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Robert Phillipson responds to

Humphrey Tonkin *Language and the ingenuity gap in science*

The empire of scientific English

Tonkin's article refers to many relevant parameters in the current dominance of English in science. His conclusion that publication in English 'is erroneously equated with scientific advancement in general' is a disturbingly valid generalisation that ultimately reflects ignorance, prejudice and myopia.

Belief in it has only taken root in continental Europe within roughly the past decade. That it went without saying earlier in the UK and USA reflects lack of reflection on the part of cultures that have been economically, politically, and scientifically dominant, and still are in some respects. It also reflects historical amnesia, since Anglo monolingualism was counter-balanced by the strong presence of Latin and Greek in general education until well into the 20th centuryⁱ.

American English-language dominance in Europe was unthinkable before 1945, but US global ambitions have been actively pursued for two centuries (Hixson 2008, Smith 2003). Creating a global empire was given concrete form in academia through funding by US corporate world 'philanthropic' foundations. They invested heavily and strategically in research and higher education in Europe from 1919, and worldwide after 1945. This has decisively influenced the way research paradigms and university training in the social sciences (sociology, anthropology, political science etc.) and applied natural sciences such as medicine are understood and organized. Building on domestic policies, the significance of English for US empire (eagerly abetted by the British, like in military affairs) can be traced throughout the 20th century (Phillipson 2009a).

80 years ago Bertrand Russell (1960, 166-8) expressed concern about academia being limited by utilitarian constraints and an excessive influence on universities by business. Current linguistic favouring of English structurally and ideologically is a result of increased corporate influence on research (through direct funding and in research councils) and university management (presence on university Senates). Partnership between the state, with its responsibility for universities as a public good in Europe, and commerce is a present-day troublesome reality. The trade union of Danish academics is using the UNESCO complaints procedure to attempt to elicit a ruling that university management structures (Senates now have a majority of non-academics) are in conflict with principles of academic freedom and university autonomyⁱⁱ.

Tonkin's portrayal of US linguistic hubris contrasts markedly with the way universities in continental Europe see themselves. Many Nordic universities have formulated language policies that aim at ensuring that their graduates and staff are in effect bilingual: universities have a responsibility as publicly funded institutions to promote the national language(s), and they participate in an international community of practice that functions predominantly but far from exclusively in English. This principle is enshrined in a Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy (available in eight Nordic languages and Englishⁱⁱⁱ), signed by Ministers from five countries.

The assumptions that underpin higher education and research language policy are made explicit by some Nordic universities. Thus the University of Helsinki declares:

Languages are a resource within the academic community

The University's bilingual and multilingual environment and internationalisation are sources of enrichment for all and are a necessity for the international comparability of its research performance.

Language skills are a means to understanding foreign cultures and for making Finnish culture known to others. The university promotes the language proficiency of its students and staff as well as supports their knowledge of different cultures. Multilingual and multicultural communities promote creative thinking.

University of Helsinki, Finland, Language policy, 14 March 2007^{iv}

In an anthology that explores the tensions between expanding English and the national language in Denmark (Harder 2009), three leading academics from the hard sciences (mathematics, chemistry, life sciences) at the University of Copenhagen explain that proficiency in both Danish and English is required of their staff and students. Flexible policies determine choice of teaching materials, and in which degree programmes or courses Danish and English are used as the medium of instruction. Some uses of language function in parallel (e.g. some terminology), whereas for others there is functional differentiation (e.g. more specialised content that is not of national relevance in English). None of the Copenhagen policy statements refer to what they are doing as bilingual education, which it is in all but name, often with course readings in English and Danish in speech.

There are many variants of Chinese-English bilingual higher education, with quality control, and financial incentives for Chinese teachers who are capable of teaching in English: ... in bilingual education, Chinese is the dominant medium of instruction. [...] ... we need to be cautious in developing our own model and philosophy to suit the context of our country.' (Jiazhen 2007, 213, 214). Is it only in China that one can find a professor of Mechanical and Power Engineering citing Colin Baker and Jim Cummins on academic proficiency development?

The Anglo world may miss out in the longer term. On the other hand the prestige and resources of top universities in the USA and UK mean that these countries can attract top scholars from all over the world^v. Many of these remain bilingual, though with English as the sole professional tongue. The risk of a monolingual mindset may be similar in other parts of the world, not least in former colonies and in countries in the Asia and the Middle East to which Anglo countries are exporting 'English-medium universities' (Phillipson 2009b)^{vi}. A generation ago most academics in northern Europe were expected to have a reading proficiency in English, French and German. Younger scholars tend to have proficiency in a single foreign language. Concern about English becoming the sole filter for information from the outside world is a major one, since the idea that everything is published in English worldwide is false. A Danish Professor of German maintains that the Danish government might not have naively opted for participating in Bush II's illegal war in Iraq if more Danish policy-makers had been familiar in depth with how the issues were being explored in the French and German governments and media.

My personal professional trajectory has been decisively influenced by reading work in French, and to a lesser extent German and the Scandinavian languages. Reading these languages is still important, but mostly for empirical documentation of experience, trends, strategies etc rather than

cutting-edge research. I occasionally use Danish or French, in writing and at conferences, when this is appropriate, like many locals.

The pressures behind the scholarly juggernaut English are massive. The latest instrument for imposing conformity worldwide is bibliometric ranking and quantification. Several European countries now have lists of A and B publishers and journals, the underlying assumption being that whatever is published in one (top journals are invariably English medium) is intrinsically superior to the other. As anyone with first-hand experience of peer review knows, while it is a useful process, it is not an objective gold standard. Editor gatekeepers are massively influential.

