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The Role of English as an International Language: Neutral, Imperialist or Democratic?

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The following quotations may be seen as representing a range of opinion in a debate about the role of English as an international language:

"since no cultural requirements are tied to the learning of English, you can learn it and use it without having to subscribe to another set of values […] English is the least localized of all languages in the world today. Spoken almost everywhere in the world to some degree, and tied to no particular social, political, economic or religions system, or to a specific racial or cultural group, English belongs to everyone or to no one, or it at least is quite often regarded as having this property."

Wardaugh, R. (1987) *Languages in Competition* Blackwell

"What is at stake when English spreads is not merely the substitution or displacement of one language by another but the imposition of new 'mental structures' through English. This is in fact an intrinsic part of 'modernization' and 'nation-building', a logical consequence of ELT. Yet the implications of this have scarcely penetrated into ELT research or teaching methodology. Cross-cultural studies have never formed part of the core of ELT as an academic discipline, nor even any principled consideration of what educational implications might follow from an awareness of this aspect of English linguistic imperialism."

Phillipson, R. (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism* OUP

"there have been comments made about other structural aspects, too, such as the absence in English grammar of a system of coding social class differences, which make the language appear more 'democratic' to those who speak a language (e.g. Javanese) that does express an intricate system of class relationships."

Crystal, D. (1997) *English as a Global Language* CUP

What is your opinion? Discuss, with reference to the roles played by language in the development and maintenance of 'society' and of 'culture'. You may refer to any non-English speaking society with which you are familiar in order to exemplify your points.

1. Introduction

> In "international" activities there is a pecking order of languages, with English having much the sharpest beak, for a variety of reasons - political, economic, and cultural.
>
> (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996: 429)

There is no question that the position of English in today's world is the closest we have ever come to a 'global language'. Of course, it would be erroneous to claim that English is spoken by everyone, or even by a majority of the world's population. Even the most generous estimates (allowing for a very loose gauge of proficiency) suggest that approximately 1.5 to 1.7 billion people can communicate in English (Bolton, 2006: 260-261; Crystal, 2003: 67). This accounts for barely a quarter of the global population. Yet the stereotypical image of the monolingual Briton taking his annual two week vacation in the Spanish sun, and getting irritated by the locals who "can't bloody-well speak English", unfortunately remains an all too common reality. And such assumptions are not confined to the native English speaker. Indeed, a Japanese student who recently returned from a trip to Croatia was genuinely surprised to find that only a relatively small number of Croatian people were proficient in English (JTT Class, 2008). However, the fact that English language competence is assumed to be the norm in a Spanish-speaking or Croat-speaking environment reveals a great deal.

Such assumptions exist because the fact of the matter is that English has become the language of international travel and tourism (a booming sector of economies throughout the world). With the exception of popular tourist destinations which cater predominantly to a specific, linguistically homogenous group of non-native English speakers, the language of communication will be English. This is exemplified each time we board an international flight, regardless of whether or not the country of departure or arrival is an English-speaking one.

There are several other domains where English usage can be witnessed all over the world. It is the prevalent language of publishing and the internet (Graddol, 1997). Crystal (2003: 115) quotes a figure of 80% of the world's electronically stored information being in English, and access to that is dependent on English language ability. In the increasingly 'global' economy, English is the principal means of communication between two non-native English speakers of different first languages.

Of course, the current situation is not universally applauded. McKay (2002) summarises opposition to the growing dominance of English as an international language:

> The main negative effects of the spread of English involve the threat to existing languages, the influence on cultural identity, and the association of the language with an economic elite
>
> (McKay, 2002: 20)

Since the publication of Robert Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism* in 1992, heated argument has continued unabatedly over the role of English as an international language, and whether its increasing presence in the world should be seen as benevolent or malignant. This paper examines various perspectives in the debate, before offering the writer's own opinions, particularly with reference to the country in which he is currently domiciled, Japan.

1.1 Kachru's 3 Concentric Circles

For the purposes of this essay, I have elected to adopt Kachru's concept of three concentric circles (Kennedy et al, 2001). Thus, the Inner Circle is used to refer to the traditional English-speaking countries (e.g. USA, UK), the Outer Circle to refer to those countries where English is used internally as a lingua franca (e.g. India, Malaysia, Nigeria) and the Expanding Circle to those countries where English is becoming increasingly widespread as a language for international communication (e.g. Germany, Japan, Russia).

