The Hegemony of English as a Global Language

Gulbahar Beckett, University of Cincinnati
Yan Guo

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5. THE HEGEMONY OF ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

A Critical Analysis

INTRODUCTION

English, the first language of about 400 million people in Britain, the United States and the Commonwealth, has become the dominant global language of communication, business, aviation, entertainment, diplomacy, and the Internet. As such, an estimated number of over a billion people speak it as their second or foreign language. These second- and foreign-language speakers of English include millions of migrant and immigrant English as a Second Language (ESL) school-age students (see Faltis, 2006) and over 560,000 international ESL university students in the United States (Open Doors, 2006) and over 137,000 in Canada (OECD, 2003). About a billion others in the rest of the world speak English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The estimated users and learners of English in China and India alone number over 533 million, more than those in the United States, the UK and Canada put together (Kachru, 2005).

These numbers seem to be increasing daily due to a new wave of migration as well as new English language policies around the world. For example, the governments of Saudi Arabia and Turkey have signed a series of agreements with US universities and have been sending students to the USA. Increasing number of countries such as China and Korea are requiring English as a foreign language at increasingly early ages (e.g., kindergarten). In September 2001, China decided to make English compulsory in primary schools from Grade 3 upwards. Cities such as Beijing and Shanghai introduced English at Grade 1 in 1999. China has even issued a historic policy calling for the teaching of some major university disciplines such as information technology, biotechnology, new material technology, finance and law through the medium of English (TESOL, 2006).

Governments as well as some scholars appear to be accepting such a spread and implementation of English uncritically. Some argue that, when taught correctly, English can be both integrative and empowering (Loomba, 1998; Warschauer, 2000). We acknowledge the empowerment of English language acquisition, as is the case with the acquisition of any knowledge. However, we argue that the increasing dominance of English language is contributing to the neo-colonialism.
and racism through linguicism by empowering the already powerful and leaving the disadvantaged and powerless peoples further behind (Beckett & McPherson, 2005), an issue that needs attention.

Specifically, we discuss how English as a dominant language worldwide is forcing an unfamiliar pedagogical and social-culture on to its learners, socio-psychologically, linguistically and politically putting them in danger of losing their first languages, cultures, identities, contributing to the devaluation of the local knowledge and cultures (Canagarajah, 2005). Drawing on the work of critical linguists such as Fairclough (1995) and Pennycook (1998), who have drawn our attention to the close relationship between language and power, we show how the global spread of English is not only a product of colonialism, but also the most potent instrument of cultural control (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995) and cultural construct of colonialism (Pennycook, 1998). We echo the critique of the spread of English as the “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 1988), which may impoverish indigenous languages and cultures (Cooke, 1988; Phillipson, 1992), and privilege certain groups of people while having an adverse effect on others who do not have as much access to English language learning (Pennycook, 1995). We show how these are manifested in reality, discuss the theoretical underpinnings of such manifestations, and call for a critical treatment of the dominance of English language by helping learners develop critical language awareness in order to contest and change practices of domination (Fairclough, 1995) and by reclaiming the local in this global phenomenon (Canagarajah, 2005).

This chapter contributes to the existing literature by adding specific examples from communities whose voices have largely been neglected, namely some Chinese communities in Asia and school age ESL students in North America. The chapter extends existing discussions also because we call for an in-depth analysis of the current EFL policies and practices and their direct impact on the social, cultural, economic, as well as political discourses of local communities. Our discussion of these issues responds to the call for these issues to be studied from local and critical perspectives (Canagarajah, 2005; Kubota & Lin, 2006). We echo Canagarajah’s (2005) call to develop “more inclusive and egalitarian language policies and practices” (p. xxix) and suggest some new strategies that may be used to develop policies and practices that enrich rather than replace local languages in these complex, post-modern times.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN? COLONIALISM, NEO-COLONIALISM, AND CAPITALISM

