ENGLISH as a FOREIGN LANGUAGE:
The Modern Day Trojan Horse?

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Throughout China, the National language, Mandarin, is spoken by only 53% (Yan 2005) of the Chinese population while most primary schools, all middle and senior-middle schools, colleges and universities have mandatory English instruction. (Niu Qiang & Martin Wolff 2004)

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” (Shakespeare) But “linguistic imperialism”
denoted by such economically optimistic and sensationalized names as Globalization,
McDonaldization, Englishization, or New World Order, etc. still amounts to post-colonial (United Nations Declaration) re-colonialization. “Englishisation is inextricably linked to globalisation and americanisation (which some see as neo-imperialism or hyperimperialism, or merely empire, Hardt & Negri 2000) and to Europeanization.” (Phillipson 2004)

“Linguistic imperialism can occur when English becomes a gatekeeper to education, employment, business opportunities and popular culture and where indigenous languages are marginalised. (Pennycook 1995, 2001) is suspicious that the spread of English is beneficial, in many cases the language is appropriated and changed by different cultures. Cooke (1988) uses the metaphor of the Trojan horse to describe the way that 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, English is viewed as “the gatekeeper” to higher education, employment, economic prosperity and social status. (Is Chinese drowned in the sea of English? 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 ranks No.1 in income www.chinaview.cn 2004-03-09 11:13:22)

“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 who’s English falls short of the required standard do not receive their diploma. English is also a decisive aspect of the postgraduate

1 "the dominance asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" Robert Phillipson
2 possibly originating with Marshall McLuhan's vision of a "global village" or Immanuel Wallerstein's "world-systems theory"
3 McDonaldization,...is 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
entrance examination. White-collar workers expend a lot of energy on English learning, despite having few opportunities to use it, because it is a pre-condition 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 unparalleled fervor. (Niu Qiang & Martin Wolff 2005) But in doing so, China has also subjected itself to the monolanguage and monoculture predicted and disdained by Marx and Engle. “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, in the Communist Manifesto (1848) Marx and Engels 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, both Smith and Marx and Engels viewed the process of economic and cultural globalization as one 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 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 (MacArthur 2004) are currently teaching English to more than 600,000,000 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. “... language and culture converge when we assign value to particular words and their corresponding objects or symbols. In this sense, words are little more than audio-visual tags for cultural value.” (Steggaman 2004) 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: to act as junior partner to US global power; to help organise the global economy to benefit western corporations; and to maximise Britain’s (that is British elites’) independent political standing in the world and thus remain a ‘great power’. (Curtis 2003)

Underpinning the English language and culture lays the Judeo-Christian religious concepts of justice and social order. The European Union, North American Free Trade Agreement, World Trade Organization, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, World Bank,
International Monetary Fund, even the United Nations itself, are all predicated upon Western legal concepts evolved from British Common Law (Niu Qiang & Martin Wolff 2004) and are vehicles for the implementation of linguistic imperialism on a regional or 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 that have re-coined the “Golden Rule” (Holy Bible) 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 IMF, World Bank, WTO, and NAFTA to highlight their perception that these international organizations are mere tools of Western dominance and economic injustice.

China spent 15 years negotiating the terms of its membership in the WTO. (Long Yongtu 2001) Membership “per se” was not the issue. What was at stake was the 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. The WTO is the most significant instrument for implementing linguistic imperialism on a global scale. (Phillipson 1992)

“English, which in the words of George Steiner (1975: 469) ‘acted as the vulgate of American power and Anglo-American technology and finance’, has 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, ‘big’ or ‘small’, nor to its colonizing effects on them; it conceals consternation concerning the role it plays in minimizing the importance of the nation and in 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 accomplishment that it was in the last century. It is even more so 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. (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 being, in reality, just another fancy name for re-colonization or reshaping the world in the image of the U.S. and its philosophy of a “free society.”

This is also 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.” - from 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 of EFL teachers recruited to teach EFL to the Iraqi people.

“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.” (Templer 2002)

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, i.e. wars and threats of wars. Suggested counter measures to this English invasion include adopting an artificial language such as Esperanto (Dr. Ludwig L. Zamenhof, a Polish physician, published it in 1887) as the international language of commerce; placing a prohibition on learning or using English, or placing an embargo on importation of Western culture through literature, movies and songs. (Phillipson 2003) For obvious and not so obvious reasons, each such absurd suggestion is doomed to failure. (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 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 and the recent escalation of global terrorism. These two phenomena have certain common characteristics which bear on the issue of acceptance of an English language based New World Order.