2. Varying Views on the Role of English as an International Language

The question which this paper seeks to answer provides three statements representing a range of opinion in the debate about the role of English as an international language:

       (i)   English is neutral

       (ii)   English is imperialist

       (iii)   English is democratic

These statements appear to correspond rather closely with Japanese linguist Yukio Tsuda's 'Three Positions to English Hegemony and English Divide' which are respectively: Functional/Idealogical, Critical/Transformative, Pro-Hegemonic (Tsuda, 2008: 47). We will now examine each of these three positions in turn, following the order which Tsuda approaches them in.

2.1. English is Democratic

The supporting quotation for this position is taken from David Crystal's *English as a Global Language* (1997). And Crystal does indeed appear to be widely thought of as academia's 'poster boy' for what Tsuda terms the 'Pro-Hegemonic position', as it "welcomes and celebrates the global spread of English" (Tsuda, 2008: 47). Pennycook comments on Crystal's "liberal laissez-faire attitude" and his "naïve liberal idealism" (Pennycook, 2001a: 56). Not unreasonably, both Bolton (2006) and Phillipson (1999) draw attention to Crystal's links with the organisation US English, and in the preface to the first edition, Crystal himself acknowledges that the suggestion for the book "came from 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" (Crystal, 2003: xiv).

But in reality, there appears to be very little, if any, evidence that Crystal believes English to be democratic. The quotation in the question is taken from Crystal's attempts to explain what makes a global language, and his speculation that "a language may have certain properties which make it internationally appealing" (Crystal, 2003: 8). He refers to the readiness of the English language to adopt foreign vocabulary (in contrast to more resistant languages such as French), as well as the absence of a class-encoding system, but the use of inverted commas around 'democratic' is notable. 'Democratic' is intended only to highlight the contrast with class-encoding languages, and is not being used in the normal political sense. The words which follow the quotation are also highly significant: "But these supposed traits of appeal are incidental" (Crystal, 2003: 9).

The chapter continues by concluding:

> A language has traditionally become an international language for one chief reason: the power of its people – especially their political and military power…English… has been no exception.
>
> (Crystal, 2003: 9)

Such thoughts are hardly in keeping with the notion of English as a democratising force. Bolton (2006) chooses to classify Crystal as a 'Popularizer' (perhaps a fairer label) but refers to him immediately after McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil's cliche-laden *The Story of English* (1986), from which he quotes:

> Its genius was, and still is, essentially democratic. It has given expression to the voice of freedom from Wat Tyler, to Tom Paine, to Thomas Jefferson, to Edmund Burke, to the Chartists, to Abraham Lincoln, to the Suffragettes, to Winston Churchill, to Martin Luther King. It is well equipped to be a world language, to give voice to the aspirations of the Third World as much as the inter-communication of the First World.
>
> (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil (1986). Quoted in Bolton (2006), p.256)

In discussing 'The future of English as a world language', Crystal (2003: 172) remarks that "Language is an immensely democratising institution". But this refers to all languages. In an argument which appears to have far more in common with Kachru (see 2.2 below) than McCrum et al, he continues:

> To have learned a language is immediately to have rights in it. You may add to it, modify it, play with it, create in it, ignore bits of it, as you will. And it is just as likely that the course of the English language is going to be influenced by those who speak it as a second or foreign language as by those who speak it as a mother-tongue.
>
> (Crystal, 2003: 172)

In summation, there appears to be very little serious scholarly opinion which argues that 'English is democratic'. It is not an idea which I would subscribe to.

2.2 English is Neutral

If we are to accept the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Holmes, 2008: 335, Montgomery, 1995: 223) that the very way in which people view the world is determined partly or wholly by the structure of their native language, no language can be considered truly neutral. Each language provides a world view at least partially different from others. In 1977, Fishman (Phillipson 1992: 10, Pennycook, 2001b: 79) claimed a 'tool-like neutrality' in English, but within only a decade, he appeared to have recanted (Phillipson 1992: 10).

Baugh and Cable (1993: 6) comment on the neutrality of English among competing indigenous languages, and such a notion has some merit. Wardhaugh (2006: 102, 365) provides several examples of situations where the use of other particular languages (i.e. Indonesian, Swahili) can be considered 'neutral', but he also at least partially accepts Whorf's hypothesis (2006: 223), and argues that speakers of more than one language have an increased number of language behaviours

available to them. In this sense, English is no different to any other language.