Our language is our greatest asset, greater than North Sea Oil, and the supply is inexhaustible; furthermore, while we do not have a monopoly, our particular brand remains highly sought after. I am glad to say that those who guide the fortunes of this country share my conviction in the need to invest in, and exploit to the full, this invisible, God-given asset (Chairman of the British Council, in the British Council’s Annual Report 1983-84, cited in Phillipson, 1992, p. 144-145).
Globalization is by no means a new phenomenon, nor is the spread of English language (Canagarah, 2005). The history of both may be traced back to hundreds of years ago to when various countries began to see the arrival of foreign visitors (e.g., the arrival of the British and the English language in North America and elsewhere) who started to colonize local peoples by imposing their language, culture, and religion upon them. Of course, the more recent spread of English is also linked to capitalism, as illustrated by the quotation from the Chairman of the British Council cited above, as well as the emerging neo-colonialism and Western cultural and linguistic hegemony that exploit and displace numerous people worldwide. This "[i]nexhaustible ... god-given asset"—the English language—is gaining a monopoly, attracting human and capital investments in economic exploitation and ideological and cultural hegemony, creating further inequality between the rich and the poor (see Beckett & McPherson, 2005) and promoting neo-colonialism.

The inequity and the neo-colonialism transpire in different ways and contexts. As English spreads to various corners of the world, the demand for native English-speaker teachers from the inner circle English-speaking countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States (Kachru & Nelson, 2001) is increasing, opening the world market to the "God-given asset" of the world’s already richest countries. The services of these teachers are expensive and therefore are affordable to the children of political and financial elites whose investment in education brings them greater political and financial power (Tri, 2001). Those who cannot afford the expensive services of native-speaker teachers resort to the service of non-native speakers with a high English proficiency (Beckett & McPherson, 2005). Such a practice creates a misconception that teaching English is better carried out by native speakers. This influences not only recruitment practice, but also the perceptions of non-native English-speaking teachers, by extension, non-native English-speaking students (Beckett & Stiefvater, 2008), who internalize the misconception of the idealized speaker of English (e.g., Braine, 1999). Such misconception and internalization often result in the formation of linguist and racist attitudes.

REQUIRING ENGLISH: DISPLACING THE LOCAL AND FIRST LANGUAGES

As a global language, English has become a requirement for descent employment, social status, and financial security in various parts of the world, including language minority areas whose inhabitants must learn the dominant language of their countries. For example, the Uighurs in the north-western People’s Republic of China are feeling increasing pressure to learn Mandarin Chinese as well as English for their basic survival, making local languages and knowledge irrelevant. This is pressuring parents to send their children to Mandarin Chinese and English bilingual preschools and Mandarin Chinese medium schools so that their children learn Mandarin Chinese, English, and academic subjects. This seems to be causing terrible social and psychological displacement as well as the loss of their first language, culture, and identity, as children learn the socially constructed "high"
value of the English language and the "irrelevance" of their first language at the young age of five. The local language shift and loss that accompany such curricular changes further undermine the sustainability of these local cultural practices and knowledge by creating linguistic, epistemic, and cultural disparities. In this way, changes in education and curriculum can have a dramatic effect on the sustainability of small, non-dominant cultures (MacPherson & Beckett, in press) that need to be addressed.

The socially constructed importance of English language acquisition has forced many well-educated intellectuals and professionals to migrate to English-speaking countries so that their children can learn English where it is spoken as a first language. Unfortunately, it does not take too long for them to realize that while their children do learn English and may never speak their first language, they themselves may have been permanently dislocated because they may not be able to regain their social status and dignity, as their English is not good enough and their experiences and expertise aren't recognized. Many are coming to realize that such choices are causing them real psychological damage.

