The Global Spread of English, "Linguistic Imperialism", and the "Politics" of English Language Teaching: A Reassessment of the Role of English in the World Today

Bijoy Lal Basu

[Abstract]

The global spread of English and the resultant explosion of English Language Teaching in many parts of the world have been termed as "Linguistic imperialism" by Phillipson (1992). According to his theory, English has been cleverly promoted around the world by the British and American agencies with the sole intention of increased profit and continued domination of third world countries. This view also holds that this spread is detrimental to the local languages and cultures. Many other scholars and academics from all over the world have joined the debate bringing to the fore issues such as nature of domination, ways of resistance, cultural and linguistic hybridity and pluralization, identity politics, representation and appropriation of English, etc. The reactions to Phillipson's top-down structural view of domination have thus been marked by competing narratives and interpretations. In this paper I review the debates and make an attempt to characterize the opposing positions pertaining to the global spread and role of English today.

The concept of "linguistic imperialism" took the English Language Teaching (ELT) world by storm when Robert Phillipson's ground breaking book by the same name appeared in 1992. Before then, there was no serious challenge to the idea of English as an international language serving as a *lingua franca* as well as offering access to global knowledge, science and technology. Phillipson, however, draws attention to the "dominance of English" and "structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (p. 47). He talks about the negative effect on local languages of the presence of English. Phillipson is also the

first to focus on the role the ELT profession plays in "promoting the *rules* of English and the rule of English" (p. 1). Who has benefited most from the explosion in the ELT profession? – He asks. Thus he raises probing and uncomfortable questions and makes us wonder if we, English language teachers in the "periphery"[1], are also complicit in this "neo-colonialism" as we are implicated in teaching the language of the former colonial masters. Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism thus opened up a debate which has since drawn comments, opinions from several scholars including ELT professionals.*

A working definition of "linguistic imperialism" provided by Phillipson (1992) is as follows:

> Linguistic imperialism is the process by which the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. (p. 47)

Here, Phillipson uses the word "structural" to refer to "material properties" such as financial allocations and institutions. The word "cultural" on the other hand is used to refer to "ideological properties" such as attitudes and pedagogic principles. According to this definition, therefore, English linguistic imperialism involves both material and ideological domination of English over other languages and cultures.

In this paper I will first take on board the main arguments provided by Phillipson. I will then move on to consider the viewpoints of other scholars who may align with or depart from Phillipson's position. In doing so, I will focus on the role of English and the implication of teaching English as a second or foreign language in different geopolitical contexts. Overall, I will make an attempt to capture the debate on "linguistic imperialism" and provide an up-to-date analysis from a mainly "periphery" perspective.

Key Arguments in *Linguistic Imperialism*

a) English kills off other languages: According to Phillipson (1992), English is both "replacing" as well as "displacing" other languages (p. 27). To support his argument that English is indeed replacing local languages, he refers to a study which shows how Chamorro, the local indigenous language of Guam, has been virtually neutralized by English, even though it was the declared official language. That English is displacing local languages, on the other hand, is evidenced in the Scandinavian context where English is gradually taking over in certain domains, such as science and technology, entertainment, etc. In many schools in post-colonial contexts, mother tongues are discouraged and ignored in favour of English. English is the language students in those schools aspire for because that is considered as an instrument for social upward mobility and power. The local languages are thus gradually and systematically "phased out" (p. 28). He quotes quite a few African scholars such as Mateene, Bokamba and Tlou, Rubagumya to support this claim.

The fact that there are so many writers in the Periphery who are writing in English rather than in their mother tongues is also explained in terms of his theory of imperialism and power -- it is because the pull of the Centre has been so strong that those writers could not exercise their creativity in their mother tongues. Furthermore, the corollary of the spread of English, according to Phillipson, is not just limited to this replacement or displacement of one language by another but "the imposition of new *mental structures* through English" (p. 166). Implicit in Phillipson's argument is the view that it is not possible to impart the language without assimilating the values embedded in the language, a view that aligns with the strong linguistic determinism of the "Sapir Whorf Hypothesis".

b) Inequality between English and the local languages: Phillipson points out that many inequalities -- both structural and cultural -- exist between English and the local languages in many regions and the result is that English receives the larger share of material resources ahead of the other local languages. The situation is one of "subtractive Bilingualism" as English advances at the expense of local languages. In India, for example, the dominance of English thwarts the natural multilingual developmental process. Phillipson (1992) uses the term "linguicism" to characterize this phenomenon.