> Code-switching can allow a speaker to do many things: assert power; declare solidarity; maintain a certain neutrality when both codes are used; express identity; and so on.
>
> (Wardhaugh, 2006: 110)

Kachru (1994: 139) refers to the 'neutrality' of English in terms of class, caste and religion as a motivation for Englishization of the languages of the Outer Circle. This strikes me as being very close to the above notion of English as 'democratic' in comparison to class-encoding languages, and perhaps 'neutral' is a better choice of word. But Kachru urges caution in the use of the "tricky" term 'neutrality':

> What is 'neutrality' at one level may be a strategy for solidarity and immense power at another level. That certainly is the case for English in, for example, the Outer Circle.
>
> (Kachru, 1994: 139)

Nevertheless, Kachru is considered by Tsuda to be a major proponent of what he calls the 'Functional/Ideological' position. Tsuda claims that "the linguists in this position focus on and emphasize the neutral function of English" (2008: 48). While Tsuda applauds such linguists for focussing on the 'functional diversity' of English, and their efforts to claim equal status for 'non-standard' varieties, he ultimately condemns them for a position which "simply affirms the global spread of English without examining the impact of the dominance of English" and is ultimately "actually supporting the global domination of English" (Tsuda, 2008: 48).

2.3 English is Imperialist

This is the position which Tsuda clearly aligns himself with. Quoting liberally from Phillipson and Pennycook, he refers to this as the 'Cultural/Transformative Position' which "perceives the global spread of English as a serious problem causing injustices, inequalities, and discriminations" (Tsuda, 2008: 48). Several linguists share these concerns. Cooke argues that it is a language of imperialism and describes it as a Trojan Horse (Pennycook, 2001b: 80). This metaphor is adopted by Qiang and Wolff in their provocative 2005 article, which goes so far as to incorporate the motives of Osama Bin Laden in highlighting the danger which linguistic imperialism brings:

> In short, Bin Laden engages in terrorism to protect his religion, language and culture from a perceived, and probably very real, world-wide threat posed to his Islamic world by the English based New World Order.
>
> (Qiang and Wolff, 2005: 58)

Phillipson makes many valid points in his writing, strongly echoing the arguments of Rogers (Kennedy et al, 2001: 107), and contesting the activities of the British Council in promoting English around the world. But the repeated assertions of 'linguistic imperialism' in his 1992 text of the same name, and elsewhere, only serve to detract from the validity of his other arguments. Another vocal critic of the British Council, Widdowson (Phillipson 1992:13), points out that "there is a fundamental contradiction in the idea that the language of itself exerts hegemonic control" (Widdowson, 1998: 398). Spolsky (2004) dismisses the idea as a 'conspiracy theory', "which detracts from the more critical problem of dealing with the social, economic, political and cultural causes and effects of globalization" (Spolsky, 2004: 80). In opening his review of *Linguistic Imperialism*, Davies (1996) goes so far as to joke whether the book is meant to be a spoof, and cites its two "fundamental flaws":

(1) The book is insular, looking neither at the interaction of English with other languages nor

at the role of other imperial languages.

(2) The deterministic insistence of the author means that his judgements are impervious to the facts, thereby trivialising history in favour of myth.

(Davies, 1996: 495)

Berns et al interpreted Phillipson's attitude towards his readers as "condescending and patronizing" (Berns et al, 1998: 39), and "found some assertions and terminology puzzling, even insulting, if not simply misleading". The Japanese member of the Berns group commented on the inaccuracy of Japan being referred to as one of the "dominated poor" periphery countries (Berns et al, 1998: 37). Interestingly, Berns et al mentioned what they perceived to be Phillipson's attempts to "dominate us through the imperialism of the printed word" (Berns et al, 1998: 43).

Bisong (1995) rejects Phillipson's thesis as it applies to Nigeria. He argues that history must not be allowed to blind people from the current reality (1995: 127), a view which appears to be shared by Achebe, who wishes to focus on how Nigerians use this "world language which history has forced down our throats" (Achebe, in Pennycook, 2001b: 84).

