Globalism and the universal language

ABDULLA AL-DABBAGH

Some lessons from the past

LIKE SO many other innovations, the idea of one common language for all mankind appeared for the first time, in European thought, during the Renaissance. It has been estimated that since then nearly 'seven hundred such artificial languages'[1] have been tried. Undoubtedly, this had to do with the collapse of Latin as the common language of education, soon to be replaced by the various, rising national languages. Europe's great expansion overseas, in this epoch, also created the need for a unified vehicle of communication.

In many ways, the world, and not just Europe, is now facing a similar challenge. While English has become the Latin of the contemporary world, such a position, one can say in the light of historical experience, has always been precarious. Whether English will be unanimously accepted as the one unifying, international language of the globe, whether it will share this role with one or more other languages, or whether an artificial language will be adopted for that purpose is the question that sooner or later we will all be facing.

It seems that Francis Bacon was the first person to expound 'the idea of constructing an ideal language for the communication of knowledge from the best parts and features of a number of existing languages'[2]. Later, the German philosopher Leibniz (1646–1716) went a step further in the attempt to transcend the inadequacies of natural language by postulating a totally new sign-system for human thinking – something anticipating, in fact, aspects of modern mathematics and modern logic – which would be the clearest vehicle for communication[3]. Even if such projects often seemed cumbersome and impractical, they nevertheless revealed a strong faith in the ability to solve the problem of the multiplicity of languages (sometimes called 'debabelization'[4]), producing, at times, genuinely radical proposals to that effect.

In the 17th century, many blueprints for a universal language began to appear, the most famous of which was Bishop John Wilkins's *Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (1668). Nearly forty years earlier, the French philosopher Descartes (1596–1650) had 'outlined a scheme for a constructed language based on numbers that would represent words and notions'[5]. This is how the linguist R.H. Robins describes Wilkins's attempt:

> Wilkins's project was nothing less than the creation of systematically worked out and universally applicable principles of a language, written and spoken, for communication between members of all nations of the world. *The Essay*, which runs to 454 pages, after criticizing the shortcomings of existing natural languages sets out what purports to be a complete schematization of human knowledge.[6]

Thus, one can almost describe the universal language as a continuous dream of philoso-

ABDULLA AL-DABBAGH is Professor of English and co-ordinator of the English Literature Programme at United Arab Emirates University. He has taught English for over three decades in universities in Iraq, Jordan, and the UAE, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. His teaching and research interests include literary criticism and theory, Shakespeare, comparative literature, cultural studies, and translation studies. He is a member of the editorial board of the 'International Journal of Arabic–English Studies' and of the 'Journal of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences', UAE University.

DOI: 10.1017/S0266078405002026

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

phers and linguists, at least in Europe, since the end of the Renaissance. Seven hundred such attempts, in the space of no more than three hundred and fifty years, average two per year. Although they were mostly simplified mixtures of existing languages, these projects nevertheless included some daring experiments, such as languages based on numbers or on musical notation. In the 19th and 20th centuries, scores of these artificial languages sprang up, the most influential and most widely recognized of which is, of course, Esperanto.

Designed by the Polish linguist Dr. Ludwig Zamenhof in 1887, Esperanto swept aside all its rivals to become the one universally upheld artificial language. It is now officially recognized by a range of international organizations from the UN and UNESCO to professional associations of doctors, teachers, scientists, stamp and coin collectors, and many others[7]. Many newspapers and magazines are published in Esperanto editions worldwide, and Esperanto is broadcast for hundreds of hours each year in many countries. Over ten thousand books have been published in Esperanto, and it is taught officially in over thirty universities and six hundred schools[8]. Esperantists claim that their language is now spoken by several million people all over the world and they hold annual congresses that are attended, on average, by two to five thousand members.

By contrast, Basic English, the major attempt in the 20th century to form a universal language on the basis of an already existing natural language, has not met with much success. Aiming at the reduction of English vocabulary to about 800 words, Basic English was first proposed by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, who had appeared on the intellectual scene as the joint authors of a well-known work on semantics, *The Meaning of Meaning*. Together with this great simplification of the vocabulary, the relatively simple grammar and the already wide expansion of English all over the world were thought to be sufficient to make Basic English the long sought for international language.