Linguicism, claims Phillipson, is like sexism in the sense that language is the means for effecting and maintaining an unequal allocation of power, much as that between men and women. For him, English linguistic imperialism is one example of "linguicism", a sub-type of it, which he defines 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)

British involvement in a great deal of educational planning for underdeveloped countries, as Phillipson argues, has been characterized by "ignorance of local realities" and "anglocentricity". The effect of planning decisions, for example, has been that teacher training is provided only in English, to the exclusion of other languages and in language teaching the experience of multilingual countries elsewhere in the "periphery" such as in India, or the USSR has been ignored. The goal of the Periphery countries becoming self-sufficient has thus been made dependent on the authority and example of the "centre". In the neo-colonial phase of imperialism, Phillipson argues, inter-state actors from the Centre and representatives of the elite in the Periphery who are 'themselves the products of colonial education' are key agents of this linguistic imperialism.

c) ELT was masterminded as an 'imperialist' structure and it only caters to Centre interests: In *Linguistic Imperialism* Phillipson launches a scathing attack on the "ELT enterprise" for only serving British American interests. For him, ELT professionalism is nothing but an attempt to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce the same dominant – dominated

relationship. It is because the methods adopted in ELT, the principles and procedures, the theories of language learning and teaching excludes "broader societal issues, the prerequisites and consequences of ELT activity".

The professional discourse around ELT *disconnects* culture from structure by limiting language pedagogy to technical matters, that is, language and education in a narrow sense, to the exclusion of social, economic, and political matters. (p. 48)

The propagation of audiolingualism, for example, was itself the result of a combination of cultural and structural factors and it had both cultural and structural implications. Phillipson questions why a British or American norm should be considered as "global" for the Periphery and casts doubts over the validity of expertise from English-speaking countries, over local knowledge and expertise. ELT thus comes in for criticism for ignoring the diverse world contexts in which it was to operate.

Curriculum design and textbook writing are also identified as aspects of ELT that reflect "media imperialism" (p. 62). As Phillipson clarifies, the Periphery depends on the technology and professionalism of the Centre, and the Centre products are also made available in the Periphery. Thus instead of trying to find "more appropriate local solutions", the Periphery adopts and only manages to reproduce the Centre institutions and practices in the end. ELT "aid", in the same way, through training and education only serves to diffuse an "occupational ideology". Phillipson also expresses doubt over the extent to which ELT aid has been successful in making Periphery ELT professionals adept at writing textbooks or designing syllabuses. He concludes that the Centre aid agencies have only created continued dependence of the Periphery on the Centre.

Phillipson uses Galtung's parallel to compare "linguistic imperialism" with economic, political and military imperialism. Within this imperialistic structure only the Centre holds the monopoly of "expertise and theory-building" and the "beneficial spin-offs" would also accrue to the centre (p. 179). The tenets of the Makerere report (conference held in Uganda in 1961) that represented influential beliefs in the ELT profession -- termed as 'fallacies' by Phillipson (p. 185) -- are worth mentioning here:

- The monolingual fallacy – English is best taught monolingually.

- The native speaker fallacy – The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.

- The early start fallacy – The earlier English is taught, the better the results.

- The maximum exposure fallacy – The more English is taught, the better the results.

- The subtractive fallacy – If other languages are used much, standards of English will drop.

Phillipson goes on to question the validity of these assumptions which clearly point to "the issue of power and control". According to Phillipson, the four central processes in imperialism – fragmentation, marginalization, exploitation, and penetration – are all evident in the creation of ELT.