Pennycook subscribes to many of Phillipson's views, but he appears to be aware of the dangers of such rhetoric, and wants to "avoid what seems to be a foreclosure of discussion and possibilities by naming the spread of English as linguistic imperialism" (Pennycook, 2001b: 84). English itself is not imperialist, and to claim such is, in the words of Lysandrou and Lysandrou, "linguistic luddism" (Crystal, 2003: 25). Lysandrou and Lysandrou add:

If English can facilitate the process of universal dispossession and loss, so can it be turned round and made to facilitate the contrary process of universal empowerment and gain

(Lysandrou and Lysandrou, 2001. In Crystal, 2003: 25)

Of course, it is highly questionable whether English ever will be used on a grand scale for such a noble cause, and we might expect Pennycook to make accusations of "naïve liberal idealism" again.

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However:

> I also want to suggest that the concept of discourse allows for the construction of counter-discourses in English, and may offer remarkable potential for change.
>
> (Pennycook, 2001b: 84)

Describing a language as imperialist serves no purpose, as any language may be used to further imperialist objectives. Language is a tool which may be utilised in both benevolent and malign pursuits. It can be described as neither 'neutral', 'imperialist', nor 'democratic'. These are thoughts which Crystal provides in his own defence against accusations that he argues that 'English is democratic':

> I don't actually know what that sentence might mean. People, and the political systems they create, are democratic, imperialist, and so on, and this is partly expressed in the language they use. I don't know what it might mean to say that a language is democratic in some sense distinct from the people who use it. I would never argue that a language 'is' anything, other than in linguistic terms (language is inflectional, agglutinative, etc). I suppose it is natural to assume that, if one is attacking a position where someone says that 'language is X' (imperialist, in this case), one must espouse the opposite position ('language is not X', i.e. non-imperialist, and thus democratic).
>
> (Crystal, 2008: unpublished)

There are however, two statements regarding the role of English as an international language which are valid. English is dominant. But perhaps most crucially in considering its current role as an international language, English is pragmatic. These statements will now be explored in further detail.

2.4 English is Dominant

There is no question that English is currently dominant, more dominant than any other language in history. There are several contributing factors to this. The Industrial Revolution stemmed from Britain in the late eighteenth century, and all the new vocabulary it spawned was originally in

English. Those who wanted to learn about these groundbreaking innovations had to do so in English (Crystal, 2003: 80). The expansion of British colonial power, which peaked towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the emergence of the USA as the leading power of the twentieth century (Crystal, 2003: 59), tied to the explosion in communications and transport (Crystal, 2003: 82), and more recently, the internet (Crystal, 2003: 115, 121) all combined to place English in its current position of dominance. English was essentially repeatedly in "the right place at the right time" (Crystal, 2003: 78, 120), "an accident of circumstance" (Kaplan, 1987: 138).

2.5 English is Pragmatic

The second statement we can make with conviction, is that English currently retains its international dominance because English is pragmatic. Rightly or wrongly, English was the most practical choice of language in several of the post-colonial, newly-independent nations (Crystal, 2003: 121). In the case of other countries which were successful in developing a different national language, such as Sri Lanka, there came a later realisation that English remained a highly valuable tool for very practical purposes (Crystal, 2003: 111). Phillipson sees all these countries as ongoing victims of linguistic imperialism, but Bisong refutes this as a failure to understand the 'complexities' of the language situation in such places:

> Reasons for learning English now are more pragmatic in nature… Nigerians are sophisticated enough to know what is in their interest, and that their interest includes the ability to operate with one or more linguistic codes in a multilingual situation
>
> (Bisong, 1995: 131)

English may have been considered the most politically expedient, practical, and least undesirable choice of official language for newly independent Nigeria. And it continues to be so. Several writers from the outer circle have been criticised (by inner-circle figures such as Phillipson and by some

fellow outer circle writers) for writing in the colonial master's tongue (Bisong, 1995), but this must surely be a matter of personal choice. Achebe (in Bisong 1995: 129) says "I have been given this language and I intend to use it". Bisong notes that Achebe fully supports the work of others writing in the indigenous languages, and concludes that English was chosen by his own 'creative instincts' (Bisong, 1995: 129). Kennedy (in Kennedy et al, 2001: 110) draws attention to the fact that an additional factor in a writer's choosing English over his or her native language may be the availability of a greater market for one's writing. Whether the motive is to have one's message reach a larger audience, or simply to have a more financially lucrative career, it is undoubtedly pragmatic.

