Is EFL a modern Trojan horse?

NIU QIANG AND MARTIN WOLFF

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language: an adverse perspective

THROUGHOUT China, the National language, Mandarin, is spoken by only 53% of the Chinese population (Yan 2005), while most primary schools, and all middle and senior-middle schools, colleges and universities have mandatory English instruction (cf. Niu Qiang & Martin Wolff 2004a). Shakespeare says that 'a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,' but linguistic imperialism – defined by Robert Phillipson (1992) as 'the dominance asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages' – has had other economically optimistic and sensationalized names, such as:

- *Globalization*
  which possibly originated with Marshall McLuhan's 'global village' or Immanuel Wallerstein's 'world-systems theory'
- *McDonaldization*
  'the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world' (Ritzer, 1993:1)
- Englishization
  Phillipson in 1999, which (according to Hardt & Negri 2000) 'is inextricably linked to globalization and americanization (which some see as neo-imperialism or hyperimperialism, or merely empire)'
- And such other more general expressions as *New World Order*, *Post-colonialism*, *Re-colonialization*, *Englishisation*, and *Europeanization* (cf. Phillipson 2004).

Linguistic imperialism can occur when English becomes a gatekeeper to education, employment, business opportunities and popular culture and where indigenous languages are marginalized. Pennycook (1995, 2001) is doubtful whether the spread of English is beneficial, while Cooke (1988) uses the metaphor of the Trojan horse to describe the way in which English 'may be welcomed initially in a country but then cause concern as it dominates the native language(s) and cultures' (Ljungdahl 2002).

In China, however, English is viewed as the 'gatekeeper' to higher education, employment, economic prosperity and social status. Is Chinese, as a result, drowning in the sea of English? Cf. <www.chinaview.cn 2004-08-30 16:08:02>; English, a language you have to learn? <www.chinaview.cn 2004-04-01 15:26:56>; Shanghai ranking No.1 in income <www.chinaview.cn 2004-03-09 11:13:22>. However:

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> 'Academician Xie Kechang of the Chinese Academy of Engineering has questioned the necessity for the entire nation to learn English. It is a compulsory subject in college entrance examinations, and college students whose English falls short of the required standard do not receive their diploma. English is also a decisive aspect of the postgraduate entrance examination. White-collar workers expend a lot of energy on English learning, despite having few opportunities to use it, because it is a precondition for promotion. A professional's English language level is considered indicative of their overall caliber' (Xie Kechang 2004, 'English remains a gatekeeper to higher education, better jobs and social position in the Hong Kong SAR.'
>
> – Mee-Ling Lai (1999)

China has embraced English with unparallel fervor, but in doing so, it has also subjected itself to the monolanguage and monoculture predicted and disdained by Marx and Engels. 'In the *Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith identifies the global character of Western capitalism from its outset, foreseeing the "mutual communication of knowledge" and "an extensive commerce from all countries to all countries" that would be of benefit to all parts of the globe. Famously, in a phrase which at least partially echoes Goethe's discussion of *Weltliteratur*, Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) link the global spread of capitalism to the production of a global culture. For them, the constant revolutionizing of bourgeois production and the search for new markets that fueled imperialism meant that 'national one-sideness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature.'

For all their other differences, Smith on one side and Marx and Engels on the other viewed the process of economic and cultural globalization as leading toward a genuine universalism on the other side of the false particularities produced in the era of nations and nationalisms. There remains a strong undercurrent of universalism in some variants of the concept of globalization, especially insofar as it seems to inexorably suggest the production of 'a single, homogenous planetary space' (Szeman 2001).

Apparently ignoring the admonition of Marx and Engels or calculating that the death of Marxism in China is preferable to continued economic stagnation and poverty, China has opened its gate to English as the unofficial second language. Legions of approximately 150,000 foreign EFL teachers (Niu Qiang & Martin Wolff, 2003) and more than 1,000,000 Chinese English teachers (McArthur 2004), are currently teaching English to over 600 million Chinese at any given moment, twice the population of the United States of America. This army of English teachers unavoidably brings with it a simultaneous invasion of Western culture.

