

“Do you speak global?” an enquiry into the theories of English as an international language.

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Fields:

Discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics

Keywords:

English as an international language, Linguistic ecologies

Abstract:

This paper addresses methodological issues that emerge in the study of English as an international language, and argues for a more in-depth analysis of the specific socio-economic factors at stake in the process of what is often simplistically regarded as linguistic globalization.

It is argued that, amongst attitudes towards the spread of English, it is important to avoid the bias of addressing its consequences morally. Indeed, the last decades have witnessed fierce debates over the legitimacy of a cultural imperialism at stake, with one of the main issues concerning the endangerment of local cultures and linguistic identities. Nonetheless, proponents of this moralizing approach fail to offer a convincing analysis of key terms such as *culture* and *linguistic identity*. Rather, they advocate the preservation of *linguistic diversity*, a position which I argue derives from the wrong belief in languages as ideal autonomous entities.

Furthermore, one should not simplistically regard English as an agent of American neoliberal economics or as the insidious promoter of global capitalist values. This is not to deny the role of (i) historical factors which have led to the recent predominant position of English as an international language, and (ii) the political issues at stake within the linguistic debates surrounding it. Quite the contrary, their repercussions are of primary importance when it comes to locating the diverse *linguistic ecologies* (Mufwene 2004) in their respective temporal, geographical, economical and social contexts.

Altogether, this paper will focus on various components influencing the dynamics of languages in contact. It argues that diglossia (i.e.: languages in competition) is not necessarily

prevailing over multilingualism. Indeed, the main claim of this paper is that all speakers eventually make linguistic choices according to their own specific situation, and don't conform to general categorizations. Examples will be taken from fieldwork conducted with individuals in multilingual working environments, where English is selected over other languages, and more specifically French.

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