Not surprisingly, this did not turn out to be the case; and the whole project from the start had smacked somewhat of linguistic imperialism. Its open advocation by Churchill and the British government towards the end of the Second World War was indicative of this ideological background. The project aimed more at spreading the English language than at solving the problem of the multiplicity of languages in the world. It was never intended, in the minds of its sponsors, to replace English. On the contrary, its aim was to make the task of spreading English easier, as was very succinctly put by none other than Churchill himself:

> Basic English is not intended for use among English-speaking people, but to enable a much larger body of people who do not have the good fortune to know the English language to participate more easily in our society. People are quite purblind who discuss this matter as if Basic English were a substitute for the English language.[9]

It was only to be expected that Basic English would be rejected by those very people patronizingly described here as not having had 'the good fortune' to know English. There is no escaping the fact that there was no enthusiasm for it outside the English-speaking world. It has been pointed out that even those 'foreigners who favor Basic English are for the most part those who already know English'[10], and that their support stems from their allegiance to English rather than from any legitimate belief in the efficacy of Basic English as a universal language. In fact, even Churchill's famous English-speaking colleague during the War, Franklin Roosevelt, seemed to have been skeptical about the whole project:

> Churchill had discussed the possibilities of Basic English with Roosevelt at Quebec in 1943, and in April 1944 had sent him a British Cabinet Committee report on means of promoting its wider use. The President prepared a reply, which he never sent off, but which concluded: "Incidentally, I wonder what the course of history would have been if in May 1940 you had been able to offer the British people only 'blood, work, eye-water, and face-water', which I understand is the best that basic can do with five famous words".[11]

It is significant that the third figure in that famous post-war triumvirate also tried his hand at the question of the international language. In fact, Joseph Stalin even published his opinions in a separate book, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (1950). Although seemingly approaching the question of language and linguistic theory from a radical perspective, it becomes clear, in the concluding sections of the essay, that Stalin is not in favor of any radical linguistic change. While he correctly observes that there cannot be an equal 'crossing' of two languages to produce a new, third

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

language (the case usually being of one language emerging victorious from the cross while the other dies away), he still regards the development of language as a gradual, long-term and evolutionist process. In fact, he seems to hold that new languages may develop by extending and perfecting the basic elements of existing languages. For this reason, his version of how the new international language will rise is peculiarly reminiscent of the colonialist/imperialist imposition of a dominant language:

> It is clear that in these conditions there can be no question of the suppression and defeat of some languages, and the victory of others. Here we shall have not two languages, one of which is to suffer defeat, while the other is to emerge from the struggle victorious, but hundreds of national languages out of which, as a result of prolonged economic, political and cultural co-operation of nations, there will first appear most enriched and unified zonal languages, and subsequently the zonal languages will merge into a single international language, which, of course, will be neither German, nor Russian, nor English, but a new language that has absorbed the best elements of the national and zonal languages (51–2).

Far from revealing a radical road for the utilization of language and for its transformation from a debased instrument of national domination and cultural imperialism into a tool for the building of the new international culture, this conclusion is a paradoxical *affirmation* of the very process of the rise and domination of a handful of languages and the acquisition of zonal spheres of influence. What, in fact, are these so-called 'most enriched and unified zonal languages', if not the languages of the dominant and imperialist nations? What does the choice of examples – German, English, and Russian – reveal, and why not Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, or Urdu, for example? And just how will a new language emerge 'that has absorbed the best elements of the national and zonal languages'? What are the best elements – and what are the worst elements, for that matter – of such diverse languages, and how can they possibly merge to form anything new, let alone a single, international language?

Still, there is no doubt that in the years immediately following the Second World War, with the fall of the Axis powers and the renewed faith in international co-operation through such youthful and still promising organizations as the United Nations, there was a strong and serious revival of interest in the possibilities of a universal language, not just among linguists and philosophers, but also on official state levels. The development of the global forces of production, the heightened level of consciousness and the rapid advances in the means of communication all seem to have contributed to the creation of the conditions for the rise of a new international culture. And one of the main pillars of this new culture, it was soon realized, was a universal language.

The question that arises here is how the new culture will be created and what its constituent elements will be. Certainly, there are already international cultural forms in a number of fields ranging from musical notation to the universal language of science and technology, to stylistic techniques in literature and art. Of all the means of cultural and generally human communication, language is still the most important, and the crucial element that endows cultures with a national rather than an international form. For this reason, the creation and application of a universal language becomes an urgent task in the process of creating the new culture.