REQUIRING NATIVE SPEAKERS: DISEMPOWRING LOCAL NON-NATIVE TEACHERS

Owing to colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism, migration, and immigration, English has become the language of all. That is, it is no longer the language of white people of British origin. People from all races and cultures can be native or advanced speakers of English. However, despite scientific evidence that native-speakeriness does not equal good teaching and research which does not suggest that all students prefer native speakers, there is still a prevalent misconception that English is the native language of white people and that it is better taught by them, which is evidenced in advertisements for English language-teaching jobs that explicitly state a preference for native speakers (Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, & Riazi, 2005), proof of linguist attitude. We have now started to see more and more advertisements that state a preference for native-like proficiency (e.g., see TESOL, 2007). While we see this as progress made in the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession, it is important to point out that the "native-like proficiency" construct is by no means neutral. In fact, we find it is often used to hide institutional racism that discriminates against people based on phenotypical features such as skin colour, eye shape, and facial features and promotes the white hegemony. ELT scholars have just begun to address and call for more discussions of this important issue (see Kubota & Lin, 2006). As is clear from the following example, further and continued discussion of this issue is indeed necessary.

Guo (2006) recounts her experience of an English language-teaching job application that showed the irrelevance of the native-like proficiency she had. While she was looking for a tenure-track position, she was also searching for temporary employment in language schools and colleges. She had received numerous rejection letters. This is one of the rejection messages she received from a language school:
Using words like “terrific” and fabulous,” our Head teachers told me you have an excellent knowledge of teaching and that they believe you are highly skilled. They also mentioned that your English is not quite perfect and gave me a number of examples.

The model we present in our classrooms must be flawless. This is because we expect our students to form and test their hypothesis about the way English works against the authority of their teachers’ use, and to otherwise base their acquisition on our faculty’s precise model. I expect that your English is better than many native speakers, though as yet, it’s not quite at the particularly high level we require of our teachers. We are proud of the few non-native teachers we do have and encourage you to contact us again once you’ve achieved that last step in your English.

As a speaker of Chinese and English, Guo’s credibility as a language educator was challenged in recruitment practice despite the fact that she held a doctorate in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from a prestigious Canadian university. Guo’s English was perceived as not quite perfect, or not standard for international students. However, as Davies (2003) reminds us, even native speakers’ communicative competence differs one from another, and the language of a speech community is perceived as a standard not because the language is the most perfect, but because the community has power, a possible explanation for the response to Guo’s applications to work in English language schools.

It is important to reiterate that native speakership is neither a privilege of birth nor of education, but “acceptance by the group that created the distinction between native and non-native speakers” (Kramsch, 1997, p. 363). Similarly, Thomas (1999) challenges the “birthright mentality” that gives in to “the fallacy that anyone who speaks a certain variety of English as a native language can teach it” (p. 6). An Indian-born medical doctor Abraham Verghese (1997) puts it nicely: We are “like a transplanted organ—lifesaving and desperately needed, but rejected because we are foreign tissue” (cited in Braine, 1999, p. xiii). Non-native speakers become constructed as less authentic, knowledgeable or legitimate (Braine, 1999; Kubota & Lin, 2006). Non-native scholars in TESL need to continue to argue for the legitimacy of their participation (e.g., Vargas, 2002). Do they always have to look at their non-nativeness as a deficit? Do they see themselves as an incompetent ventriloquist, or as a competent bilingual educator and scholar (Nieto, 2002)? How should they position themselves? Li (1999) notes:

Although our credibility and competence as English educators are put to the test every day and occasionally challenged by our colleagues and students, we are compensated with a larger and richer repertoire of pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural knowledge that only between-the-worlds residents are privy to (p. 44).

Non-native speakers’ other-ness is an asset, not a liability (Kubota, 2002). English is not their birthright, but it is their language, too. As non-native speakers, they could not claim authority over the language, but they can claim ownership of it (Li,
1999). As an owner of two or more languages and cultures, they can take advantage of "the vantage point of an insider/outsider" (Li, 1999, p. 43). Absorbing the best from both cultures, they can see their in-between experience as a condition of creativity.

