

## ***HOW HAS ENGLISH MANAGED TO SPREAD AROUND THE GLOBE AND TO WHAT EXTENT CAN IT BE CONSIDERED A FORM OF LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM?***

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### ***Abstract:***

This article seeks to explore why English has managed to spread around the globe. It addresses the controversial point of view that the teaching of English could be seen as an act of encouraging linguistic imperialism. Should teachers be encouraged to teach solely in the target language? Or, should teachers use both target language and vernacular language to help expedite language learning, which will in turn help to challenge the ELTE tenet of an English first approach?

### ***Introduction***

According to Phillipson (1992), “*English has become the dominant international language and language pedagogy has contributed to its hegemony*” (1992:4). Cook (2010), 18 years later, supports this statement by implying that the English language is still the dominant means of communication in science and commerce and the current boom in language teaching around the world has helped maintain this dominance. This article will explore how English has been able to manifest itself into everyday life with the help of the English Language Teaching Enterprise (ELTE). The ELTE model has helped drive English around the world, which could be said to have had detrimental effect on other languages in terms of creating an inequality between languages. This supports the notion that the spread of English could be labelled as a form of linguistic imperialism. Linguistic imperialism, according to Phillipson (1992), is the dominance of a language that is asserted and maintained by the establishment that creates inequalities between other languages. Canagarajah (1999) agrees with Phillipson by claiming that “*the dominance of English deepens the inequalities between English and other languages*” (1999:41).

### ***Discussion***

It can be argued that colonial experience and past colonial administration has helped spread English due to that fact that the United Kingdom was one of the most powerful voices, in the League of Nations, on questions of colonial policy at the end of WW1 (Brutt-Griffler 2002). The spread and enforcement of English, however, was not necessarily the goal as “*Frederic Lugard advocated a policy of vernacular education, a policy of where the mother tongue was used in education as opposed to English.*” (Brutt-Griffler 2002:101). The implication here

could be that the British Empire did not wish to make learning English a policy. Great Britain's imperial policy was not linguistic imperialism as people think of it today but the opposite. *"It was a policy of limiting the spread of English to what was minimally necessary to running an empire"* (Brutt-Griffler 2002:115).

According to Young (2001), however, by definition, imperialism has a general sense of economic domination which can have an influential effect on economy and language, therefore implying a spreading, not a limiting notion. Phillipson (1992) also argues that imperialism, in the linguistic sense, is the dominance of a language that is maintained by the establishment. Although Brutt-Griffler's (2002) claim on linguistic imperialism during colonial rule was to 'have enough' to minimally run an empire, this is still, to some extent, a form of imperialism as there would have been some long-term influence on the host countries and their languages, thus resulting in a form of domination. If Brutt-Griffler's opinion is viewed to be partially correct, then one could say that English Language Teachers in this modern age can be considered bi-products of a post-colonial hangover (Blair 2017). Is it possible to say that English language teachers can be viewed as the bearers of spreading English and are unaware of the inherent conservatism that is present and embedded in the ELT industry?

### ***The English Language Teaching Enterprise***

English language teaching today can be considered a major economic and commercial activity that has been marketed effectively worldwide (Cook 2010). For example, *"in 2008 there was a turnover of over 10 billion pounds in language schools in English speaking countries"* (Cook 2010:7). This fiscal competitiveness and drive has powered the language, which has undoubtedly helped in making it the language of science and commerce around the world. One of the reasons for the spread of English comes down to the enforcement and supposed correct method of only English being used in the classroom. *"The monolingual tenet holds that the teaching of English as a foreign language of L2 should entirely be through the medium of English"* (Phillipson 1992:185). The belief that an exclusive focus on English will maximise the learning of a language is difficult to comprehend. Isn't it important to be able to refer to one's mother tongue a crucial part in learning a second language? Widdowson, in Cook (2007:397), supports this by stating that *"while in the classroom the teacher tries to keep the two languages separate, the learners in their own minds keep the two in contact"*.

The ban on other languages reflects a belief that other languages are a hindrance in foreign language learning (Phillipson 1992). The 'English Language Teaching Model' advocates a communicative approach to teaching by encouraging as much speaking as possible where the use of the target language (TL) is the only language that should be used in class (Joyce 2015). Phillipson (1992) claims that the reason behind this pedagogical model is that when learning a language, the learner should retrace the steps of a child learning a language in natural communicative situations. However, can first language acquisition (FLA) be treated the same as second language acquisition (SLA)? This communicative method is supportive of Krashen's SLA theory where he believes that there is no major difference between the way we acquire our first language and subsequent languages. He argues that infants and second language (L2) learners learn by listening attentively to spoken language and not by learning grammar rules (Krashen 2003). This is a plausible argument, but learning a second language could also be argued to be a more conscious activity. We as learners are actually aware of the learning-process taking place (Blair 2017), thus posing questions to the current model of English language teaching where the medium of instruction is only through English. Does this approach really help students or is it a subtle attempt to implement the English language where possible thus reinforcing the passive notion of modern day linguistic imperialism?

The pedagogical practices of the ELTE are a leading reason for the spread of English (Phillipson 1992). Although Phillipson writes this in 1992, it is still very much the case in this current day. For example, the teacher training courses of CELTA and TEFL promote the communicative method and an “English first” ethos is very much a central pillar of ELT. These short courses have resulted in a boom of English language teachers around the globe because anyone, to some extent, can do it. These courses are also supported by a global hype in the publishing industry for UK produced textbooks. The current structure permits the marketing worldwide of monolingual textbooks, which could be seen as re-enforcing Anglo-centricity around the world. (Phillipson 1992). However, having worked with several textbooks both in France and the UK, it is difficult to understand what Phillipson means by this. Hobbs (2013:164) readdresses this matter by mentioning that what is required of English language teachers and language teacher educators is “*a greater understanding of the links between language and culture...a healthier respect for the awareness and variations of English found in local and international contexts*”. English has been turned into a product, and the further it spreads, the more money the industry makes, leaving a trace of an anglo-centric identity, resulting once again in a subtle form of modern day linguistic imperialism. By making textbooks more relevant to student needs, this would help make CELTA graduates more culturally and holistically aware of the student’s local context in which English is being learnt.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, English has been able to flourish and spread worldwide. Language pedagogy taught in teacher training courses has only helped English as a dominant language in the world today (Phillipson 1992). However, it is important to be aware that the ELTE is an industry, it is a business, it is a way of life. If you join the ELTE it becomes a career path and like any other business, it is important to make money, therefore reinforcing this notion that the industry is lined with an inherent conservatism.

If the larger structure is to blame for the spread of English, then perhaps the ESL classroom could act as a site of resistance against the values and pedagogical practices and challenge the upper management in teaching institutions. As there is a definite encroachment of a dominant language, implying that linguistic imperialism is very much alive, we should be encouraging societal bilingualism and multilingual repertoires (Galloway and Rose 2015) rather than aiming at the promotion of a conception of English as the only language operating in the modern world. Phillipson and Canagarajah are cautious and suspicious of the spread of English and view it as having a stratifying nature. They imply there is an inequality between it and other languages. Although dated in their writing, their views are still very current and show how imperialism does stratify, creating inequality.

To take this research further, it would be interesting to see how countries in Africa have responded to the sudden rush of English. After many years of independence, have many African independent states continued to practice linguistic policies inherited at the time of independence? Can English maintain its hegemonic status or will the gradual refusal and powerful national loyalties beginning to emerge result in the gradual decline of English?

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