Language is the major vehicle of culture and human communication. As an instrument, a universally usable means of communication, language has often been regarded as a neutral force in the cultural battle. This is a fatal supposition. The linguistic situation can be no more than the reflection of the social and political situation. In the world today, there are a handful of languages belonging to the dominant nations, to which all the other languages of the world are subordinated. Under the existing system, the thousands of languages of the peoples of the world, even when spoken by thousands of millions of people, can never achieve equal status with the dominant languages. This fact, of course, has not gone unrecognized: cf., for example, Mario Pei[12] and J.R. Firth[13]. As Firth succinctly put it: 'World languages are made not by amateur grammarians but by world powers. The Roman Empire made Latin, the British Empire English.'[14]

The linguistic and cultural subordination of the peoples of the world is a reflection of their economic and political subordination. Furthermore, as a major element in the formation of nations and of national culture, language has always been an instrument of great nation domination and of national and cultural oppression which today is inseparable from the question of imperialism. In every country that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is made up of more than one nation – the case, in fact, in the vast majority of countries – the dominant group has always practiced both the chauvinism of the big nation and cultural and linguistic oppression. More significantly, the situation contains a built-in inequality lying at the root of the oppression that cannot be immediately eradicated even in the most advanced social systems. Cultural and linguistic autonomy and national self-determination do not *immediately* change the basic structure in which there is one language for the majority (the dominant nation) and one or more languages for the minority (the minority nationalities or subordinate nations).

Similarly, granting equal legal status to the languages of the world does not change the basic conditions of linguistic oppression that consists of a handful of languages subordinating thousands of other languages. Moreover, language is an instrument of national culture, which manifests itself, today, often as imperialist culture. Imperialist culture finds its vehicle of dissemination in a handful of dominant languages. In a second stage, this material is handled by a number of the major subordinate languages to be spread across the globe. In order to change this situation, liberate language and transform it into a sharp instrument of the new world culture, it seems to be vital to recognize the need for a single, international language that will bring the peoples of the world closer together and overthrow the linguistic domination of the few languages and their degeneration into instruments of imperialist oppression.

For several reasons, one argument runs, no existing major language can serve the purposes of a universal language. First, all the major languages of the world are naturally evolved languages and are plagued by unnecessary, linguistic complexities[15]. Secondly, they all have for too long been connected with historical culture, in its various oppressive phases, and their use inevitably evokes the old cultures. Thirdly, and most importantly, as languages of dominant nations, they have all been vehicles of linguistic oppression and great nation chauvinism, and several of them have, in the modern era, been consciously utilized for the purposes of cultural domination.

In order to overthrow cultural imperialism, one of the main tasks is to overthrow linguistic domination. The road to a single, international language does not lie in Basic English, nor in the development of the so-called great zonal languages – a euphemism, in fact, for the languages of the dominant nations – but in the transformation of the very conditions that gave rise to the oppressive domination of those languages.

In conclusion, from what has been discussed so far, it is clear that the question of the universal language received the most serious attention in the years immediately following the Second World War. This period was a truly culminating point for all the efforts of linguists and philosophers over three hundred years. For the first time in history, it seems, international statesmen and world figures expressed genuine interest in this question. And although the achievement of a common language for all humanity may still seem far away, it is clearly no longer a dream or a theoretical game of linguists, but a practical proposal that is merely awaiting the ripening of the conditions of its application.

The fact that Roosevelt was, from the outset, not very interested in this issue, that Churchill aimed more at linguistic imperialism than at a universal language, and that Stalin, on appearance the most likely candidate for its adoption, in fact, abandoned it in favour of the more conservative, and potentially equally imperialist, notion of the growth and enrichment of zonal languages – all this does not negate the creation of the conditions, in those post-war years, that raised the question of the universal language to the immediate attention of the world leaders. And although the issue has now receded a considerable distance from the attention of world figures, the advance in consciousness has been achieved in a way that cannot be reversed, and one expects it to be only a matter of time before its concrete application.

One of the most important recent attempts at a new discussion of the question of a universal language (David Crystal's *English as a Global Language*)[16] is already more than five years old. Crystal is fully aware of the socio-political implications of this question (essentially the triumph, whether explicitly celebrated or shyly implied, of what has now come to be called *World English*), as well as its historical background (essentially what is called the victorious outcome of the 'Cold War' that had spanned nearly half a century). Although Crystal does pay lip-service to what he calls 'the fundamental value of multilingualism' (viii), he admits that the impulse behind writing the book was born out of the suggestion made by

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'Mauro E. Mujica, chairman of US English, the largest organization which has been campaigning for English to be made the official language of the USA' (ix). Thus Crystal, although asserting his independence of any political agenda, sets out to answer the following questions: 'What makes a world language? Why is English the leading candidate? And will it continue to hold this position?' (x).