Ethnic cleansing is defined as “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.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_cleansing)

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 1900’s and into the 21st century, ethnic cleansing has spread through the former Yugoslavia in Europe and far too many African nations such as Rawanda and Sudan. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_cleansing)

Modern terrorism is hard to define. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definitions_of_terrorism) **Academic Consensus**: 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 targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought. **Jason Burke**, an expert on terrorism: use or threat of serious violence’ to advance some kind of 'cause'. Some state clearly the kinds of group ('sub-national', 'non-state') or cause (political, ideological, religious) to which they refer.

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 that which one equates with their own self-identity and self-worth and which separates them 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 a threat to language, religion, culture, or ethnicity.

Ethnic cleansing and terrorism may be the natural defensive mechanism to the Trojan Horse bearing the EFL army, armed with English language and culture. Those who suggest poverty as the impetus for ethnic cleansing or terrorism may suffer from a myopic and very wrong world view. (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 emanating out of Moscow, Russia, or Washington D.C. and London, England 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 simply a freedom fighter opposing the colonization of the Muslim world by the Western
economic superpower through the imposition of Judeo-Christian beliefs which 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, world-wide 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. ...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.” (Bush May 24, 2004)

Therefore, 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. (Bush 2003)

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 the English language based New World Order is in jeopardy.

According to the Judeo-Christian religion, there was a time in world history when all people spoke one language. (Holy Bible) And when the people attempted to build a tower to Heaven to become as knowledgable as God, He confused their language, scattered them and destroyed their Tower of Bable. And yet, it is those whose culture and beliefs are founded upon this Judeo-Christian religion who are now attempting to bring about a world unity of one language by evangelizing the whole world with the English language. These same people attempt to replicate their God’s knowledge and usurp His domain through scientific experimentation which goes so far as to propose to clone human beings. (CNN 2005) Do these people not realize that, according to their Bible, all of their efforts are vanity? The scriptures they appear to cherish proclaim the return of their Messiah to claim His thrown and world dominion, making all of their worldly efforts for naught. Do these “English only” evangelists not have the conviction of their own religion?

Although the Internet is also viewed by many as a factor in excellerating the dominance of English as the international language of commerce, a recent study fortells a much different and linguistically diverse future for E Commerce on the internet. (Cox 2000) Further, free, speedy and accurate translation services available on the Internet tend to reduce the need
for a universal or international language. The Internet may be the world’s last legitimate and acceptable line of defense against linguistic imperialism.

Finally, there is a growing number of linguists who are starting to realize the necessity of sounding the alarm and opposing the injustice of linguistic imperialism. Professor Kanavillil Rajagopalan of Brazil recently assembled and published 36 articles from 33 authors in “A linguistica que nos faz FALHAR,” (Portugese) Parábola Editorial of Rua Clemente Pereira, 327 – Ipiranga 04216-060 São Paulo, SP, BRAZIL. This compilation of articles provides some of the most current thinking about the need for proper language planning and is exceedingly pro linguistic ecology or linguistic diversity.

To the extent that there are forms of resistance to the spread of English, we can talk about a process of hegemony being in operation. By extension, we can talk about the hegemony of English (Macedo, Dendrinos & Gounari 2003) that involves struggles to do away with any forms of resistance and thus allow it to dominate. This process is actually 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.

We are very uncomfortable with the idea that linguists, leaders of ethnic cleansing movements, and terrorists may be aligned in the resistance movement against linguistic imperialism. But we are likewise disturbed that some people may feel so threatened by linguistic imperialism that they may be compelled to put down the pen and pick up the sword. We by no means condone ethnic cleansing or terrorism, but we do understand some of the pressures and threats that may frustrate someone to such anti-social and unacceptable behavior. Leaders of the linguistic imperialism movement, who are also committed to fight a war against terrorism, (U.S. President George W. Bush and U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair) may be well advised that the search for the enemy should not take place in the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan or the deserts of Iraq, but the true enemy may be found by looking in a mirror. President George W. Bush has stated that Osama bin Laden and terrorists like him hate the American way of life and freedom (Bush 2001) but maybe Osama bin Laden simply sees the American way of life and freedom as “an invasive threat to his cultural identity” (Boyle 1997) when forced upon his Muslim world through linguistic imperialism.

CONCLUSION

Linguistic imperialism is a struggle for power. (Tollefson 1995) Linguistic imperialism is an insidious weapon for the use by one country to interfere with the internal affairs of another country. Language planning must not only consider the affirmative needs of the particular society but must also have a defensive element to protect against linguistic imperialism perpetrated by another society. Yes, EFL is a modern day Trojan horse filled with EFL teachers/soldiers or missionaries, armed with English words rather than bullets, intent upon re-colonizing the world to remake it in the image of Western democracy. China has brought the Trojan Horse within its gates and the army of EFL teachers is hard at work Westernizing China.
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