Did the British Council have a master plan for extending ELT and through it, maintaining British influence worldwide? – asks Phillipson and provides evidence to suggest it was so. He also dismisses the claim that ELT has never been forced on people as too facile. He cites the assessment by Bernard Lott, a key policy-maker, to argue that ELT efforts have largely been determined by supply rather than demand. Again, Makerere and other conference reports too are drawn on to provide further proof that the demand for ELT in the Periphery was "largely created and orchestrated by the Centre, and reflected Centre perceptions of what was needed in the Periphery' (p. 301). Phillipson also recounts how the British Council took steps to set up the School of Applied Linguistics at Edinburgh University in 1957 by supplying students which was made up of its own career-ELT staff and "foreigners on scholarships" (p. 174). Despite the absence of explicit articulation of official policy, Phillipson argues, all inter-state actors and activities have implications of a structural and ideological kind. Thus the British Council promotion of ELT is "part of a structure which facilitates the operation of English linguistic hegemony".

Arguments in Linguistic Imperialistic Discourse

Phillipson (1992, p. 271) considers the types of argument that are used to promote English, and relates them to a theory of power. The arguments are, as he reveals, based on hegemonic beliefs. Phillipson categorizes the arguments into three sets, relating to

- capacities: English-intrinsic arguments, what English *is:* that English is rich, varied, noble, interesting, God-given, civilizing, etc. Other languages are seen as not possessing equivalent qualities which demonstrates the underlying linguicism of innateness.

- resources: English-extrinsic arguments, what English *has:* that includes material resources such as textbooks, dictionaries, grammar books, a rich literature, trained teachers, experts, etc as well as immaterial resources, such as knowledge, skills, know-how, etc. These arguments are frequently dovetailed with the potential cost of building up similar resources in indigenous languages to create a discourse of hegemony.

- uses: English-functional arguments, what English *does:* that English provides access to modernization, science, technology, etc. and unites people within as well as across countries. In academic and political discourse labels such as "world language", "international language", "link language" are often used to describe English which suggest by implication that other languages 'lack these properties or are inferior' (p. 281).

These arguments articulated in academic and political discourse, as Phillipson clarifies, interact with popular sentiment and in the process become part of "common sense" which "typifies hegemonic beliefs and practices" (p. 271). Thus the explicit and implicit values, beliefs, purposes, and activities which characterize the ELT profession and which contribute to the maintenance of English as a dominant language are termed as "English linguistic hegemony" by Phillipson.

d) Linguistic Human Rights: Phillipson (1992) argues that we need to talk of linguistic rights as part of wider human rights. He argues that one way we can campaign for greater justice for all those speakers of dominated languages is by mobilizing "supranational human rights covenants in their favour" (p. 93). He cites a UN survey which concluded that most minorities were in need of substantial protection including linguistic ones. The report also stressed that one way of protecting the minority languages was by promoting them through education provided through the medium of the mother tongue for maintaining linguistic and cultural vitality. All this was necessary because there was "abundant evidence that groups and individuals are deprived of their linguistic human rights, and that language shift occurs as a result" (p. 94).

Post–*Linguistic Imperialism* Debate

Reactions to the global spread of English have been varied. Marnie Holborow (1999, pp. 53-54), for example, categorizes those into three schools: some welcome it like the British council which approaches it with "bland optimism", some cautiously welcome it, others are resolutely opposed to it as they see it "as a new kind of imperialism" which thrives on "social inequality, discrimination, and cultural imperialism".

In the following section I consider the perceived role of English in today's globalized world from a mainly post-colonial and Periphery perspective. We can identify three schools of thoughts in this regard which may be roughly characterized as

- The pluralization view
- The lingua franca view, and
- The resistance view

a) The Pluralisation view: This view broadly argues that English can peacefully co-exist with existing local languages which are not threatened by English. English is seen as a useful global language rather than as in any way replacing existing languages. Joseph Bisong (1995) takes this position in an article which specifically takes on Phillipson's line of argument, and aims to counter it in the context of Nigeria at least.