The large output of handbooks and encyclopedias also serves to consolidate the dominance of English texts. Most have few references to scholarship in other languages. Scholarship in philosophy in, for instance, Spanish is suffering as a result: publishers are known to insist, even when an entry in a dictionary or encyclopedia is about a Latin American or Spanish philosopher, on excluding references to non-English sources (Mendieta, Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 2006).

The pre-eminence of English in the European Union (27 countries, and additional ones negotiating accession) is being consolidated by the efforts of the EU Commission, despite the EU being officially committed to maintaining linguistic diversity. The Directorate-General for Research functions almost exclusively in English: it is the language in which virtually all research applications are submitted, even though in theory any of the 23 official languages can be used. Expert assessment of the large volume of applications, and feedback to applicants, is entirely in English.

The Commission has also largely set the agenda for the integration of higher education and research, known as the Bologna process. Policy papers and initiatives tend to conflate 'internationalisation' with 'English-medium higher education'. These indications of the consolidation of a hegemonic language are internalised imperceptibly, and without challenge, though much university life remains unaffected.

The Bologna process ignores the fact that since 1991, as a result of an initiative of the former Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences, a bi-/multilingual 'European doctorate' has existed. The criteria for qualifying require study in two member states during the PhD cycle, assessment by scholars from two countries other than the country of the thesis defence/viva, and part of the viva taking place in a language other than the language(s) of the country where the thesis is defended. The European doctorate is awarded in addition to a national one. There are some doctoral schemes in cross-national partnerships in the natural and social sciences. A number of British universities are involved, disproving the idea that all British academics are unrepentantly monolingual^{vii}.

It would be naïve to see the massive integration that Europe has undergone in recent decades as a purely European affair. The USA has always been deeply involved (Winand 1993). The Marshall Plan, which morphed into the OECD, was conditional on the integration of European economies. Bologna process policies stress the interlocking of the economy with higher education, and advocate privatisation that erodes the principle of universities as a public good. The new buzzwords are that degrees must be 'certified' in terms of the 'employability' of graduates. 'Accountability' no longer refers to intellectual quality or truth-seeking but means acceptability to corporate-driven neoliberalism. Before European integration has taken on really viable forms, universities are being

told to think and act globally rather than remain narrowly European – and by implication use English rather than a national language, and contribute to running corporate empire.

An instance of the global ambitions of the EU, and how European languages can deliver, can be seen in the Commission's 'Communication' *Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment*, of 18 September 2008. It refers to a number of consultative studies, and includes a rationale for a range of activities to strengthen language learning and linguistic diversity. The Communication acknowledges 'the strategic importance of European World Languages as a communication vehicle and as a means of solidarity, cooperation, and economic investment'^{viii}. The European Parliament intriguingly recommended that this should be 'one of the main political guidelines of European policy on multilingualism'. The Commission announces a commitment to 'better promote all EU languages abroad' but particularly 'those European languages which have a worldwide coverage'. It wishes to strengthen the work of bodies already in the field, where clearly it is the British and the French who are most active. It is difficult to see this as anything other than a wish to consolidate primarily English worldwide for commercial and political reasons. Whether the appointment in December 2009 of the first Foreign Minister of the EU, Baroness Ashton, who happens to be British, will lead to any funding for consolidating the power of European languages 'abroad' remains to be seen.

I have only two minor quibbles with Tonkin's argument. I dispute the belief (popularised by Graddol and Jenkins) that 'control of the English language is slipping out of the hands (or mouths) of its native speakers'. Written English for international purposes – which has national UK-US origins – uses a common global code, with only minor variation in lexis and insignificant variations of syntax and spelling. Even speech for international purposes must use this code, though with substantial phonetic variation. The code is very much in the hands, discourses and reference works of native speakers.

Secondly the idea that the profit-making of monolinguals results from 'conscious choices made by the linguistically advantaged' seems to me to ignore how hegemonic ideologies and habitus are internalised. They are part of the 'normalization' process that Tonkin denounces, largely subconscious, and without the historical and structural origins of inequality being interrogated. Science that is rationalised as being apolitical and ideologically neutral is a prime example of such self-delusion. We face therefore a massive consciousness-raising task, along the lines that Tonkin suggests to change not only attitudes to inequality in science but also the underlying structures.

Are we moving then towards global linguistic apartheid, global diglossia, with the US remaining monolingual? Or are the forces of diversity and alternative worldviews and economies strongly in place? Time will tell.

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ⁱ That US monolingualism is recent can be seen from the 1966 *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, which includes the *Britannica World Language Dictionary* (1954). This consists of 6,000 words in English and their equivalent in columns for French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, and Yiddish, plus the same set of words listed for each of the other six languages with translations into English. There are of course some First Nations languages and many immigrant languages in use.

ⁱⁱ www.dm.dk.

ⁱⁱⁱ The full text of the Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy is on <http://www.norden.org/da/publikationer/publikationer/2007-746>

^{iv} http://www.helsinki.fi/inbrief/strategy/HYn_kieliperiaatteet.pdf.

^v Nazism caused a similar brain drain in the 1930s.

^{vi} The *Guardian Weekly* reports (4 December 2009, Stephen Hoare, p. 40) that the number of English-medium international schools around the world has trebled from around 1,700 to 5,270 in eight years, a sector 'now worth \$18bn worldwide and set to double in value by 2020' with expansion mainly in India, the Middle East, and Asia. Presumably many graduates go on to study at Anglo universities.

^{vii} (<http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/researchoffice/graduateeducation/g-eurodoc.pdf>)

^{viii} Footnote 38 refers to a European Parliament Resolution, 2006/2081(INI).