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by juana saavedra

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James Stuart Jones

The Function of English as a Globally Universal Dialect

1 Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

As stated previously, the intent of this paper was to discover what the role of English is on an international stage. Specifically I explored what the views of many different linguists were regarding this questions specifically. After obtaining a baseline understanding of the presented theories, I then looked to English's influence on a society, specifically the Japanese. This allowed me to understand what effect English has had in the real world and, finally, ask what solutions there were to make sure that if we decided to use a universal language, how we could avoid imposing one particular culture upon the world through its implementation.

4.2 Views on the Role of English as an International Language

4.2.1 English is Imperialist

Primarily through Tsuda, Pennycook and Phillipson, the idea that contemporary English stems from imperialism and thus, the language itself, is an institution of such is realized. Tsuda describes the English language as “a serious problem causing injustices, inequalities and discriminations”, in *English Hegemony and English Divide*. (2008) He uses this article to present his “transformative” position, which expounds on the Phillipsonian idea of *linguiscism*: that a language can be used as a means of authority over another language; thus destroying the host culture in the process. In an earlier article, Tsuda describes this process as “linguistic chaos” in *Japlish leads to linguistic chaos* (1997). He maintains that nations should strive to maintain their unique cultural identity through preserving their host

language. This means rejection of a codified, common global language, because he identifies this as a method for larger, more dominant nations (the West) to control, politically and socially, periphery nations.

Phillipson constructs the idea that a language is a cultural tool for total hegemony. He suggests in his book *Linguistic Imperialism*, that language is used as a means of control and defines the process as *linguiscism*. Specifically he suggests that this language imperialism is not confined to replacing cultural norms, and allows the spread of new mental structures used as a guise in what we know as nation building or modernization. This helps affirm Tsuda's stance that English dominance globally is a threat to L2 cultures.

Pennycook subscribes to many of the Phillipsonian ideas regarding the global spread of English, however, he makes sure to distance himself from using the term *imperialism* or *imperialist* when describing its proliferation. Pennycook specifies this in *The World in English*: "[I wish to] avoid what seems to be a foreclosure of discussion and possibilities by naming the spread of English as linguistic imperialism". (2006:84)

All of these authors maintain that it is important for countries to facilitate, or at least study the impacts of English Language Teaching (ELT) in order to make an informed decision as to the spread of English in their society. Tsuda still maintains that even with these teaching controls, there should not be a truly global language, i.e. one that has been globally codified for use in all nations, as world cultures would be lost to it.

4.2.2 English is Democratic

The biggest proponent of this viewpoint seems to be Crystal; Tsuda describes him as the poster boy of the pro-hegemonic position and Crystal even uses the term 'democratic' in his book, *English as a Global Language*. Although other authors that tend to agree with

Crystal's ideas about the position of English as a universal communicative device, most do not use the term democratic to describe its global propagation. Crystal has defended his use of the word by saying essentially; it was the next most logical way of countering the argument for linguistic imperialism.

Bullock takes the idea of English as a democratic tool a step further by explaining that it is a question of honorifics. He argues that English could be described as too democratic (not in political terms) as it does not have any cultural system of address. He goes on to say, "It could be argued that the use of English enables a certain freedom to allow a person the chance to avoid certain social norms where other languages adhere too rigidly to socio-cultural positions." (2008) As English allows for such socio-cultural pluralism, he contends that English can be considered 'democratic' in this sense.

Essentially there is little scholarly opinion that subscribes to the notion that English, specifically, is democratic. It seems there is more material that describes the socio-cultural institution of language itself that has a democratising effect on central and periphery nations.

4.2.3 English is Neutral/Pragmatic

As discussed in chapter two, Graddol suggests that English has been an intermediary that has caused people the world over to consider it a culturally neutral. Although many scholars believe that any language will, in some form, carry with it cultural norms and rules of its origin and thus English is no different to any other language in this sense. The major difference here though is that English has seen the development of many types, or dialects if you will, of itself that suggest it is capable of more socio-cultural variation than most other languages. English has a certain adaptability that can cross all borders. Graddol and Sergeant both hint to English's adaptability and ability to be intertwined into local languages and

naturally develop in any context or surrounding in which it is used. (English in the Future, 2006) (English in the World Today, 2012) It has even been suggested by others such as Bisong in *Language Choice and Cultural Imperialism: a Nigerian Perspective*, that English has allowed authors to express their native experiences through the use of English, reaching far greater audiences than previously capable.

Furthermore, Crystal uses Singapore, India, the Phillipines, and Papua New Guinea as examples of cultures that have been able to implement the use of English, or some variation thereof, in everyday life whilst maintaining their cultural identity. (English as a Global Language, 2003) To those that believe English is a tool to propagate imperialist motives, this is truly contradictory. To this end, Sergeant suggests that with the diverse use of English globally, it has seen a re-conceptualization in an internationalist context through affordable world travel and easily accessible mass communications.