From this perspective, the minority languages are not threatened at all; a child with an indigenous background will acquire full proficiency in his mother tongue even if he attends

an English medium institution. As Bisong explains, there is no way a few hours of schooling in English would compete with the continuous acquisition of the mother tongue from the environment. In Nigeria, multilingualism is the norm, not monolingualism and the child will actually probably learn one more local language from his peers as well as English making him a multilingual. English is therefore just an addition to the repertoire of a Nigerian child. Similar sentiments are expressed by Bangladeshi scholar Fakrul Alam who argues that his middle-class parents sent him to an English medium school not just because "the best jobs would go to people who were most fluent in English", but also because "I would eventually pick up Bengali from the world I lived in" (2007, p. 373).

Against Phillipson's argument that the indigenous cultures in the periphery are threatened and marginalized, Bisong (1995) contends that that is not the case. The culture itself is not threatened – they are sophisticated enough to know what to take from Anglo-European culture. Thus a new culture is emerging which takes elements from western culture but the basic structure is still African. When writers like Achebe compose in English, Bisong explains, it still captures and reflects Nigerian culture and life-style. In this regard, he quotes Bamgbose who argues that a distinct Nigerian variety of English is emerging to express Nigerian culture.

Bisong has a different explanation too as to why writers like Achebe have chosen English rather than their mother tongue for creative writing. He believes it is because "his choice of language was forced on him by his own creative instincts". Besides, there are others writing in the vernaculars so there will be a blending of the two ensuring that "our ethnic literature will flourish side-by-side with the national ones" (p. 129). The following quote from Achebe seems to confirm this analysis:

> I feel that my English will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. (cited in Crystal, 2005, p. 184)

Not everyone, however, is convinced this is the case. Ngugi wa Thiongo (2007), for example, points out that language and culture are inseparable, and that therefore the loss of the former results in the loss of the latter. Ngugi seems to be concerned with preserving the specificity of his individual groups in the face of homogenizing forces of neo-imperialism.

> Way forward? Bisong's position is clear -- no nation can escape its history, so there will certainly be some degree of dominance of the colonial language – but we should look at what is happening now rather than what happened in the past, how English came to be what it now is. We must look forward. While acknowledging the negative intent and consequences of colonial history, Bisong feels that in contemporary African society English has assumed a different role. Thus his is a more optimistic view of how the cultural capital which English represents can be harnessed by periphery subjects to their own ends. Chew (1999) in the same vein argues that a "pragmatic multilingualism" is in existence in Singapore "where the population has knowingly

done a calculation and views the adoption of English not so much as a threat to their own languages but as the key to a share of the world's symbolic power" (p. 47).

In his response to Bisong, Phillipson (1996), however, reaffirms his position claiming that the notion of stigmatization of African languages indeed comes from African sources, and that displacement is a reality as "diglossia condemns dominant African languages to the private domain" (p. 162). As for the medium of instruction, Phillipson critiques Bisong for ignoring the fact that "the linguistic pecking order favours literacy skills and academic competence in one language rather than another" (p. 166). Holborow (1999), commenting on the spread of English, notes that the dominance of English has its roots not in the recent technological innovation but in the power of capital and while English seems to be everywhere, it does not seem that way to everyone (p. 59). This provides a less rosy and indeed more problematic picture of multilingualism in the third world context than Bisong's account does in Nigerian context.

b) The Lingua Franca view: This view shifts the focus away from the context and function of English to the "form" of English which might serve to challenge the dominance of Centre models based broadly on Standard British or American English. Linguists such as Jennifer Jenkins (2000) and Barbara Seidlhofer (2002) make a case for legitimating a variety of English which they call English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) which non-native speakers use to each other, on the ground that, worldwide, non-native speaker/non-native speaker interaction is far more common than contacts involving native-speakers. The argument has it that speakers in "expanding circle" countries as well as in "outer circle" countries should be permitted to be "norm creators" rather than simply taking their cue from centre models of English.