Crystal is clear on what makes, and has historically made, a global language: 'A language does not become a global language because of its intrinsic structural properties … A language becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political power of its people – especially their military power' (7).

Yet, this awareness that should have logically led to the consciousness of the transience of these 'imposed' global languages, complementing the transience of the imperial powers on which they have depended, does not quell the jarring note of imperialist triumphalism that permeates the work: 'Nearly a quarter of the world's population is already fluent or competent in English, and the figure is steadily growing … No other language can match this growth' (4–5), and 'by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain had become the world's leading industrial and trading country. By the end of the century, the population of the USA (then approaching 100 million) was larger than that of any of the countries of western Europe, and its economy was the most productive and fastest growing in the world. British political imperialism had sent English around the globe, during the nineteenth century, so that it was 'a language on which the sun never sets'. During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted, almost single-handedly, through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower. And the language behind the US dollar was English' (8). What happened, we wonder, to French and German in the nineteenth century, to Russian and Chinese (as well as the languages of the newly liberated nations of the Third world) in the twentieth century?

Crystal's linguistic imperialist bias appears in his dismissive and distortive account of the attempt to create a truly common language for mankind ('There are many who think that all language learning is a waste of time. And many more who see nothing wrong with the vision that a world with just one language in it would be a very good thing', (13) by caricaturing such an endeavor and reducing it to the desire not to learn languages or to have the world 'dominated' by 'just one language'. Ironically, he seems to be oblivious of the fact that this is exactly the situation that he will go on to celebrate when he explains the new linguistic domination of the world by – English.

Crystal's imperialist inclinations appear also implicitly, but no less effectively and dangerously, in some of the topics he singles out for discussion: for example, *linguistic power* (i.e., as language acquisition and consequently bilingualism are best started at an early age, English is better taught soon, and the earlier the better); *linguistic complacency* (native English speakers may have to acquire other languages in order to better facilitate the spread of English); and *linguistic death* (it is survival of the fittest out there in the linguistic jungle of the world, and 80% of the world's six thousand or so living languages will die within the next century (17). And the conclusion is: 'English is now so widely established that it can no longer be thought of as "owned by any single nation"'(21), and 'for the reasons presented in the next three chapters all the signs suggest that this global language will be English' (23). Crystal's seemingly scientific and rational arguments become enmeshed in prophecies and prognostications.

On the colonial, or so-called post-colonial, situation, Crystal is equally biased. Jumping from Gandhi, Kenyatta, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, he rushes to Achebe and Rushdie, without trying to build any coherent argument. The implicit message is a simple and reiterated one: the triumph of English (in spite of decolonization, and in spite of national liberation). The message is: we are back, and with a vengeance – this time taking over the whole world, and this time it is for good. The book closes with these words: 'If there is a critical mass, does this mean that the emergence of a global language is a unique event, in evolutionary terms? It may be that English, in some shape or form, will find itself in the service of the world community for ever' (140).

By contrast with Crystal, Robert Phillipson (*Linguistic Imperialism*, 1992)[17] looks at the phenomenon of the dominance of English as a 'World Language' from a very different perspective, and defines it unequivocally as one most indicative of linguistic imperialism: 'To put things more metaphorically, whereas once Britannia ruled the waves, now it is English

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which rules them. The British empire has given way to the empire of English' (1).

Phillipson's project, influenced by the work of such theorists of the relationship between language and power as Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Louis-Jean Calvet, and others, attempts to relate 'English linguistic imperialism' to 'imperialism as a broad theory enabling us to understand exploitation' (46): 'We live in a world characterized by inequality – of gender, nationality, race, class, income, and language. To trace and understand the linkages between English linguistic imperialism and inequality in the political and economic spheres will require us to look at the rhetoric and legitimation of ELT (for instance, at protestations that it is a "neutral", "non-political" activity) and relate what ELT claims to be doing to its structural functions' (46–7).