For all the laudable sentiments of having an equitable language policy, the harsh reality is that all too often, it is simply not practical. Let us consider some international institutions. The European Union currently has no fewer than 23 official languages ('Europa: Languages and Europe'), and this number is set to increase with the addition of new member countries such as Croatia and Turkey. But the reality of the situation is far different, with only English, French and German being used for the vast majority of working documents (Phillipson, 2001). With 51% of EU citizens (native speakers and 38% of all other citizens) claiming the ability to hold a conversation in English ('Europeans and their Languages', 2006), English dominance is continuing to grow, in spite of administrative efforts to combat this. Crystal (2003: 89) states that by 1996, when there were only 15 member states, "over a hundred pairs of languages required translation and interpreting services (French/English, French/German, French/Finnish, etc)". Clearly the situation is far more complex now, and quite impractical at a working level.

Other international organisations often take a more pragmatic approach, with groups as diverse as OPEC, the African Association of Science Editors, the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace and the European Aluminium Association all working entirely in English (Crystal, 2003: 87),

despite participants being largely, or even entirely from outer circle and expanding circle nations.

3 How Does English Influence the Development of Society?

English has had, currently has, and will continue to have wide-ranging, varying influences in all the countries of the world. It would be impossible to answer this question comprehensively here. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, comments here are restricted to the situation regarding my country of residence, Japan.

3.1 The Role of English in Japanese Society

Japan is a country from the expanding circle of nations. It remains a 'foreign' language for the majority of Japanese people, despite the recommendations of the government-appointed panel in 2000, that Japan should consider adopting English as a second official language in order to boost its 'global literacy', i.e. its ability to share information and ideas with the world (Asiaweek, April 7, 2000, Honna and Takeshita, 2005: 378). Many opponents of such an idea argue that most Japanese have no need to learn the language, and that it would only serve to increase the rate of decline in Japanese language standards, and damage the prized sense of national identity. Uemichi (1984) remarks that:

> When speaking English, a Japanese becomes separated from his Japanese nature and feels
> fear in the depths of his mind….Most Japanese want to study English not so much in order to
> communicate in it as to learn about western culture and ways of thinking through it.
>
> (Uemichi, 1984: 6)

But over twenty years later, Japan is a very different place, and Uemichi's views seem extremely outdated. In my own experience, the vast majority of Japanese citizens studying English want to learn

to communicate, whether it be for employment or personal reasons. English is now used as a de facto in-house language by some companies which conduct a large amount of business with overseas partners or clients, making English a useful skill for job-seekers or those chasing promotion. The number of Japanese people taking foreign vacations is far higher than twenty years ago, and the nature of those vacations has changed too. Fewer Japanese people are content to be part of the traditional group guided tour to Guam or Hawaii, accompanied by a Japanese-speaking guide and having everything right down to the food served at mealtimes decided for them. Far more people are venturing further afield, and without the dubious benefits of the organized tour. English language ability is considered an asset in travelling to any country, whether it be inner, outer or expanding circle. Honna (2006) takes a positive view of the situation:

> Japanese people and organizations now are becoming more aware than before of the reality of the importance of English as a language of international information, communication, and cooperation."
>
> (Honna, 2006: 120)

He adds that there are also "more actual, immediate, and potential needs for English use" (Honna, 2006:121) in their home country than Japanese people apparently realise, and cites internet communication as an example. Honna (2006) also confronts the fears over the 'torrential influx' of English words into Japanese, arguing that there are two reasons why replacing such words with Japanese equivalents may be problematic. The first reason given is that "foreign words involve new concepts that are not easy to express in Japanese" (Honna, 2006: 120). Unfortunately, he declines to go into further detail on this, but the second reason is far clearer: "foreign words are often used as euphemisms in Japan" (Honna, 2006: 120). It is also accompanied by some examples, including a personal favourite – 'Hello Work' (This is the current name for the unemployment office, which was previously known as the Public Employment Stabilization Office). Hiyama (2002) also lists several

English words which are used as euphemisms.