REQUIRING EXPERT KNOWLEDGE: DISEMPOWERING THE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

As discussed earlier, the global domination of the English language has been exploited as a tool of colonization (Pennycook, 1998) and neo-colonialism. The central premise of linguistic imperialism is that the spread of English represents a culturally imperialistic project, which necessarily imparts English language culture to its second or foreign language learners (Melchers & Shaw, 2003). Currently, most English textbooks and readings in China, from kindergarten to university, either originate in the Anglo countries or represent Anglocentric culture in the name of authenticity. As a result, many Chinese students know more about the Anglo culture than Chinese culture. Some young Chinese students seem to internalize the belief in the superiority of Anglo culture and the inferiority of their own culture. The idealized West in authentic English reading materials needs to be challenged. There is a need to develop English reading materials that reflect Chinese culture. It is therefore important to produce localized curricula.

The spread of English as a global language also parallels with the promotion of English teaching methodologies. Many scholars question that mainstream TESOL methodologies are still mainly informed by studies and experiences situated in Anglo societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, or Britain. This Anglo-centric knowledge base constitutes the canons of the discipline and often gets exported to periphery countries as pedagogical expertise to be followed by local education workers" (Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, & Riazi, 2002, p. 307). For example, China employs numerous English native speakers as English teachers in public schools and as universities experts. However, many of these "experts" have no training in teaching English or education. Nevertheless, they are known as foreign experts and receive better treatment and status in institutions than local English teachers or Chinese speakers. These foreign teachers often apply communicative language teaching (CLT) methods, imported from the West, with little regard to its appropriateness in the sociocultural and political contexts of China (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996). Ouyang's (2000) anthropological study of a Chinese teacher who tried to apply CLT methods in her rural hometown in China, illustrated how CLT was constrained by local sociocultural forces. The teacher realized it was difficult for her to implement CLT in her school owing to lack of support from school authorities, peer teachers and students. The ideology that assumes CLT for more democratic, humanistic and egalitarian relationships between teachers and learners may become another form of oppression and control (Hargreaves 1993). This study suggests that Western teaching methods cannot be simply imported to China, and these methods need to be curtailed because of the sociocultural and political forces at work in the country.
“SAMENESS”: RACIST RHETORIC IMPACTING LEARNERS

The practice of neo-colonialism permeates the cultures and discourses of both the colonized and colonial nations. Neo-colonialism takes place not only in the continuation of the colonial construction of the socially constructed inherent superiority of the native speaker and expert knowledge, but also manifests through the “sameness” rhetoric, often used by some teacher educators, pre-and in-service teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) students in English speaking countries such as Canada and the United States. These educators claim they do not see colour; they see all children as the same learners; and that they treat all of them equally, indicating a belief that sameness means fairness. We believe this, too, is progress made through decades of multicultural education and consciousness raising. However, the very fact that faculty, pre-service as well as the practicing teachers themselves, continue to be predominantly white and not racially conscious (Johnson, 2002) poses limits to this attempt (Gordon, 2005) and undermines the sameness rhetoric. The sameness rhetoric also indicates insensitivity to racial differences—important aspects of immigrant children’s experience.

Very often colour-blindness is the problem in such an academic environment. Colour-blindness is not an inability to see colour, but a refusal, a resistance to see race, and a resistance to see the privileges conferred on white people. Many white educators do not recognize their own whiteness as a race, nor do they see the significance and implications it entails (Kubota & Lin, 2006). Gordon (2005) states:

Colorblindness occurs on both the individual and systemic levels. On the individual level the claim, “I don’t see colour. We are all just people” provides a way for individuals to absolve themselves of racism (Bell, 2003). The very recognition of race is assumed to be racist. The systemic level of colorblindness denies the institutionally mandated privileges and discriminatory practices associated with race. It denies “the system of rules, procedures, and tacit beliefs that result in Whites collectively maintaining control over the wealth and power of the nation and the world” (Sleeter, 1994, p. 6). It assumes an equal playing field.