The British Council, the United Kingdom's international organization for educational opportunities and cultural relations, brags that 'The English language is the UK's biggest export success story' <www.britishcouncil.org.belgium/english>. However, Britain's role remains an essentially imperial one, acting as junior partner to US global power; helping to organise the global economy to benefit western corporations; and to maximise Britain's (that is, the British elite's) independent political standing in the world and thus remain a 'great power' (Curtis 2003).

Underpinning the English language and culture lie the Judeo-Christian religious concepts of justice and social order. The European Union, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the World Trade Organization, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and even the United Nations itself, are all predicated upon Western legal concepts that have evolved from British Common Law (cf. Qiang & Wolff 2004) and are vehicles for the implementation of linguistic imperialism on both a regional and a global scale. To fully participate in the new global economy, a country is economically coerced into 'voluntarily' accepting economic, political and social reforms that are pleasing to Western democratic principles: Either reform and conform or be left out of the new economic prosperity.

It is the Western economic superpowers who have re-coined the Bible's Golden Rule from 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you' to 'He who has the gold, rules'. Large protest groups repeatedly attempt to disrupt meetings of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the WTO, and NAFTA to highlight their perception that these international organizations are mere tools of Western dominance and economic injustice.

China spent fifteen years negotiating the terms of its membership in the WTO (Long Yongtu 2001). However, membership *per se* was not the issue. What was at stake was the

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timetable for China to institute numerous reforms and thereby conform to Western principles of market economy, democracy and justice, *after* its accession to the WTO. As Phillipson (1992) has noted, the WTO is the most significant instrument for implementing linguistic imperialism on a global scale.

English, which in the words of George Steiner (1975:469) 'acted as the vulgate of American power and Anglo-American technology and finance', secured its status as a global language in the 20th century, and has acted as a force facilitating globalization (Dendrinos 2002, Phillipson 2001). 'Economic, political and cultural domination of the single super-power today, the USA, goes hand in hand with the language that encodes the cultural practices that it helps to sustain. Therefore, alarm about the domination of English does not merely reflect disquietude regarding its ruling power over other languages, large and small, nor to its colonizing effects on them, but conceals consternation concerning the role it plays *in minimizing the importance of the nation* and *maximizing the role of globalization*' (Dendrinos 2005). 'American hegemony – its geopolitics driven by the key assumption that it has defined the way of life that must be adopted by all – must rely on the learning of its language in order to maintain and cement its control' (Templer 2002).

English is the same colonial language that it was in the last century, but in an even stronger form today. Globalist economic ideologies have pronounced English a key element in creating technical labor forces that meet their investment specifications, and national ministries of education have uniformly complied with these ideological demands by stacking their pedagogical chips on more English (cf. Pennycook 1999).

Upon China's accession to the WTO, reporter Antoaneta Bezlova stated, 'Its biggest benefit probably is the hope that free trade will eventually lead to the triumph of free society.' And therein lies the truth about globalization: in reality, just another fancy name for re-colonization or re-shaping the world in the image of the United States. This is reminiscent of the arrogant and offensive comment 'We are here to help the Vietnamese, because inside every gook there is an American trying to get out' (in the 1987 Stanley Kubrick film *Full Metal Jacket*). This subliminal, arrogant, and egotistical thinking may explain the real reason for the invasion of Iraq in 2004 and the new legions recruited to teach EFL to the Iraqi people. As Templer (2002) observes:

> The Pentagon already needs entire battalions of interpreters – or brigades of imported teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) – to administer the 'rebuilt' Iraq now on the drawing boards. The lucrative 'market' for EFL being opened up by our generals will be a windfall for teachers from Sydney to Seattle. Experts from numerous other fields are also being recruited to 'reshape' Iraqi education, from kindergartens to universities. And platoons of Western researchers, including grad students, will soon descend on a 'pacified' Iraq as transnational foundations seek to fund new projects. North American, British and Australian universities will attempt to set agendas for 'collaboration' and research in Iraqi academe. In this complex picture, I want to concentrate on the predictable massive infusion of what Chinua Achebe called 'the world language which history has forced down our throats'.

