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Linguistic Imperialism Continued

Author: Robert Phillipson

Publisher: Routledge, 2010, 288pp., £32.99

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Linguistic Imperialism (1992) has had a dramatic impact on contemporary English Language Teaching (ELT). It is unique – nothing quite like it had ever been written before and nothing has appeared since that confronts the discipline head on in the same way. It paved the way for research and writing of a more socio-political nature which locates linguistics within the field of social science, one of Phillipson's original aspirations. Critics often emphasize the language in which the ideas are presented rather than the content itself. As Terry Eagleton advises, 'always listen to the discourse as at least in part symptomatic of the material conditions within which it goes on, rather than a thing in itself' (1990, p.35–6). I focus on content in this review, as well as looking at possible reasons for the profound impact the publication continues to have.

At the heart of the controversy is that *Linguistic Imperialism* deconstructed accepted thinking in mainstream ELT and introduced groundbreaking insights into the global dominance of the English language. Historically tied to the post-1800 imperial conquests of the British Empire, and continued via acquisitionist aspirations from the US, English is presented as part and parcel of a desire to conquer. The original work explored how economic and political systems connect to English teaching and learning and how English teachers are implicated in the process of domination through methodological myths and theories in circulation about the language itself. This makes for uncomfortable reading if the reader is detached from the wider structures of ELT and believes that Phillipson intends to make them feel personally responsible. His goal is to hold the field collectively accountable and ask for fundamental change. *Linguistic Imperialism Continued*, as the name implies, suggests nothing much has changed since the preceding volume. This latest book charts developments in language policy and practice, EU integration, multilingualism and English in education since 1992. The overall message of the new publication is that robust language policy is necessary to protect the diversity of all languages.

Phillipson devotes substantial time in the introduction and first chapter considering responses to the original work made by key scholars in the field, such as Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (1999). Both argue that the transfer of English is by no means a one-way process and attest to the agency found in local contexts. Pennycook suggests that Phillipson's model of linguistic imperialism emphasizes the structural at the expense of the local/individual: Phillipson maintains that, 'the two levels, macro and micro, global and local, do not exclude each other, quite the opposite' (p.16). The precise balance is the key to understanding the work of both scholars, as they weave these two crucial factors together differently. The point of agreement is the need to 'decolonize our minds' (p.17) with a view to critical understanding of how ELT is shaped by political and cultural forces.

In the first chapter, Phillipson cautions that the study of linguistic imperialism is still relevant and necessary. The increase in English-taught university degrees found across Europe, as well as continued migration to the UK and US for educational purposes are presented as some of the structural reasons why English continues to dominate. A comparison is made between the rigid monolingualism of the nation state and the fluid multilingualism found in the pluralistic model, supported by Phillipson in his other work (see 2003). According to Phillipson, the ideology of the nation state is unable to incorporate or promote languages other than the dominant ones, which nowadays include English as the language of business and commerce.

In chapter two, Phillipson surveys the study of English as a world language. Whilst he embraces emerging varieties of English as positive, rather than as a deviation from the standard, Phillipson suggests there are limitations to the way English as a global language has been theorized. Notable in this chapter, is Phillipson's criticism of David Crystal's work. Phillipson points out that Crystal's unquestioning acceptance of English as the world's lingua franca at times sounds 'triumphalist' (p.37). The message is that language use should not be divorced from language users and that inequality and injustice need to be central factors in the formation of new standards – Phillipson refers to Crystal's World Standard Spoken English (1997) still based on native speaker models of English.

In chapters three, four and five, Phillipson explores language policy and practice, arguing that English is the de facto lingua franca in Europe despite claims to the contrary. He calls

for the end to the ‘conspiracy of silence’ (p.72) in ELT, addressing the widely held belief that linguistic imperialism amounts to a conspiracy theory (in terms of how English spread). Phillipson claims this reading constitutes a misunderstanding of how hegemony operates in practice (primarily directed at Spolsky’s (2004) work on language policy). Phillipson suggests the way English has been systematically promoted by EL business practices, quasi-government agencies and the geo-political interests of powerful countries such as the UK and US is generally ignored in such accounts. He concludes that if the study of language policy is not grounded in multi-disciplinary scholarship which recognizes these factors, it will remain superficial.

In the remaining chapters of *Linguistic Imperialism Continued*, Phillipson considers how English has become the language of the neoliberal empire. He suggests that English is tied to market forces both in terms of process and product. A useful breakdown of what language professionals can do to resist some of the identified trends above is provided; this includes campaigning and awareness raising, as well as investment in learning other languages, and moving away from a monolingual model in both personal and professional contexts. The whole concept of English as a lingua franca (ELF) is also addressed, concluding that the idea of English as a force of good representing development and progress is overshadowed by the destructive forces of globalization. A series of papers from scholars in countries as diverse as Greece, Hong Kong and Hungary provide contextualized responses to the key question regarding what impact ELF will have on local language and culture and whether it is in fact a ‘Lingua Frankensteinia’.

This book requires, above all else, an open and critical mind. On those terms, I fully recommend it as it offers updated insights and evidence into the destruction of language diversity in Europe and beyond. On a personal level I found it extremely insightful, as well as radical in concept. Like Phillipson, I also support the maintenance of language diversity and multilingualism and am not in favour of the default use of English in formal or informal contexts. I question whether enshrining these goals within language policy emergent from the very political structures Phillipson considers so problematic is the solution. This position has been described by Pennycook as ‘language fortification’ (2008, p.37) and runs the risk of reproducing new forms of nationalism in the name of diversity. English plays a role beyond educational or political contexts in questioning the structures of intolerance and oppression as (one of the) language(s) of anti-capitalism and revolution. In this context the notion of

lingua franca has the potential to produce new forms of thinking that seek to overturn the structures that produce the conditions for linguistic imperialism to continue.

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Biodata

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