From this, Honna concludes that foreign words are actually a necessary part of the Japanese lexicon. He also reflects on the unfortunate tendency of Japan' s ELT to "put too much emphasis on reading about foreign cultures, mostly those of the USA and the UK" (Honna, 2003: 122), and the need move away from this, and instead help Japanese people to be able to talk about themselves in an international environment, focusing on 'expressive' and 'explanatory' skills, using English as a tool for communication with people beyond the inner circle. Japanese people have to take command of English and "should demythologize English as such and be liberated from the linguistic self-limitation or self-repression associated with it" (Honna and Takeshita, 2005: 377). According to D'Angelo (2005: 331), Honna likes to tell a story about a Thai professor who joked that "Thais know 100 English words and speak like they know1,000. Japanese know 1,000 words and speak like they know only 10!"

4   The Future of English

English is currently a thriving language, with more and more people all over the world making an effort to learn it. But what does the future hold for English?

4.1 The Threat to English Dominance

At this moment in time, it seems highly unlikely that the position of English as the dominant global language could be under threat from another language. Much has been made in recent years about the rise of China as an economic power, and growing military threat. Graddol (1997:58) suggests one scenario where Chinese becomes the lingua franca of South Asia, with Russian possibly playing a similar role in Eastern Europe-North Asia, and Spanish doing likewise in much of the

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Americas. But this is currently only speculation, with little evidence that it is becoming a reality.

English is already well-established as the lingua franca among the ASEAN bloc of nations, and even

the concept of Chinese itself being a language is questionable. There is a strong argument that given

the level of incomprehensibility between speakers of eight different 'dialects' of Chinese (Crystal,

2003: 6), it would be more accurate to describe these as different Chinese 'languages'. Chinese

friends living here in Japan, who are fluent in Japanese, often talk to each other in Japanese, using it

as a lingua franca between compatriots with different 'dialects' of Chinese. This even extends to a

Chinese married couple who communicate with each other predominantly in Japanese.

Despite the recent growth of Russian economic power, and the impact of the Soviet-era,

when many citizens in the Soviet Union learned Russian as their second language, English has now

supplanted Russian as the most common second language among many of these peoples, especially

the younger generation. It will be interesting if the decline in interest in studying Russian as a foreign

language since the collapse of communism will be significantly reversed in coming years. Spanish

appears to be thriving as an international language, and its expansion has caused alarm among some

citizens of the USA (Crystal, 2003: 132), but the position of English in the USA looks very much

assured.

The biggest threat to the global spread of the English language as we now know it, perhaps

comes from within itself, rather than another language. McArthur (1998) provides a wealth of

information on this topic, highlighting in chapter 1, the 'organised babel' of English-infused local

languages and local varieties of English. With the spread of English throughout the world, a greater

variety of English (or indeed 'Englishes') is inevitable. Many believe this 'hybridization' (McArthur,

1998: 18) may cause the English language to essentially disintegrate into a family of related, but

mutually incomprehensible languages. This is not so hard to believe, if we consider the current

situation regarding existing varieties of English. Even among peoples within the inner circle nations, there are often problems of comprehension. Films from my home city of Glasgow, are often deemed to require subtitles for North American screenings, such are the difficulties faced by the audiences there (*BBC News*, 31st July, 1998).

4.2 The Dangers of English Dominance

Although this paper has dismissed the Phillipsonian idea of the linguistic imperialism of English, Phillipson, along with several other linguists has given voice to some very grave concerns regarding the current dominance of the English language. The three main problems are discussed below:

4.2.1 Linguicide

According to Tsuda:

> We are now living in an age of 'Speak English, or Perish'. This may result, sooner or later, in a 'Global Language Shift' in which people throw away their own languages and shift to English.
>
> (Tsuda, 2008: 50)

While major languages such as Spanish, French, Mandarin *Putonghua*, or even Tsuda's native Japanese are unlikely to be 'killed' by English, it may be a realistic concern for smaller languages. History provides examples of language deaths at the hands of various, stronger languages: Cornish in England (Phillipson, 1992: 19), Kamassian in Russia ('Kamas',www.ethnologue.com), and most recently, Eyak in Alaska (*BBC News*, 24 January 2008). So it is important that steps are taken to preserve languages, as is the case with Swedish (Phillipson, 2001). As Phillipson says: "policy should ensure that people learn and use English in addition to other languages rather than at their expense".

4.2.2 Linguicism

Linguicism involves representation of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for purposes of inclusion, and the opposite for dominated languages, for purposes of exclusion.