4.3 Influences on Societal Development

English has had, currently has and will continue to have a huge impact on the development of many societies the world over. As it would be impossible to answer the broad question of English's influence on all societies it has touched, I focused on its developmental influence on the country of Japan.

4.3.1 Japanese Society

Japan was considered as one of the peripheral nations from its downfall following World War Two. In its development since, it has considered adopting English as a secondary official language in order to facilitate the people's global literacy, i.e. their ability to influence and contribute ideas with the world. (Takeshita & Honna, 2005) Opponents to this, like Tsuda,

have concluded that there is no reason to diminish Japanese society or its cultural values by allowing English to invade the country. Tsuda makes this position very clear in all of his writing but particularly in his article *Japlish leads to linguistic chaos*, where he uses disease to describe the spread of English and ELT throughout Japan. He even goes so far as to say that English, the language, is capable of moving native tongue to the side and asserting Western dominance over any culture.

Honna provides a more optimistic view on the adoption of English in Japan, “Japanese people and organizations are becoming more aware than before of the reality of the importance of English as a language of international information, communication and cooperation.” (2006) He argues that the substitution of English words are important in Japan where some situations that call for description, the Japanese language cannot contend with. However, as discussed in the following paragraphs, Honna stresses the importance of proper ELT in Japan and around the globe in order to maximize local cultural preservation but allowing people to understand the purpose of English as communicative tool for the betterment of society.

4.4 The Future of English

There is no doubt that the station of English is not to be threatened by any other language to date. It is thriving in today's society and will continue to do so with ever changing technologies and the need for international understanding and compromise.

4.4.1 English Domination

There has been suggestion by Crystal (2003) of a threat to English dominance with the expansion of military and economic powers of the East, particularly in China and Russia, but in terms of language there is no competition. Considering that China has thousands of different dialects that are unable, mostly, to communicate with one another, there is no threat to the flexibility of English to be adapted to any society and understood over all borders. Russian will not withstand as even the youth from the former Soviet Nations are turning to the ease of use of English to communicate globally. The fact is that English has been proven to be more effective communicative tool than any other language.

McArthur (1998) suggests the closest English may come to being toppled would be if it disintegrated from within. There have been suggestions that because of its interoperability, it may be over developed like in Chinese, where there will be too many dialects that stray too far from the center thus creating too many hybrid forms of the language to maintain its integrity. This is seen even today as a movie from Britain, shown in the US is dubbed due to the changes and slang used by the British.

There has also been the Phillipsonian suggestion that English's domination maybe a sign of *linguicide*, where local or native languages will rot and die with the introduction and dominance of English in peripheral societies. Tsuda suggests that we are living in a time where you must speak English or find yourself out of luck. Although this is like saying that if you are connected to the rest of the world you are out of luck. As mass communication has expanded so to has Westernization, thus the spread of English is not in itself the perpetuation of Westernization or imperialism. The key takeaway here, is that cultural imposition of English felt by L2 societies is not the fault of the language itself. It is an imposition of nations on its people, meaning it is up to each nation, realizing the economic and political advantages of English, to retain its own national and cultural identity.

4.4.2 Language Planning

All scholars that have written about the role of English on an international stage have all concluded that though history has shaped English's spread and influence, this is possible with any language. In fact most linguists maintain that it is not just English that can project control over another culture when forced. Therefore all scholars suggest the need for standardized ELT and/or codification of the kind of English a nation wishes to use for global communication.

Codification, as suggested by Graddol and Crystal would serve to eliminate the chance for English to implode, becoming too many Englishes for the world to keep up with its adaptations. Crystal specifically suggests a global codification, a World Standard Spoken English (WSSE). There are already professional examples of this kind of English such as that used in air traffic control. The issue that arises here is under what authority would the language be implemented. Crystal suggests that a world council be convened to create these standards. Graddol suggests letting each country come up with their own curriculum to best serve their global communication needs. Considering the words of Tsuda and even Honnō, in Japan this would be the best solution for the country to allow its people to learn a version of English that would serve to allow them to contribute intellectually and socially on a global scale, but keep Japanese tradition sacred.

Ultimately, all scholars maintain that the goal is to allow English to be understood as a tool to be used in global communication only. Crystal describes that the challenge is to “maintain an international standard of intelligibility, in both speech and writing, can be made to comfortably exist alongside the need to recognize the importance of international diversity, as a reflection of identity.” (The Future of Englishes, 64)

4.5 Conclusion

In summary, we see that to understand the role of English internationally, we must look at how the language is viewed, whether it is used as a neutral means of global communication or an imperialist tool. Then we look to societies that have seen the influence English can have and finally we look to create the framework to teach English globally in a way that does not impede or stifle any culture or a population's cultural identity.

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