Looking at the phonology of English from an International perspective, Jenkins (2000) advocates a new approach to English pronunciation teaching, in which the goal will be not the imitation of native speakers but facilitating intelligibility among non-native speakers. She examines how speakers of English as an International Language (EIL) behave phonologically and what features of pronunciation cause intelligibility problems with the purpose of establishing "a set of nuclear core" for all L2 speakers of English which will facilitate the increased use of EIL. Jenkins (2003) lists the "Lingua Franca Core" which includes both the core and the non-core features.

Seidlhofer (2002), in the same way, advocates a "lingua franca model" as norm or target in the European context. Complementing the work on ELF phonology and ELF pragmatics done by predecessors, she argues that it is necessary as well as feasible to describe and establish the salient features of ELF, a task she has actually taken upon herself. The VOICE database she has been developing, which documents the uses of English as a lingua franca in unscripted face to face communication by fairly fluent speakers in a number of European countries, is part of the effort to look at the syntax as well as phonology of this reduced and "decultured" variety of English.

Marko Modiano (2001), aware of the threat of linguistic imperialism, argues in the same vein that promoting or teaching one British or U.S "prestige" variety serves to marginalize the users of other varieties. This also perpetuates the negative impact which foreign language learning can have on the "cultural integrity of the learner" as this presents English as "culture-specific" and "the property of the native-speaker contingency" (p. 340). Modiano suggests teaching and learning of a geographically, culturally, politically "neutral" form of English and advocates using English simply as a communicative tool for the "conservation of cultural pluralism" (p. 345).

Finally, although the ELF movement is rapidly gathering momentum, it is not certain if this emerging variety can actually achieve enough stability, consistency or global reach to be institutionalized for teaching. Even if this variety were codified in dictionaries or grammars, the issue of face validity would remain, for who can guarantee that ELF will necessarily meet the aspirations of our learners, regarding their English language goals? An interesting sociolinguistic phenomenon as it is, the suitability or desirability of ELF as a model of teaching can still be questioned.

c) The Resistance view: Finally, the resistance view as typified by Pennycook, Canagarajah and Wallace talks of "appropriating" English to "write back" or "talk back". Considering Phillipson's notion of "English Linguistic Imperialism" in depth, Pennycook (1994) observes that Phillipson has not been able to adequately consider how English can be used in diverse world contexts. Taking a more postmodern and flexible position than Phillipson, Pennycook argues that we need not be straight-jacketed by current forms, meanings and functions of English. Pennycook (1994) concedes that Anglo-American expansion and the expansion of English have gone hand in hand, but he also emphasizes the power of human agency pointing out how writers such as Achebe, Baldwin, and Lim have had an impact not only on readers in their homeland, but on readers around the world. Thus we can reshape the language to our own purposes and challenge the dominant discourses of English, those which carry its colonial past. Just as English is the language of world capitalism, he argues, it is also the language of opposition and protest.

> Pennycook (1994) prefers to see the role of English vis-a-vis other languages in terms less of absolute dominance than of "linguistic curtailment". Pennycook observes that English does pose a direct threat to the existence of other languages in many contexts, such as in Guam. As the preferred choice as a second language, English is "constantly pushing other languages out of the way, curtailing their usage in both qualitative and quantitative terms" (p. 14). Pennycook qualifies the position of Phillipson which argues for a strongly transmission effect of culture and knowledge from the Centre to Periphery countries. According to Pennycook, culture and knowledge cannot be transported like coal transported to other countries. We do not take cultural meanings wholesale via the language.

Pennycook (1994) thus challenges the deterministic thesis that defines the spread of English as "a priori, imperialistic, hegemonic, or linguicist" (p. 69). He takes up an anti-deterministic stance and contends that the specific context of situation should always be taken account of. Pennycook challenges Phillipson's stance on countries such as Singapore. While Phillipson argues that English was established as a language of power, many Singaporean commentators would dissent from Phillipson's rather bald characterization. Chew (1999) for instance, sees English as offering linguistic capital not just for an elite but the wider population and argues that a "pragmatic multilingualism" is in existence in Singapore "where the population has knowingly done a calculation and views the adoption of English not so much as a threat to their own languages but as the key to a share of the world's symbolic power" (p. 47).