Colour-blindness can be used to hide the prevailing idea of deficit thinking towards ESL students that many educators have (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Deficit thinking includes overgeneralizations about family background, low expectations, caring at the expense of academics, and a monocolural view of child-rearing practices and success. Many educators believe that many of their ESL students’ educational risks could be linked to sociocultural variables such as poverty, limited English proficiency, and racial or ethnic minority status. For example, some student teachers made comments like: “Today a lot of these kids are from immigrant homes. They have parents who don’t speak English.” As such, these generalizations particularly perpetuate the view that ESL children and families are deficient and in need of remediation. Deficit thinking permeates the general society, mirroring particularly in schools. School culture and climate lead to institutional practices that systematically marginalize or pathologize differences. While there are deep
and hidden prejudices, our experience tells us that a majority of teachers are caring and well-intentioned individuals who need help in understanding and examining views of ESL students.

**IMPLICATIONS: PROVIDING COUNTER-HEGEMONIC DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES**

Neo-colonialism creates a misconception that teaching English is better carried out by native speakers. A paradigm shift from the dominant dichotomies of either/or, like native versus non-native, to multicompetence is needed (Cook, 1992). In examining the idealization of the native speaker, Widdowson (1994) states, “when the emphasis is moved from the contexts of use to contexts of learning, the advantages that native speaker teachers have disappears. In essence, the native speaker teacher is better aware of the appropriate contexts of language use, not the contexts of language learning” (cited in Braine, 1999, p. xv-xvi). Having learned English as a foreign, and then a second, language themselves, non-native speakers can share their first-hand experience with their ESL students that a native-speaker that has not gone through the same process of learning a second language just does not have. They can be sensitive to the ideological and logical differences that their students experience. They also have translation and interpretation skills that a monolingual speaker does not have. Another privilege of their non-native background is

“the insider perspective on the immigrant experience, second language (L2) socialization, and bilingualism that allows them to walk back and forth across the divide in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) often separates ‘us’ (academics) from ‘them’ (L2 learners and users)” (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 182).

Monolingual teachers also need to be challenged to understand what it feels like to be an ESL student (Kubota et al, 2000). For example, a language shock activity where an instructor can use a language, unknown to students, to introduce total physical response is one of the ESL methods in a teacher education program. The students are asked to follow the instructor’s directions in that language. They are also asked to observe their classmates’ physical reactions and share their emotional responses at the end of the activity. This language shock activity provides an opportunity for the student teachers to experience first-hand what it is like to be an ESL student. We also hope that they will become more sensitive when they address the affective needs of their ESL students. As MacPherson et al (2004) suggest, teachers need to develop an intercultural ability, namely, moving “across cultures in a way that is tolerant of conflicting perspectives and deeply respectful of people’s lived differences” (p. 5). This intercultural ability requires that teachers move beyond learning about “other groups” to examine the cultural contexts that have influenced their own behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs (Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004). Teachers need to take a more critical stance toward language teaching and learning, examining issues of race, gender, class, and culture in
They need to challenge the superiority of English and value world Englishes, different varieties of English spoken by ESL students. White teachers need to acknowledge the white privilege and challenge their deficit thinking towards ESL students by discovering ESL students' strengths and developing students' bilingual/multilingual and bicultural/multicultural identities.

Educators need to recognize students' first languages and cultures as potential resources for learning (Chow & Cummins, 2003). Cummins et al (2005) present an example of successful bilingual education, the construction of an 'identity text.' It is a twenty-page story written by Urdu speaking immigrant children using both Urdu and English called 'The New Country.' Through their collaborative work, the students learned English with their L1 as a background and support. The children's identity and self-esteem have also been strengthened as they were encouraged to express it in their first language.

