with different kinds of English(es) can lead to a rich educational experience. Studying World Englishes will demonstrate how a range of speakers possesses different notions of conversation (e.g. introductions, closure, politeness markers). Appreciation of the diversity of Englishes demonstrates to all the great number of cultures in the world and the influence of context on language features. These can be found in spoken English from local speakers of different varieties. For example, the following authentic examples come from a language teaching video (Todd 2001):

"As a writer, I use Pidgin to communicate with the audience"

Playwright

"Mammy says I would've gone, and Nana says I woulda went" Four-year-old

"This is not a fable - it's a fact. I'm th' oldest woman in the hills of Tennessee" Senior citizen



“I find that I cannot use German to discuss feminism, because I learned about feminism through English” European

3. Teachers can show tolerance and acceptance of different rhetorical styles of English. For example, academic writing conventions in universities are sometimes imposed for reasons of uniformity and ‘past practice’. As Yamuna Kachru advises:

If the professionals in English education take a leading role in adopting a more socially realistic approach to academic writing, it will result in according respect (Cameron, 1992) to all institutionalized varieties of English. Unnecessary rigidity in prescribing a single linear pattern of academic writing, on the other hand, devalues rhetorical styles that represent the multiple voices of users of English in the world (Kachru Y. 1997, p. 345).

She points out that it is a kind of unacceptable behaviourism to change the rhetorical patterns of users of English who are not native speakers (Kachru, Y. 1997 p. 345).

There should be the recognition that English can be used for specific purposes and that teachers do not have to teach the ‘whole language’ with a perfect accent. The need of learners may be to learn only particular functions of language e.g. for scientific or business purposes.

Students may find the suggested format for an academic essay as constraining or in conflict with their traditional style of writing. For example, they may wish to have an introduction which states the topic in a more oblique fashion rather than a bald/bold assertion of what will be discussed.

4. Literature (poetry, drama and novels) written in World Englishes exposes students to new uses of language. Creative writers may regard English as a 'necessary sin'. Writers can appropriate English for their own uses. Authors (and their publishers) may argue that they can reach a wider audience and thus have a more powerful influence if they communicate in English. The domination of English allows for a more enriched existence because of the greater possibilities of interacting with other cultures. Learning English does not necessarily mean that the original languages are forgotten or dismissed. The creativity of different varieties is seen in Bolton (2000) when writing of literary creativity in Hong Kong English writing, indicating a vital culture e.g. Andrew Parkin and Laurence Wong (1997), *Hong Kong Poems*. The appropriation of English is evident when it combines with the local vernacular, adding to it expressions and vocabulary from English. The factors surrounding language change are well explained in Aitchison's text (2000) which shows that language change is not a process of either progress or decay.

5. Language teachers need to take care that tests and assessment practices do not discriminate against users of World English(es). Lowenberg warns: 'In order to assess this proficiency accurately, examiners must be able to distinguish deficiencies in the second language acquisition of English by these speakers (errors) from varietal differences in the speakers' usage resulting from their having learned such non-native norms' (2000 pp. 217-218). Therefore, to have validity, tests 'must accommodate the empirical fact that native-speaker varieties of English no longer provide the norms which all the world's non-native speakers – who now comprise by far the majority of the world's English users – attempt to follow (Lowenberg 2000, p. 224). More realistic goals about language learning are necessary, instead of having Standard English as the ideal to be attained.

Gupta states this position clearly:

the needs of the learners in using English are not to be seen as a need to interact with people from an inner circle country. There should be no innate hierarchies of American English, British English or Australian English. Different countries assign different values to the English language. It may be highly regarded because its possession can confer status, wealth, power and access to employment (1999, p. 70).

6. A positive affective environment is most important for students. In the classrooms, there must be a growing acceptance of the use of the first language and dialectal varieties: 'the rationale used to justify English only in the classroom is neither conclusive nor pedagogically sound' (Auerbach 1993, p. 9). It is likely that using the native language in ESL instruction will facilitate instruction in English and the transition to a wider repertoire of English. It helps to raise the self-esteem of students and thus leads to more effective learning, acting as a bridge to English. Use of the mother tongue may hasten the acquisition of English and allow students to draw on a wider range of language resources. It also shows that the teacher values the language of the students. Students may learn to value their variety of English when they understand that English is not 'owned' by the English speakers and those in the 'inner' circle.

## **Conclusion**

The global spread of the English language is pervasive as it is linked to education, politics, economics, science and technology, culture and the media. Active resistance to linguistic imperialism (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1996) is needed to combat the diffusion of English in those places where it results in inequalities and an imbalance of power. Where English is not the 'ancestral' language or that used by the majority of the population, learners can 'appropriate' English to their own purposes, adding to a richer language repertoire. The way forward is to promote the 'pluralistic identities

and hybrid discourses' desired by communities (Canagarajah 1999, p. 173). English language professionals in the ESOL classroom can play a crucial role by checking their own pedagogical practices. They can teach critical awareness about ideological domination and introduce strategies to validate indigenous languages. Teachers can also focus on the positive aspects of learning English, encouraging their students to communicate with the vast number of speakers of World Englishes throughout the world.

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