Rajagopalan (1999), in his response to the theory of Linguistic Imperialism, contends that Phillipson's theory which has necessarily created "the guilt complex" among EFL teachers from a "suspicion of complicity" is "totally misguided", and therefore EFL teachers need not feel guilty of "being complicit in a gigantic neo-colonialist enterprise in the guise of emancipatory pedagogy" (p. 205). It is foolhardy, he maintains, to expect such power inequalities can be rectified or done away with once and for all, since all societies are riddled with 'indispensable inequality'. Canagarajah (1999) agrees with Rajagopalan (1999) that Phillipson's theory has the potential to afflict teachers with "a false sense of guilt". In consonance with Rajagopalan he also debunks Phillipson's conception of identity as exclusively and solely constructed by English or the vernacular as "individuals and communities can accommodate a range of languages and cultures and construct alternate pluralized identities". "Linguistic Imperialism", he asserts, views domination in a unilateral and simplistic way as it ignores how "linguistic and cultural conflicts are highly mediated encounters, with the values and traditions of the local communities filtering or negotiating dominant discourses in unpredictable ways" (p. 207).

Thus Phillipson's theory, Canagarajah (1999) points out, is not sensitive to the many outcomes other than domination – such as the way discourses can be modified, mixed, appropriated and even resisted. "Linguistic imperialism" does not fully consider the critical consciousness that subjects possess and employ to negotiate domination. What is important for Canagarajah is that institutions, communities as well as subjects can exercise a relative autonomy to deal with dominating discourses and work out for themselves alternate meanings, statuses and uses (p. 208).

However, Canagarajah (1999) also warns us against the rhetoric of "linguistic hybridity" which could lead one to apathy towards domination, as Rajagopalan's account does. Canagarajah (1999) is aware that linguistic hybridity and fluid identities still do not "automatically invalidate the conditions of imperialism" as highlighted by Phillipson (1992), as societies and schools can and often do fix certain negative identities on minority students and discriminate against them accordingly (p. 209). Canagarajah's position is a more active one than Rajagopalan's as he

warns that "English still draws communities towards greater globalization and homogeneity" and calls for challenging and resisting English linguistic hegemony in order to ensure the integrity of minority communities. Unlike Rajagopalan (1999), Canagarajah (1999) sees the role of the classroom teacher as an "informed intellectual" rather than just a skilled technician busy with the "immediate tasks at hand within the narrow walls of the classroom or the pages of the textbook" (p. 210). Thus he is optimistic that it is possible for teachers to "exert their agency" and effect simple yet significant changes in and outside the classroom. Pennycook too envisions this role of teachers when he calls for "working towards social transformation" (p. 299).

Pennycook (1994) also posits the possibility not of a new variety of English but a new kind of English which will serve as a counter discourse to the dominant discourses in which English is implicated in power relations. This new English will be recreated and refashioned to serve emancipatory goals as a world language for a new age. Canagarajah (1999) too underlines the importance of "the strategy of appropriating the discourses of the centre" in order to develop "a critical consciousness and voice for marginalized communities" (p. 34). Drawing on the context of the Sri Lankan classrooms he contrasts the more conventional "non-reflective oppositional practices" with the proposed "purposeful and productive resistance" and stresses the need for the latter.

Wallace (2003) agrees with Canagarajah (1999) on the role of individual agency in reaching the "goal" of resisting linguistic imperialism, but differs from him with respect to the "means", i.e. how that can be done. While for Canagarajah the goal can be achieved through the deployment of "pluralised" English "infused with diverse alternate grammars and conventions from periphery languages" (p. 175), Wallace (2003) cautions us that such practices will only be possible after "a long process of creative appropriation" (p. 71) rather than from the outset. Again, while both Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (1999) exhibit a preference for the "local" and "immediate" over the "global" and "longer term", Wallace (2003) points to the difficulties that such approaches have. She advocates for a "globalised" as opposed to "localized English" and proposes a critical pedagogy that will serve students in the longer term by preparing them for the challenge to social inequality. She argues for the need to develop "literate English" as opposed to "day-to-day survival English" as the former, unlike the latter, is "functionally wide-ranging", less "native-speakered" and can be "especially powerful when used discursively" (p. 77). Such literate English will have the potential to serve the "writing back" and "talking back" function for creative as well as critical purposes. The kind of English serving this function, as Wallace (2002) explains, will not necessarily be standard in form, and may indeed contain minor regional variations, but "functionally it will be elaborated to serve global needs… as a tool for resistance" (pp. 106-7).

