

Preface

I am an Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Everyone of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses,
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me . . .

(Kamala Das, 1997: 10)

Kamala Das captures the paradox of English in the world today. To some, English anywhere outside the mother tongue context is an alien language, perhaps even an imposed language. From this standpoint, English has a fixed identity, both political and linguistic. It represents something peculiarly English, or perhaps Anglo-American, but at all events certainly Western. English has become a world language because – and to the extent that – Anglo-American, Western culture has become hegemonic in the world.

To others English, although not their mother tongue, is nevertheless *their* language, an expression of their own unique identity. It is theirs because they have *made* it so – through their lived experiences in the language that have gained expression in the way they use English. In this view, English has become a world language to the extent that it has been stripped of any simplistic association with Anglo-American and

Western culture. World English has emerged because its users have changed the language as they have spread it. Of the many English writers from Africa and Asia who have addressed this topic, perhaps none has expressed the point so eloquently as Chinua Achebe:

What I . . . see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a world-wide language. . . . The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. . . . The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. . . . He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience . . . I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. (1994: 433–4)

The first conception described has been well articulated by scholars working within, in particular, the framework of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). That conception of language spread makes use of notions such as linguisticism, cultural and linguistic hegemony, and language imposition. Agency is invested in various representations of institutionalized power. In contrast, the speech communities acquiring the language figure as passive recipients of language policy (cf. Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2000). It is assumed that to have *political* control is to have *linguistic* control. The center-driven narrative of English language spread writes people residing outside the West out of their central role in the spread of English and their place in making the language we call English.

As Said (1993) has forcefully argued, in this narrative of the making of modernity, non-Western peoples barely appear at all, except insofar as they are oppressed by the irresistible forces of imperialism. After they free themselves, they remain subject to ideological control through *hegemony*, a vague force by which the former colonial masters continue to impose their will on their former colonies. Even in the present age this worldview chooses to emphasize the “colonial in the postcolonial,” as Alastair Pennycook (1998) puts it. On the other hand, such a standpoint almost entirely ignores the *postcolonial in the colonial* – that is, the process by which the peoples colonized by European powers shaped the world in which we live, including their own independence, in profoundly significant ways.

A key contention of the present work is that English owes its existence as a world language in large part to the struggle against imperialism, and not to imperialism alone. Rather than dismissing the significance of evidence that shows the active historical role of non-mother tongue English speakers in the development of a world language, the theoretical framework developed here emphasizes their agency and historicizes their will. In this conception, World English is not simply made *through* speakers of other languages but *by* them.

In this book, I investigate the agency of non-mother tongue English speech communities in the two principal processes by which English has become a world language: language spread and language change. This account stresses that these linguistic processes cannot be studied in isolation from one another. Although the idea of combining the study of language spread with language change might appear overly ambitious, the failure to do so hinders the goal of understanding how a host of post-colonial writers from Asia and Africa, like Kamala Das and Chinua Achebe, can claim the linguistic space of English to express their experience. It offers an alternative to the notion that hundreds of millions of people around the world have set out to learn English because they are the passive victims of Western ideological hegemony, emphasizing instead their agency in (re)making world culture. The conception put forward tying language spread to its change holds that World English is a *phase* in the history of the English language – the phase in which most of its speakers do not belong to a dominant national speech community or even a few mother tongue speech communities. Instead, it is the historical phase in which the vast majority of English speakers belong to bilingual speech communities. I suggest that the proliferation of varieties of English are a necessary result of the development of World English, and not a temporary, unfortunate effect that we can expect to disappear in time. The conception developed in this book provides an historical and linguistic justification for first, second and foreign language users of English to claim their rightful place in the creation of the multicultural identity of English.

Chapter 1 opens with a consideration of the nature of the subject matter: what is the meaning of *World English*? It is argued that the English language spread that has produced it requires primarily linguistic analysis rather than sociopolitical. In these terms, English spread appears not as the territorial expansion of the language but as second language acquisition by speech communities, or what will be called in this work *macroacquisition*.

