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Theoretical and pedagogical implications of the global spread of English

In this paper I argue for the importance of exploring the political, ethical and empirical underpinnings of different understandings of the global spread of English, and the different research or pedagogical responses that these understandings may imply. I shall focus on six different frameworks for understanding the global spread of English: colonial-celebration, a traditional view that views the spread of English as inherently good and beneficial for the world; laissez-faire liberalism, which views the spread of English as generally a good thing as long as it can coexist in a complementary relationship with other languages; language ecology, which focuses on the potential harms and dangers of the introduction of English to multilingual contexts; linguistic imperialism, which points to the interrelationships between English and global capitalism, 'McDonaldization' and other international homogenising trends; language rights, which attempts to introduce a moral imperative to support other languages in face of the threat imposed by English; and postcolonial performativity, which seeks to understand through contextualised sociologies of local language acts how English is constantly implicated in moments of hegemony, resistance and appropriation. The implications of these different frameworks for different research and pedagogical agendas will then be raised, including perspectives on the use of centralised or emergent standards and norms of English, problems with the pragmatic business-as-usual approach commonly advocated, possibilities for developing language awareness of global multilingualism, policy implications of support for education in local languages, and various classroom pedagogies to deal with the global position of English. Finally, if time permits, it may be useful to reflect on questions concerning the position of Spanish, both as a language in a complex relationship with English, and as a language with its own colonial and postcolonial histories.

Colonial-celebration

I do not intend to dwell on this position in detail since a number of us have already documented it at length (see, for example, Bailey, 1991; Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1998b). Simply put, this is a position that trumpets the benefits of English (or, of course, other languages in other contexts) over other languages, suggesting that English has both intrinsic (the nature of the language) and extrinsic (the functions of the language) qualities superior to other languages. I use the term colonial in conjunction with celebratory here because I believe these celebrations of the spread of English, its qualities and characteristics, have a long and colonial history, and form part of what I have elsewhere called the 'adherence of discourses' (1998b), the ways in which particular discourses adhere to English. Although I am giving this position short shrift here, it is worth observing that it is backed up by a very long history of glorifying English, and that it remains extremely popular, as shown by the public response to writers such as Honey (1997). Most importantly, this view has no place for a sense of diversity: to promote diversity is simply to deny people access to the most important language of our time, English.

Laissez-faire liberalism

The dominant academic line on these matters espouses what I call a liberal laissez-faire attitude. The most recent example of this line of thinking is David Crystal's (1997) overmarketed book on the global spread of English. What Crystal tries to argue for is a complementarity between a support for the benefits of English as a global means of communication and the importance of multilingualism, a balance between the dual values of "international intelligibility" and "historical identity". On one level, of course, this is an estimable position, a far more balanced view than the colonial celebratory line: we have all the advantages created by the spread of English: ease of communication, global travel and communication etc; while on the other hand we work to sustain local cultures and traditions. All we need in this way of thinking is to celebrate universalism while maintaining diversity. The TESOL organization also reflects this liberal idealism in its mission statement "to strengthen the effective teaching and learning of English around the world while respecting individuals' language rights".

Unfortunately the very seductiveness of this easy formulation makes its social and political naivety dangerous. Liberal laissez-faire views are inadequate because they fail to account for the power of English, and thus the inequitable relationship between English and local languages. One problem here is Crystal's simplistic view of complementary language use - English will be used for international and some intranational uses, while local languages will be put to local uses. As Dua (1994) points out, looking at the context of India, such a view is quite inadequate: "the complementarity of English with indigenous languages tends to go up in favour of English partly because it is dynamic and cumulative in nature and scope, partly because it is sustained by socioeconomic and market forces and partly because the educational system reproduced and legitimizes the relations of power and knowledge implicated with English" (p.132). The liberal stance uncomfortably echoes views such as those of Hogben (1963), who claims that all language planners agree that we need a bilingual world "in which one language has priority by common consent as the sole medium of informative communication between speech communities which properly prefer to retain their native habits of discourse for reasons which have little or no relevance to the exacting semantic demands of science" (pp. 28-9). As Dua (1994) cogently argues, such views immediately condemn other 'home' languages to a less significant role. This view is already one nail in the coffin of other languages. In the context of the relationship of English to Indian languages, he points out that "In order to bring about the fundamental change in the complementarity of English..., it is necessary to learn from the history of English. It must be realized that language is basically involved with class, power and knowledge" (p.133).

Language ecology

Drawing on Tsuda's (1994) distinction between a "diffusion-of-English paradigm" and an "Ecology-of-language paradigm", Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) argue that rather than accepting policies that promote the global spread of English, we should work towards the preservation of language ecologies. This notion of language ecology suggests the importance of "the cultivation and preservation of languages" (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1996, p.441) in a way parallel to how we understand natural ecologies. The notion of language ecology is in many ways a very useful one since it appeals to a notion of environmental protection that is shared by many. Most importantly, however, the ecological analogy shows how the introduction of languages and literacy into particular language ecologies may have devastating affects on other languages and their uses (Mühlhäusler,

1996). It is thus a powerful argument that mitigates against any simple view that one more language might not make a difference, or a belief that global English and local languages can live in happy complementarity. In Australia, for example, the introduction of European animals (rabbits, foxes, pigs, goats etc) into the delicate ecology of Australian wildlife has had devastating effects. This image then allows us to draw a powerful parallel between, for example, 'ferral' goats eating kangaroos and wallabies out of their natural habitats, and 'ferral' European languages destroying the rich linguistic ecologies of Aboriginal Australia. Taken alone, however, the language ecology metaphor is limited since it relies so heavily on a notion of what is 'natural' and therefore on what may at times appear a conservative notion of preservation. Conservation may easily slide into conservatism