Anglocentricity, cultural imperialism, assymmetrical interaction, media imperialism, "linguicism", linguistic racism, and even linguistic cannibalism make up the terminology on which Phillipson bases his arguments. In the end, he raises even more questions that need to be resolved:

> Nothing that I have written here disputes the fact that the English language can be used for good or bad purposes, both by native speakers and second language users. It is a truism that English can be used to either promote or fight capitalism (which is itself full of contradictions), to liberate people or oppress them. But this argument ignores the structural power of English nationally and internationally… Linguicism has been evolved as a construct for understanding how language decisions effect unequal resource and power allocation. It seems highly likely that in many neo-colonial contexts linguicism has taken over from racism as an ideology which legitimates an unequal division of power and resources (318–9).

As if to foreground the contrast between these two positions, Alastair Pennycook[18], the third major figure to deal with this topic at length, takes up a place somewhere in the middle. He sums up what might be described as the common ground of the first position in this way:

> By and large, the spread of English is considered to be natural, neutral and beneficial. It is considered natural because, although there may be some critical reference to the colonial imposition of English, its subsequent expansion is seen as a result of inevitable global forces. It is seen as neutral because it is assumed that once English has in some sense become detached from its original cultural contexts (particularly England and America), it is now a neutral and transparent medium of communication. And it is considered beneficial because a rather blandly optimistic view of international communication assumes that this occurs on a cooperative and equitable footing (9).

Pennycook sums up the contrasting position, which balances the picture by pointing to another set of cultural and political effects of the spread of English:

> Its widespread use threatens other languages; it has become the language of power and prestige in many countries, thus acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress; its use in particular domains, especially professional, may exacerbate different power relationships and may render these domains more inaccessible to many people; its position in the world gives it a role also as an international gatekeeper, regulating the international flow of people; it is closely linked to national and increasingly non-national forms of culture and knowledge that are dominant in the world; and it is also bound up with aspects of global relations, such as the spread of capitalism, development aid and the dominance particularly of North American media. (13).

In his attempt to arrive at a middle position between the two, Pennycook finds them linked to two different views of language: 'The key point here is to find a space between, on the one hand, a structuralist view of language as an idealized, abstract system disconnected from its surroundings, and, on the other hand, a materialist view of language that reduces it to its contexts and therefore sees language use as determined by worldly circumstance' (26).

While acknowledging the work of Phillipson 'for helping us understand how and why the global dominance of English has occurred' (68), Pennycook claims that there are a number of reasons for taking up a stance against what he calls 'deterministic theses that define the spread of English as a priori imperialistic, hegemonic, or linguicist' (69). These reasons are: first, that determinism in whatever form, biological, economic, or sociological, is false; second, that determinist theses are based on a totalizing approach that is equally as falsifying as one-sided determinism; third, that concrete experience offers cases of actual benefit from the spread of English that could not be called colonization; and fourth, that a space exists or

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

must be found for the global teaching of English that is 'not automatically an imperialist project' (69).

Thus the debate on the role and status of English as the foremost world language, and the principal, if not indeed the sole, candidate for an acknowledged and unanimously accepted universal language, has continued and intensified in the last two decades. In one of the most recent studies in the field, Janina Brutt-Griffler[19] adds a new twist to the debate by arguing that the spread of English as a world language was due as much to *anti*-imperialism as to imperialism. She argues that English was used as an instrument for liberation by the colonized and that 'through appropriating the language, they empowered themselves to resist colonialism' (65). Brutt-Griffler explains that classic British colonial policy was not to force English on the colonized peoples, seemingly for economic reasons – it was too expensive. Furthermore, this policy promoted bilingualism, as colonial civil servants were required to speak local languages. British imperialists, in their golden days, recognized the importance of knowing the languages of the people they intended to rule and control.

In spite of these illuminating observations on classic British colonial language policy, and how in many ways, it served initially to limit the spread of English, Brutt-Griffler cannot however convincingly refute the thesis that the imperialist power (economic, military, and political) of the UK (and subsequently of the USA), as recognized and admitted by almost every single linguist in this field, was the chief reason behind the spread of English as a world language.