(Phillipson, 1992: 55)

This is clearly a serious issue, which on perhaps a more basic level than Phillipson intends, I consider to mean the unfair treatment of people who belong to a different language group (given that the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines racism as 'the unfair treatment of people who belong to a different race'). This form of linguicism can relate to the use of a different language, or the use of a different variety of the same language. Like racism and sexism, linguicism can exist in many forms, and range from relatively innocuous to highly abusive, and even involve the grave violation of basic human rights. Crystal (2003: 125) includes an extract from *Decolonising the mind* (1986), where writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o remembers the manner in which English was forced upon him:

> Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment - three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY

(Crystal, 2003: 125)

Given such experiences during his youth, we can perhaps understand the 'harshness' of his comments urging fellow writers to stop being 'Afro-Europeans' (Bisong, 1995: 130).

Linguicism exists within inner circle societies too. Tsuda (2008) includes a striking example from the University of Massachusetts sociolinguist Donald Macedo:

> A group of students petitioned the administration not to hire professors who spoke English

with a foreign accent, under the pretext that they had difficulty understanding their lectures. By barring professors who spoke English with a foreign accent, these students would have kept Albert Einstein from teaching in U.S. universities.

(Macedo, 2003, in Tsuda, 2008: 50)

4.2.3   Cultural Imposition

Again, the threat of foreign cultures being imposed through the dominance of English is very real. But I would argue that it is by no means inevitable. English does play a role in westernisation (or perhaps more accurately 'Americanization'), but so too does electricity. After all, without it, other cultures would be unable to watch MTV, or have neon-lit MacDonalds restaurants in their locality. But I doubt that Phillipson would suggest such countries would be better-off if the national power grid was shut down. In highlighting the rapid Americanization of China, Tsuda (2008) informs us that NBA legend Michael Jordan is now more popular than former national leader Mao Zedong. But I would speculate that at the time of writing, footballer Ronaldo is infinitely more popular than the incumbent prime minister Gordon Brown. This does not mean that the UK is being 'Portugalised'. Kennedy (Kennedy et al, 2001: 104-105) points to Malaysia as an example of a nation which is promoting its own Islamic identity, but recognises the value of English as a tool for international contact and trade. Local cultures throughout the world must develop English, and shape it to suit their own needs and desires.

4.3 The Development of Englishes

'Half -baked quackery' is the term used by Quirk (1990: 17) to refer to any attempts to allow English speakers in the outer or expanding circles to deviate from the British/American-dictated Standard English. But it appears that Quirk and his followers are now in a minority among linguists. To learn a language is to own it, and all cultures and individuals are entitled to adapt the language as

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they see fit. Throughout its history, English has been adapted to suit particular groups, with variations in grammar, lexis, pronunciation making some varieties within inner circle countries very dissimilar to others. It is true that many of these local variations are only manifest in the spoken language, and the written language often follows a more standard form. But this is not always the case, as we see from the Webster-led development of a distinct American English for both practical and political reasons (Crystal, 2003: 142). The USA took the language, and made it their own. All other societies have the right to do the same.

4.3.1   The Inevitability of Lexical 'Borrowing' and Creation

Kachru and Nelson (2001: 15) refer to the 'attitudinal schizophrenia' which is present in places such as Singapore, where British or American English continues to be the benchmark for many people. This is unrealistic and unnecessary. Kachru and Nelson continue: "If a typical American has no wish to speak like or be labeled as a British user of English, why should a Nigerian, and Indian, or a Singaporean user feel any differently?" (2001: 18) All societies should be comfortable infusing their variety of English with the flavours of their own cultures.

Phillipson (1992: 7) "English intrudes on all the languages that it comes into contact with". But contact is a two-way transaction, so may we therefore assume that in Phillipson's mind, 'all languages that have come into contact with English intrude on it'? This is nonsensical. Would we be better-off eating 'roast cow meat' for Sunday lunch or going on that crucial first date to a place which serves 'small Japanese cakes of cold cooked rice, flavoured with vinegar and served with raw fish, etc. on top'?