Linguistic imperialism

A term that Skutnabb-Kangas (1988, 1998) makes central to her view of the inequitable allocation of language rights is 'linguicism'. Linguicism, she argues - akin to racism and ethnicism - is a sort of "linguistically argued racism" (1988, p.13; 1998, p.16), a process by which an unequal division of power is produced and maintained according to a division between groups on the basis of the language they speak. Phillipson has taken up this term and looked specifically at one form of such linguicism, namely what he calls "linguistic imperialism", and particularly English linguistic imperialism: "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). Phillipson tries to show that there are significant relationships between frameworks of global imperialism - that is to say continuing relationships of global inequality - and the global spread of English, and that the dominant role of English in the world today is maintained and promoted through a system both of material or institutional structures and of ideological positions.

Phillipson is generally very convincing in his demonstration of how English has been promoted and supported by a range of institutions, particularly the British Council. The important point with Phillipson's view, however, is to understand what it can and cannot do. As he suggests, this issue for him is "structural power" (p.72), not intentions, and not local effects. He is interested in "English linguistic hegemony" which can be understood as "the explicit and implicit beliefs, beliefs, purposes, and activities which characterize the ELT profession and which contribute to the maintenance of English as a dominant language" (p.73). Thus, it is the ways that English is promoted through multiple agencies and to the exclusion of other languages that is the issue. What this of course lacks is a view of how English is taken up, how people use English, why people choose to use English. Thus, it is perhaps the very power of Phillipson's framework that is also its weakness.

Language rights

Rather than an argument only for the maintenance of language ecologies, we now have an argument that languages are threatened by linguistic imperialism, and particularly English imperialism. "Unless we work fast", argues Skutnabb-Kangas (1998), "excising the cancer of monolingual reductionism may come too late, when the patient, the linguistic (and cultural) diversity in the world, is already beyond saving" (p.12). What is proposed, then, is that the "right to identify with, to maintain and to fully develop one's mother tongue(s)" should be acknowledged as "a self-evident, fundamental *individual* linguistic human right" (p.22). This, then, is a powerful argument in favour of the support for diversity in terms of fundamental

human rights. Where the versions I discussed above considered support for diversity in terms of pluralism for its own sake, diversity as a national resource, or language ecology as a natural balance of languages, the language rights argument supplies a *moral* imperative to support minority languages (and access to majority languages). It is the strength of this position that gives weight to Tollefson's (1991) demand that an applied linguist committed to democracy must also show "a commitment to the struggle for language rights" (p.211). Powerful though such an argument is, however, it relies on problematic assumptions about the necessary effects of English, and the possibility of working with a notion of universal rights (Coulmas, 1998; Pennycook, 1998a). As Rassool (1998) argues, the complex, interconnected nature of the modern world means we have to investigate other ways of looking at questions of language rights: "in the light of these dynamic changes taking place globally and nationally can the argument for a universalizing discourse on cultural and linguistic pluralism be sustained?" (p.98).

Postcolonial performatives

One further way of thinking about these questions is in terms of what I call postcolonial performativity. This view acknowledges the significance of all these last three perspectives - linguistic ecology, linguistic human rights, and linguistic imperialism - but in trying to explore further what I earlier (1994) termed the 'worldliness of English', it works with concepts of appropriation and performance. Thus it offers a political standpoint both on the structure of linguistic imperialism and on the agency of resistance. The notion of appropriation is crucial to postcolonialism, since a central part of the postcolonial is not only a critique of the 'metropolitan' categories of knowledge and culture, but also a taking over of and reuse of language, culture and knowledge. Postcolonialism also demands that we work contextually. What role English plays in particular contexts needs to be understood in terms of specific sociologies of those contexts. If we start to pursue such questions in terms of local contexts of language, it becomes possible to consider using English not so much in terms of some inevitable commonality, but rather - as with Judith Butler's (1990) understanding of gender as something performed rather than pre-given - as another form of 'performativity'.

Thus we need both a more complex understanding of globalization and a more complex understanding of language. Appadurai (1990) suggests the "new global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models" (p.296). This position moves towards the "conceptualization of global culture less in terms of alleged homogenizing processes (e.g., theories which present cultural imperialism, Americanization and mass consumer culture as a proto-universal culture riding on the back of Western economic and political domination) and more in terms of the diversity, variety and richness of popular and local discourses, codes and practices which resist and play-back systematicity and order" (Featherstone, 1990, p.2). From this point of view, both the liberal approach of Crystal with its global and local languages in mutual relationship, or the more critical view of Phillipson and others, with its local diversity threatened by global homogeneity, may be inadequate. Thus, while never losing sight of the very real forces of global capital and media, we need, at the very least, to understand the response to cultural spread and not assume its instant effects. As Claire Kramsch (1993) suggests, we need to start thinking here of what is produced in cultural encounters, not just homogeneity or heterogeneity, imperialism or resistance, but rather what 'third cultures' or 'third spaces' are constantly being created?

Pedagogical implications

These different paradigms for understanding the global position of English imply different forms of pedagogical response. I have charted these in simple fashion below.

Paradigms	Pedagogical/policy implications
colonial-celebration	Normative standards, English promotional
laissez-faire liberalism	Pragmatic, business/teaching as usual
language ecology	Language awareness for diversity
language rights	Education in local languages
linguistic imperialism	anti-imperialist policy development
postcolonial performative	Appropriation, contextual postcolonial pedagogies

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