Conclusion

Thus, what we have observed is a varied response to the global spread of English and the way the Periphery should deal with English. Ferguson (2006) sums up the whole spectrum of attitudes and perceptions among individuals and societies regarding the spread: "[English is perceived] as a threat to linguistic diversity and to the vitality of national languages, as a means of accessing technological knowledge, as a useful lingua franca or as all of these simultaneously" (p.8).

When Phillipson (1992) argues that English dominates the other local languages, in many contexts he is right as that seems to be the case. That many languages are on the verge of extinction due to the aggression of English is well-documented as in the case of Australia, for example, where many indigenous languages have gone into oblivion (Marcel, 2009). The appeal for English, however, has remained undiminished. Pennycook (1994) recounts some of those. Just as Achebe in 1975 appealed, "let us not in rejecting the evil throw out the good with it" (p. 259), just as Kachru suggested, "whatever the reasons for the earlier spread of English, we should now consider it a positive development in the twentieth century world context" (p. 10), Syed Hussein Alatas, taking the Malaysian perspective, echoes similar sentiments: "Those opposed to the study of English will only succeed in making Malaysians backward. They are not true nationalists" (p. 183). Still, as Pennycook (1994) argues, a more informed and cautious approach is necessary:

To view the spread as natural is to ignore the history of that spread and to turn one's back on larger global forces and the goals and interests of institutions and governments that have promoted it. To view it as neutral is to take a particular view of language and also to assume that the apparent international status of English raises it above local social, cultural, political or economic concerns. To view it as beneficial is to take a rather naively optimistic position on global relations and to ignore the relationships between English and inequitable distributions and flows of wealth, resources, culture and knowledge. (pp. 23--24)

Thus we cannot ignore the social, political and economic factors that come into play when methods and materials cross borders. Since the threats of linguistic imperialism are indeed real, there will be value in a top down intervention to save the linguistic rights of minorities, as Phillipson (1992) advocates, to try and find policies that will allow those languages to survive. Pennycook (1994) also concurs with that step, although he sees point of intervention as necessary in the realm of teaching which takes the form of critical pedagogy and allows for "struggle, resistance and different appropriations of language, opening up a space for many different meaning-making practices in English" (p. 69). As Block (2004) observes, a shift to a more reflective, more nuanced, more culturally sensitive approach is already taking place in ELT pedagogy and practices.

To conclude, Phillipson (1992) is right in pointing out the threat that global spread of English indeed poses to indigenous languages and culture, the existence of a hegemonic structure and obvious promotion of ELT by the U.S and the British governments. However, pinning down the rapid spread of English in today's quickly changing world to these factors alone is necessarily taking a "top down" view which fails to take account of the hopes, struggles and aspirations of the majority population in the Periphery. While English has been and still is used by the elite to mete and dole injustice and inequality to the poor in certain contexts, the language has also been instrumental in serving emancipatory functions in others. The contribution of *Linguistic Imperialism* is that it has, as Ricento (1994) had rightly predicted in his review, stimulated ELT professionals – planners, administrators, researchers, teacher educators, and teachers – to re-examine the assumptions, goals, and methods which inform their various practices, and constituted, as Phillipson (1992) himself hoped, "an initial step on a long journey" towards linguistic, cultural and economic emancipation.

Acknowledgements

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Phillipson uses the term 'centre' to refer to 'core English-speaking countries' such as the USA, the UK, Australia and 'periphery' to refer to other countries with or without colonial past such as Nigeria, India, Turkey, Japan, etc.

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