Languages constantly 'borrow' and adapt words from others, often merging and creating whole new words in the process. Crystal (2003: 158-163) provides a host of examples of new

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compound words, new meanings for existing words etc, such as 'side-hero' (Crystal, 2003: 160), coming from 'supporting hero' and 'side-kick'. There are words which are used more expansively than in the 'standard' form (such as 'lollies' in New Zealand, which is used to mean 'sweets' or 'candy'), and there are words which are used in a more restrictive sense (e.g. 'beverage' in Jamaica, meaning only 'lemonade')

4.3.2   The Need for Codification

Given the growing number of rapidly expanding, and highly diverse varieties of English which are developing, there is a growing need for codification. This would serve two purposes. Firstly, if countries such as Malaysia and India codified their varieties of English, these could be taught in class, eliminating any possibility of unwanted influence from the inner-circle nations (Kennedy et al, 2001: 105). It would perhaps also bring greater parity in terms of the status with which the indigenised variety is held. D'Angelo is concerned with the "general misconception that world Englishes can be equated with a total absence of standards." (D'Angelo, 2005: 330)

Perhaps most importantly, codifying the various varieties of English would allow countries to determine a form which would still be effective as a lingua franca, in dealing with people from outside their own language group. A rich variety of different forms of English in each part of the world would curtail the linguistic advantage held by inner circle countries. But it is likely that different varieties would become incomprehensible to different groups. Perhaps the solution is for all of the world's English speakers to become fluent in two varieties of the language – their local version, and a more international, standard form. Inner-circle peoples would face the same task. Rajagoplan (2006) refers to the monolingual native-speaker as a 'latter-day noble savage' who is actually disadvantaged in the new environment of World Englishes, of which 'hybridity' is the hallmark

(Rajagoplan, 2006: 99).

Crystal believes the advent of a 'World Standard Spoken English (WSSE)' is a distinct possibility in the future (Crystal, 2003: 185). Already, codification exists in some specialist areas of English, such as air-traffic control – pilot communications, where the "burden of improving radiotelephony communications should be shared by native and non-native speakers" (ICAO, 2004: 3-1). Of course, the question arises of who exactly would be responsible for codifying this WSSE. The UK? The USA? We would be no better off than before. The difficulty lies in finding a completely fair, neutral solution. I suspect that none exists, and that the selection of a group responsible for codifying the WSSE would be based on politics and compromise as much as anything else.

4.4 The Future of English in Japanese Society

I believe that the role of English within Japanese society will continue to grow in the coming years. More English words will corrupt/enrich the Japanese language, depending on one's viewpoint. Stanlaw sees English as a 'creative force' and its presence as "neither a marker of language pollution nor an indication of cultural colonization." (Stanlaw, 2004: 299). The Japanese language is not in any danger of dying in the foreseeable future.

Japanese people will continue to study English, in order to communicate on a global scale, as well as to access the wide range of English-language information and entertainment available. There will be a slow, gradual move away from the America-centric view of the English-speaking world which has dominated since the end of the Second World War (Patil, 2006), towards an outlook which more fully incorporates its English-speaking fellow Asian nations. Japanese people will hopefully become more confident in their use of foreign languages in general, not only English.

5   Conclusion

English is now a far-reaching international language, playing at least a small part in the lives of most of the world's citizens. It reached such a globally dominant position as a consequence of several contributing factors. It has been used as a tool in the oppression of various groups throughout history, as any large language has. It has also been used in many positive ways, bringing people together, as any language does. Certainly, inner-circle English speakers have enjoyed an unfair advantage over those of the outer and expanding circles, predominantly due to factors well beyond language (science, economics etc). But, as Kachru and Nelson urge:

> "we must agree that the old speech community notions are no longer relevant. As long as the old-fashioned English speech community continues to be the paradigm of reference, a monolingual, monocultural way of looking at the linguistic world is unavoidable.
>
> (Kachru and Nelson, 2001: 20)

But it is up to the countries of the outer and developing circles to take ownership of their language, and use it without inhibition or fear of failing to match-up to the 'standards' of the inner-circle varieties. In this age of globalization, a lingua franca for the world is vital, and it does not appear that there are many options more viable than English. In the future, computerised simultaneous translation systems may provide the answer, but anyone who has tried Babel Fish will know that it is still a long way from doing so. Some scholars argue that the world should adopt a minor language as the lingua franca, providing 'a level playing field' for the international arena. Others advocate the use of an artificial language, such as Esperanto. But both of these suggestions are impractical, due to a lack of resources to teach them.

> It is not the language of imperialism; it is the language we have seen that has evolved out of a history of which we need not always be proud, but whose legacies we must use to good effect.
>
> (Ramphal, 1995, in Crystal, 2003: 26)

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