Inside every Iraqi is there an American trying to get out? – Or, inside every citizen of the world? Is linguistic imperialism the non-military manifestation of over-inflated nationalistic pride? Is it that simple to explain? Have English words become the weapon of choice, rather than bullets, for the colonization of the world by the United States of America and the United Kingdom?

There are those who suggest that the current invasion of EFL teachers is merely the new wave of Western evangelist missionaries (Hadley 2004), engaging in a different type of 'war of words' that has merely replaced the 'cold war', wherein world domination by the English-speaking world was pursued through military intimidation: that is, wars and threats of wars. Suggested counter-measures to this English invasion include: adopting an artificial language such as Esperanto (created by Dr Ludwig L. Zamenhof, a Polish physician, and first published in 1887) as the international language of commerce; placing a prohibition on learning or using English; or placing an embargo on the importation of Western culture through literature, movies and songs (Phillipson 2003). For obvious and not so obvious reasons, each such suggestion is doomed to failure (cf. Modiano 2003).

But such suggestions sound much like the reverse of closing the barn door after the horse has escaped. The Trojan horse is an invited guest, which has taken up permanent residence, and will not be evicted without a major

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battle for the minds and souls of all the people of the world. Will English culture inevitably become the monoculture of the world through universal adoption and use of English as the monolanguage of international commerce?

Before aligning with those in the 'inevitability' camp, we must give serious consideration to the continuation of *ethnic cleansing*, from Biblical times through modern world history to the recent escalation of global terrorism. These phenomena have certain common characteristics which bear on the issue of acceptance of an English-language-based New World Order. One online encyclopedic source offers the following definition <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_cleansing>:

> The term ethnic cleansing refers to various policies of forcibly removing people of another ethnic group. At one end of the spectrum, it is virtually indistinguishable from forced emigration and population transfer, while at the other it merges with deportation and genocide. At the most general level, however, ethnic cleansing can be understood as the expulsion of an 'undesirable' population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these.

The Torah or Old Testament of the Bible talks about ethnic cleansing in the 13th century BCE between the Hebrews and the people of Canaan. The most infamous example of ethnic cleansing was the extermination of Jews by Nazi Germany in the 1940s. In the late 1900s and into the 21st century, ethnic cleansing has spread through the former Yugoslavia in Europe and such African nations as Rwanda and Sudan.

Modern terrorism is hard to define (but cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Definitions_of_terrorism>). The academic consensus would appear to be: an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-)clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main actual targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen either randomly (as 'targets of opportunity') or selectively (as representative or symbolic targets) from a particular population, and serve in effect as 'message generators'. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorists, victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target audience(s), turning it or them into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought. Some terrorists state clearly the kinds of group ('sub-national', 'non-state') or cause (political, ideological, religious) which interest them.

At the core of ethnic cleansing and terrorism is a sense of nationalism tied to language, religion, culture, or ethnicity, all of which are racist in nature. There is a perceived compelling need to protect and preserve what one equates with one's own self-identity and self-worth and which separates one group from all others. There is a primal need to attack and eradicate those who are perceived to threaten or dilute that most valuable and innate asset which makes an identifiable group, be it language, religion, culture, or ethnicity.

Ethnic cleansing and terrorism may be natural defence mechanisms against the Trojan Horse that bears the EFL army, with English language and culture as its weapons. Those who suggest poverty as the impetus for ethnic cleansing or terrorism may suffer from a myopic and wrong-headed world view (cf. Abadie 2004). Al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden is by no means poor nor has he espoused any agenda to eradicate poverty. Bin Laden is an Islamic fundamentalist born into Saudi Arabian wealth, who is opposed to the New World Order eminating out of Moscow, Russia, or Washington and London and opposes a perceived threat to his religion, language, culture and family dominance in local politics.

To many, Bin Laden is a radical terrorist, a fringe fundamentalist Muslim, but to many others, particularly disenchanted or disenfranchised Muslims around the world, he is a freedom fighter opposing the colonization of the Muslim world by the Western economic superpower, through the imposition of the Judeo-Christian beliefs that underpin the use of English as the language of international commerce. In short, Bin Laden engages in terrorism to protect his religion, language and culture from a perceived, and probably very real, worldwide threat posed to his Islamic world by the English-based New World Order. U.S. President George W. Bush has stated his agenda:

- The rise of a free and self-governing Iraq will deny terrorists a base of operation, discredit their narrow ideology, and give momentum to reformers across the region.