Schools and districts need to recognize that it is crucial to adapt the educational system to reflect its multicultural and multilingual community. Schools should adopt antiracist education, "an action-oriented strategy for institutional change to address racism and the interlocking systems of oppression" (Dei, 1996, p. 25). Schools need to analyze their own policies and practices—the curriculum, textbooks and materials, instructional strategies, tracking, recruitment and hiring of staff, and parent involvement strategies—that devalue the identities of some students while overvaluing others (Nieto, 2000). One way to adapt the educational system is to incorporate ESL students' home culture into the school curriculum. For example, ESL parents may visit the classroom to share their "funds of knowledge" or students may be given homework assignments that require that they interview their parents or their grandparents about their communities or their immigration experiences (González & Moll, 2002). This kind of activity helps to acknowledge parents' cultural values and make parents feel they can provide valuable contributions. This also helps students make better connections between the school curriculum and their personal experiences, which in turn will help students to succeed academically. Another way is to provide culturally responsive facilities for ESL students. For example, one of the local schools in Calgary provides ping-pong tables and badminton clubs for Asian kids as a way of helping students to adjust schools.

It is evident from the above discussion that there is a pressing need to develop a strong critical perspective on the impact of English as a global language and future English language-teaching policies and practices. That is, future policy should call for the reclamation of local languages and knowledge through critical multiculturalism and multilingualism. According to MacPherson and Beckett (in press), there are three prevailing philosophical positions that inform multicultural policies and practices around the globe: conservative, liberal, and critical. The
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conservative approach presumes the superiority of modern Eurocentric thought and education, and objects to socially diverse multiculturalism. Corresponding English language policies and practices are inner-circle native-English centric and prescriptive. It sees a need for all English learners to learn North American, British, and Australian English. The liberal position acknowledges diversity, but superficially focuses on the universal human “race,” a rhetoric of sameness that Kubota (2004) refers to as “political correctness with little substance” (p. 31). An alternative form of liberal multiculturalism is what Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) call “pluralist multiculturalism,” which sees differences in people and cultures. However, the cultural differences are often trivialized, exoticized, and essentialized as ends in themselves. Multicultural discussions and practices often involve “othering” with lists of how “they” are different from “us.” Linguistic discussions that attempt to teach native-like accents also often involve contrastive analysis that show how other languages are different from English and what may be done to eradicate non-native English accents. Such conservative and liberal approaches to multiculturalism and English language policy and practices erases systemic racism, linguicism and power inequities by perpetuating superiority and the superficial rhetoric of equality, diversity and political correctness.

As MacPherson and Beckett (in press) point out, critical multiculturalism makes explicit hidden or masked structures, discourses and relations of inequity that discriminate against one group and enhance the privileges of another. Criticizing ideology is central to the critical enterprise and involves “the attempt to unearth and challenge dominant ideology and the power relations this ideology justifies” (Brookfield, 2000, p. 38). As pointed out earlier, critical multilingualism calls for a critical examination of the relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; Pennycook, 1998) and how it can be an instrument of cultural control (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995) and a cultural construct of colonialism (Pennycook, 1998). It also draws our attention to how the spread of English is “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 1988), which can impoverish indigenous languages and cultures (Cooke, 1988; Phillipson, 1992), privileging certain groups of people while harming others (Pennycook, 1998). As such, it calls for a critical treatment of the dominance of English language, the development of critical consciousness (Fairclough, 1995) and the reclamation of the local in this global phenomenon (Canagarajah, 2005).

What do we do to implement critical multiculturalism and critical multilingualism? A paradigm shift from doing TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) to doing TEGCOM (Teaching English to Glocalized Communication) can be one approach (Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, & Riazi, 2005). According to Kraidy (2001), glocalization is a concept that originated in Japanese agricultural and business practices which means global localization, a global outlook adapted to local conditions. Glocalization emphasizes the interaction of both global and local forces in specific sociocultural contexts where local actors can claim their ownership of English and act as active agents to engage in different creative practices. Such a paradigm shift, coupled with critical multiculturalism and critical multilingualism, can become an intellectual enterprise aimed at
deconstructing and reconstructing language to generate a more equitable world (MacPherson & Beckett, in press).

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Yan Guo  
*University of Calgary*

Gulbahar H. Beckett  
*University of Cincinnati*