Another perspective on the anti-imperialist uses of English has been refined in recent decades through the experience of the 'appropriation' of English, particularly literary English, by the formerly colonized – the case of what has come to be known as the Empire writing back. Predictably, this area too is divided into two opposing camps, best represented here, not only for the African context but for much of the world generally, by the celebrated African writers Ngugi wa Thiong'O and Chinua Achebe. While Ngugi thinks that 'African literature can only be written in the African languages of the peasantry and the working class,' Achebe argues that, while English will continue to be resented in Africa because 'it came as part of a package deal which included many other items of doubtful value and the positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice', we must not 'in rejecting the evil throw out the good with it', and calls for recognizing 'the importance of the world language which history has forced down our throat', consciously taking the option of 'I have been given this language and I intend to use it.' While the divide between these two viewpoints may seem sharp enough, yet, they may basically not be so contradictory. At the same time that there is no doubt that Third World national languages should be upheld and fortified for the purposes of anti-colonial liberation, it is perhaps as necessary to engage English and to transform it into an area of struggle for the same aim (Pennycook 259–260).

In the most recent collection of studies on this topic (Thomas Ricento, ed., *Ideology, Politics and Language Policies: Focus on English*)[20], Alastair Pennycook and Robert Phillipson again figure prominently. Phillipson's contribution, focusing once again on the key concepts of *world language*, *language spread*, and *linguistic imperialism*, to oppose the perspectives of David Crystal and others (which he regards as narrowly anglicist), also underlines the inequalities created by the use of English in international communication, calling for 'a linguistic human rights approach' (106), and arguing that Esperanto serves better, and more fairly, the purposes of international communication.

In fact, the debate on the candidacy of the foremost universal artificial language, Esperanto, has also continued and intensified, though much less obtrusively, in the same period. Ever since its introduction by Zamenhof in the late nineteenth century, Esperanto has created the ground for an intense debate, indeed the battleground for illustrious defenders and intellectual champions on the one hand and sharp denigrators and powerful enemies on the other.

One of the most famous defenders of Esperanto in the nineteenth century was Leo Tolstoy, whose support for it provided an added reason for its quick suppression, as a dangerous radical creed, by the Tsarist regime. No doubt the Nazis in the early twentieth century persecuted Esperanto speakers for similar reasons, in spite of its support by such illustrious commentators as the linguist Otto Jespersen and the philosopher Bertrand Russell.[21] In the contemporary world, the efforts of the Esperantists to gain world acceptance through

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

recognition by international bodies were blocked first by the French, in the days of the League of Nations, when they thought French should be the sole universal language, and more recently by the Americans, who have vetoed putting it on the UN agenda for adoption as a world language.[22]

And yet, the status of English as the uncontested single world language of the era of globalism is far from certain. In one of the most judicious attempts at summing up the current situation, Joshua A. Fishman[23] argues that 'beyond the ebb and flow of history, there are other reasons to believe that the English language will eventually wane in influence' (27). He rightly points out that globalization, principally in trade and communication, has also brought in its wake regionalization, and with it the spread of regional languages, thus making such languages as Chinese, Spanish, Hindi, and Arabic strong contenders. In fact, the global spread of English and the simultaneous spread of these big regional languages have 'created a squeeze effect on small communities, producing pockets of anxious localization and local-language revival resistant to global change' (28).

Thus in a situation where globalization, regionalization, and localization are all happening concurrently, the question inevitably arises: What will become of English? Fishman argues that English in such a situation 'will gravitate increasingly toward the higher social classes', and suggests that 'it might even help the future of English in the long run if its proponents sought less local and regional supremacy and fewer exclusive functions in the United Nations and in the world at large. A bully is more likely to be feared than popular.' Fishman concludes:

> There is no reason to assume that English will always be necessary, as it is today, for technology, higher education, and social mobility, particularly after its regional rivals experience their own growth spurts. Civilization will not sink into the sea if and when that happens. The decline of French from its peak of influence has not irreparably harmed art, music, or diplomacy. The similar decline of German has not harmed the exact sciences. Ancient Greek, Aramaic, Latin, and Sanskrit – once world languages representing military might, sophistication, commerce, and spirituality – are mere relics in the modern world. The might of English will not long outlive the technical, commercial, and military ascendancy of its Anglo-American power base, particularly if a stronger power arises to challenge it. (34)

Yet, while there has developed, in the last decade or so, an increasing awareness of the gravity of the issue of the development of English into an international language, as expressed, for example, by Marko Modiano:

> Never before in history has the multitude of human languages been more threatened by the spread of one specific tongue … Our responsibility now must be both to embrace the beast and at the same time to tame it . . . In the rush to participate in the global movement, the spread of English can potentially wreak havoc on any number of languages and cultures. While it is capable of ushering in the 'beneficial' fruits of technology and of so-called 'Western advances', the English language is a dangerous bedfellow.[24]