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… Helping construct a stable democracy after decades of dictatorship is a massive undertaking. … Our agenda, in contrast, is freedom and independence, security and prosperity for the Iraqi people. … Our coalition has a clear goal, understood by all – to see the Iraqi people in charge of Iraq for the first time in generations. … There are five steps in our plan to help Iraq achieve democracy and freedom. … The second step in the plan for Iraqi democracy is to help establish the stability and security that democracy requires. … These two visions – one of tyranny and murder, the other of liberty and life – clashed in Afghanistan. (24 May 2004)

- As a consequence, the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East. This strategy requires the same persistence and energy and idealism we have shown before. And it will yield the same results. As in Europe, as in Asia, as in every region of the world, the advance of freedom leads to peace. (2003)

However, as long as there are those who value their ethnicity, religion, language or culture more than money, and are willing to fight to protect what they value, the 'inevitability' of an English-language-based New World Order is in jeopardy.

According to the scribal tradition of Judeo-Christian religion, there was a time when all people spoke one language. And when the people attempted to build a tower to heaven, so as to become as knowledgeable as God, He confused their language, scattered them, and destroyed their Tower of Babel. Yet it is those whose culture and beliefs are founded upon this Judeo-Christian religion who are now attempting to bring about the world unity of one language by evangelizing the whole world with English. Yet, according to precedent in their own Bible, all such efforts are vanity.

Although the Internet is also viewed by many as a factor accelerating the dominance of English as the international language of commerce, a recent study foretells a much different and linguistically diverse future for e-commerce (cf. Cox 2000). Indeed, free, speedy and accurate translation services available on the Internet now tend to reduce the need for a universal language, and, ironically, the Internet may prove to be the world's last legitimate and acceptable line of defence against linguistic imperialism.

Finally, a growing number of linguists are starting to realize the necessity of sounding the alarm and opposing the injustice of linguistic imperialism. Professor Kanavillil Rajagopalan in Brazil recently assembled and published thirty-six articles from thirty-three authors in *A linguistica que nos faz FALHAR* ('A linguistics that makes us FAIL', Parábola Editorial, Rua Clemente Pereira, 327, Ipiranga 04216-060, São Paulo, Brazil). This compilation – strong on linguistic ecology and diversity – represents current thinking on the need for adequate language planning, and strongly favours linguistic ecology and diversity.

To the extent that there are forms of resistance to the spread of English, we can talk about a process of *hegemony* in operation, and by extension about the *hegemony of English* (cf. Macedo, Dendrinos & Gounari 2003), a process which involves struggles to do away with any forms of resistance to its domination, which is the essence of hegemony (Dendrinos 2005). President George W. Bush's war on terrorism may be just such an attempt to do away with Islamic resistance to linguistic imperialism.

The present writers are uncomfortable with the idea that linguists may be aligned in their resistance to linguistic imperialism with leaders of kinds of ethnic cleansing and with terrorists, and are disturbed that some people feel so threatened that they put down the pen and pick up the sword. We by no means condone ethnic cleansing or terrorism, but we understand some of the pressures and threats that may frustrate someone into such anti-social and unacceptable behaviour. President George W. Bush (2001) has stated that Osama bin Laden and terrorists like him hate the American way of life and freedom, but bin Laden may see the American way of life – and freedom – as 'an invasive threat to his cultural identity' (cf. Boyle 1997).

Conclusion

Linguistic imperialism is itself a struggle for power (cf. Tollefson 1995). It is an insidious weapon used by one country to interfere with the internal affairs of another country. Language planning must not only consider the affirmative needs of a particular society but must also have a defensive element to protect against linguistic imperialism perpetrated by another society. There is manifestly a view that EFL is a modern-day Trojan Horse, filled with

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EFL teachers cum soldiers cum missionaries, and armed with words rather than bullets, but intent nonetheless on re-colonizing the world and re-making it in the image of Western democracy. ■

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