Toward the development of this new understanding, Chapter 2 undertakes a reexamination of some methodological questions in linguistic

analysis. It suggests the necessity of a shift in the unit of analysis employed by linguistics from the individual idealized speaker/listener to the speech community in discussing questions of language spread and change. This paradigmatic refocusing from the linguistic individual to the linguistic social allows for the examination of second language acquisition processes that take place at the speech community level and that have ultimately produced new English varieties. The chapter also justifies the detailed empirical study of language spread in the former British Asian and African colonies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter 3 examines the objectives of empire and the role of ideology versus economics in the formation of British colonial policy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The chapter finds that the formation of British language policy was not necessarily about ideology and ideology was not necessarily about spreading the language. The objectives of the empire involved a complex interplay of ideology and economics. The case of American rule in the Philippines in first third of the twentieth century demonstrates that ideological imperatives might have dictated language policy. In the British empire, however, economics took precedence. An examination of three key architects of British language policy reveals that attitudes toward language in colonial settings involved hitherto largely overlooked complexities.

The agency of speech communities previously viewed as passive recipients of language policy forms the focus of Chapter 4. It undertakes a detailed examination of historical documents spanning more than a century from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries relating to British colonial language policy to complicate the notion of English language imposition in Great Britain's African and Asian colonies. The empirical data suggest that British language policy is perhaps best characterized as *reactive* in its quest to limit access to English. The chapter connects access to English with the creation and preservation of social class stratification. Limiting access to English provided a means of social control over the working classes. Colonial authorities promulgated indigenous language education for the majority of the population and promoted local lingua francas. In the case of Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe), the British engineered a new national language where none previously existed.

Chapter 5 details the extent to which English education was reserved for the colonial elite and kept safely out of the reach of the vast majority of the population of British colonies throughout the history of its colonial empire. Descriptive statistics show a heavy emphasis on providing indigenous language rather than English-based education. The chapter

also examines empire-wide institutional formulations of language policy to counteract the notion that mother language industrial education was a later development, brought about specifically by the intervention of an American educational commission in the 1920s (Phillipson, 1992; Berman, 1982; Clatworthy, 1971; King, 1971). The chapter includes an account of post-World War I imperial politics, which saw the British and the French clash within the administrative bodies of the League of Nations, the French calling for the teaching and use in the colonies of European languages and the British advocating indigenous.

If the emergence of World English is not a function of the linguistic imperialism of British colonialism, why has English rather than languages such as Chinese, French, Turkish, Spanish, Arabic or Portuguese become the world language? Chapter 6 offers an historical explanation. It demonstrates how the advent of non-settler colonies together with British dominance of the world market combined to inaugurate World English via the macroacquisition of the language in Africa and Asia. This process is distinguished from the mode of spread of English within the British Isles via speaker migration, which resulted not in bilingual speech communities but the adoption of English as a mother tongue. Four differentiating features of a world language are posited: econocultural functions, transcendence of the role of an elite lingua franca, stabilized bilingualism, and language change.

Chapter 7 develops the key new construct of macroacquisition, second language acquisition by speech communities, that links language change to its spread. That process involves the genesis of bilingual speech communities. Two forms of the development of bilingual speech communities are distinguished. In *Type A* macroacquisition, the process coincides with the development of *an entirely new speech community*. *Type A* macroacquisition takes place in a multilingual setting in which the acquired language serves as a unifying linguistic resource, the speakers otherwise belonging to separate mother tongue speech communities. *Type B* macroacquisition involves the transformation of a monolingual mother tongue speech community (or a section thereof) into a bilingual speech community. It takes place, in general, in a formerly predominantly monolingual setting – one in which one mother tongue dominates.

Chapter 8 uses of the two types of bilingual speech community to explain the degree of stabilization of language change as new varieties. Bilingual speech communities of *Type B* have available a versatile and flexible mechanism for the communication of culture bound knowledge or meaning in the form of code-switching. In the case of *Type A*, on the other hand, without a common medium to express culture bound knowledge,

language change is far more likely to stabilize. This is particularly true when the new variety becomes tied to expressing a national identity that has no other linguistic expression to fall back on – as might be the case in certain postcolonial settings. To illustrate macroacquisition, the book discusses the development of new varieties of English, with a section devoted to the South African case.

As Chapter 8 discusses the tendencies toward the proliferation of varieties of English within World English, Chapter 9 takes up the question of why the language has maintained its essential unity. The explanation focuses on the emergence of a world language speech community. The resultant centripetal force spawns a process of world language convergence, a center of gravity around which international varieties revolve.

The final chapter suggests that the field of English applied linguistics is inherently tied to the history of the language. The construction of applied linguistics is in large part linked with the spread of the language, including the prominent role of non-mother tongue English-speaking teachers. Chapter 10 suggests the need to *reclaim* the role and contributions of non-mother tongue teachers of English within the international history of English. It argues that an imperialist ideology has not been at work in the spread of the language but in the attempt to ground English applied linguistics in “Center”-driven conceptions of methodology.

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