There has also developed an intense debate around it[25], in which the unadulterated voice of Anglo-American triumphalism continues to be popularly heard whenever this issue is discussed, as Susanna McBee noted as early as 1985:

> Whether it comes with an American or British accent, the world's latest lingua franca will keep spreading. 'It's like the primordial ooze,' contends James Alatis, dean of the School of Languages and Linguistics at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Citing the link between American power and the English language, Alatis insists that 'its growth is ineluctable, inexorable and inevitable.' [26]

It should be added, however, that such an unqualified championship of English is answered in its own terms by the supporters of Esperanto, as Kep Enderby noted in 1990:

> The trouble is that any language intended for use as an international language, other than Esperanto or some other constructed language, will be difficult to learn, and will still not be seen to be neutral. After 100 years, Esperanto is an established fact. It has survived its ordeals and come a long way. Its literature already exceeds that of many a small nation and is growing all the time, but it has a long way to go before it becomes a widely used international language. It deserves to be supported.[27]

Still, one may well conclude, as a result of what has been discussed so far, and in spite of all the reservations expressed, that English is now *ipso facto* the uncontested, international language. Without any prior agreement, or officially

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

imposed policy, it has *practically* won that status – in trade, science, tourism, and, most importantly, in the educational system, throughout the world. The possibility of any other language, whether natural (Spanish or Chinese) or artificial (Esperanto), replacing it in the near future seems remote.

No doubt this contemporary phenomenon (which, in its uncontested form, is very recent and very much linked to the globalism of the last decade or so) has roots in the British Empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in the unparalleled hegemony of US power today. Similarly, other world languages of the past – from Greek and Latin, to Arabic, and perhaps to Turkish, Persian, and Chinese, down to the modern European languages of French, German, and Spanish – have been linked to the rise of particular world powers of the time (the Roman Empire, the spread of Islam, modern European colonialism, and so on). The comparative study of these languages as world languages (that is, in the various historical contexts of their achieving the status, either fully or partially, of an international language) is the fascinating task of a full-length study perhaps yet to be done.

In today's world, this status has been achieved on a greater scale than at any other time in history by English. It is therefore appropriate to conclude with a look at the phenomenon of English as an international language. One of the chief aspects of this phenomenon, as notably described by H.G. Widdowson (1994), is that English is no longer the 'property' of one or more nations but, as an international language, belongs to the whole world and is the property of anyone who uses it:

> The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. To grant such custody of the language, is necessarily to arrest its development and so undermine its international status. It is a matter of considerable pride and satisfaction for native speakers of English that their language is an international means of communication. But the point is that it is only international to the extent that it is not their language. It is not a possession that they lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it.[28]

It is remarkable how, in the space of the last few years, this observation has become part of conventional wisdom. As Melvia A. Hasman put it in 2000:

> English is divesting itself of its political and cultural connotations as more people realize that English is not the property of only a few countries. Instead, it is a vehicle that is used globally and will lead to more opportunities. It belongs to whoever uses it for whatever purpose or need.[29]

Inevitably, the implications of this new phenomenon for the cross-cultural teaching of English were also soon recognized. Sandra Lee McKay has noted, also in 2000:

> The teaching of EIL [English as an international language] has several important implications for the role of culture in language teaching. First, because individuals who learn an international language do not need to accept the norms of native-English-speaking countries, the teaching of culture needs to focus on giving students knowledge about, rather than suggesting they accept, particular cultural values and beliefs . . . Ultimately, a recognition that English is an international language highlights the fact that, as more and more individuals learn English, the language belongs to no one culture but, rather, provides the basis for promoting cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly global village.[30]

Nor could the areas of phonology and pronunciation be excluded for long. The most recent study in the field argues that 'for the first time in the history of the English language, second language speakers outnumber those for whom it is the mother tongue, and interaction in English increasingly involves no first language speakers whatsoever'31, the traditional model of teaching English pronunciation (i.e. sounding like a native speaker) no longer applies to the modern world. In fact, as H. G. Widdowson had already argued, in his seminal essay of 1994:

> To the extent that the design of instruction depends on a familiarity with the student reality which English is to engage with, or on the particular sociocultural situations in which teaching and learning take place, then nonnative teachers have a clear and, indeed, decisive advantage.[32]

■

Notes

1 Mario Pei, *The Story of Language* (1952). George Allen & Unwin, London, 1968, p. 419, and Fred West, *The Way of Language*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1975, p. 228.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

2 R.H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics*. Longmans, London, 1967, p. 112.
3 *Ibid*, p. 113.
4 *Ibid*, p. 113. See also J.R. Firth, *The Tongues of Men and Speech,* 1937, Oxford University Press, 1970, Ch. 6.
5 Mario Pei, *The Story of Language*, *Ibid*, p. 418.
6 R.H. Robins, *Ibid*, p. 114. Seventeenth century pre-occupation with the universal language continues to attract attention, as in Frank D. Walters, 'Taxonomy and the undoing of language: Dialogic form in the universal languages of the seventeenth century.' In *Style*, vol. 27, Spring 93, 1–16, note 1, and Daniel Pigg, 'Trying to frame the unframable: Oroonoko as discourse in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko.' In *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 34, note 1, Winter 97, pp. 105–112.
7 Mario Pei, 1, p. 420.
8 Bernard Cavanagh, *A First Language for All Mankind.* A British Esperanto Association Pamphlet, U.K., no date, p. 15.
9 'Onwards to Victory: War Speeches by the Rt. Hon. W.S. Churchill 1943,' quoted in C. K. Ogden, B*asic English: International Second Language.* Harcourt, Brace, & World, New York, 1968, p. 114.
10 Mario Pei, *Ibid*, p. 432.
11 C.K. Ogden, *Ibid*, p. 116.
12 *Op. cit*. Part 5, Ch. 5, 'Universality via Linguistic Imperialism.'
13 *Op. cit*. Ch. 6, 'Debabelization.'
14 J. R. Firth, *The Tongues of Men and Speech*, p. 70.
15 Cf. H. Jacob, ed., *On the Choice of a Common Language*, London, 1946, and Mario Pei, *The Story of Language*, Ibid, pp. 425–433.
16 Published by Cambridge University Press, 1997.
17 Oxford University Press, 1992.
18 *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language.* Longman, London, 1994.
19 Janina Brutt-Griffler, 'World English: A Study of its Development', In *Multilingual Matters*, London, 2002.
20 John Benjamins, London, 2000.
21 Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language.* Blackwell, Oxford, 1995.
22 Leslie Alan Horvitz, 'Advocates of Esperanto continue to lobby for their lingua franca.' In *Insight on the News*, Vol. 13, Note 36, 29 Sep 97, pp. 42–3.
23 Joshua A. Fishman, 'The New Linguistic Order.' In *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 113, Winter 1998, pp. 26–34.
24 Marko Modiano, 'Linguistic Imperialism, Cultural Integrity, and EIL.' In *ELT Journal*, Vol. 55, note 4, Oct 01, p.345.
25 See for example: Brian Paltridge, 'English as an International Language.' In *Cross Currents,* Vol. 41, Note 2, Summer 91, pp. 27–37; H.G. Widdowson, 'EIL, ESL, EFL: Global Issues and Local Interests.' In *World Englishes*, Vol. 6, Note 1, 1995, pp. 135–46; Marc Deneire, 'A Response to H.G. Widdowson's "EIL, ESL, EFL: Global Issues and Local Interests"', *World Englishes*, Vol. 17, Note 3, Oct 98, pp. 393–5, H.G. Widdowson, 'EIL: Squaring the Circles. A Reply.' In *World Englishes*, Vol. 17, Note 3, Oct 98, pp. 397–401, & Janina Brutt-Griffler, 'Conceptual questions in English as a world language: Taking up an Issue.' In *World Englishes*, Vol. 17, Note 3, Oct 98, pp. 381–92.
26 Susanna McBee, 'English; out to Conquer the World.' In *U.S. News & World Report*, Vol. 98, 18 Feb 85, p. 52.
27 Kep Enderby, 'The Problem of Language in International Affairs.' In *Social Alternative*, Vol. 8, Note 4, Jan 90, p. 69.
28 H. G. Widdowson, 'The Ownership of English.' In *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 28, Summer 94, p. 385.
29 Melvia A. Hasman, 'The Role of English in the 21st Century.' In *Forum*, Vol. 38, Note 1, Jan–Mar 00, p. 4.
30 Sandra Lee McKay, 'Teaching English as an International Language: Implications for Cultural Materials in the Classroom.' In *TESOL Journal*, Vol. 9, Note 4, Winter 00, pp. 10–11.
31 Jennifer Jenkins, *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 1.
32 *Ibid*, p. 387.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078405002026 Published online by Cambridge University Press