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Promoting English: Hydras old and new **Robert Phillipson**

Until the 16th century, English was the language of an obscure island in northern Europe. Military aggression in Wales, Ireland, and Scotland was followed by vigorous attempts to eliminate all languages other than English throughout the British Isles, with only partial success. People of British origin who settled in the Americas and Australasia imposed similar policies, with disastrous consequences for local languages. This English Hydra is still vigorously alive worldwide. However, intriguingly, the monster is understood by many as a universal need in the modern world. This misunderstanding obscures the reality that English opens doors for the few and closes them for the many. English plays a central role in servicing a capitalist system that serves the interests of a tiny fraction of the world's population. The wealth of the transnational elite accumulates in ethically indefensible offshore banks, while the rest of the world attempts to survive onshore. In countries known as 'English-speaking', a label that airbrushes speakers of many other languages, the rich have become much richer in recent decades, while conditions for the rest of the population have deteriorated. The English-language Hydra services this injustice at home and abroad.

The key document that determined language policy in the British Empire - the promotion of English and the marginalisation of local languages - was a *Minute on Indian Education* prepared by Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1835. India was of immense economic value to the UK, but the goals included to strengthen 'our language, our learning, and ultimately our religion in India... India as a base of operations, that afterwards may be applied ... to the surrounding nations ... The Indian mind had walled itself up inside such a prison that only a new language could give it a ladder of escape'; English was for 'the enlightenment of benighted Asians' (Charles Trevelyan, cited in Clive 1973: 361). The decision to strengthen English and weaken the hold of other languages was in fact a *fait accompli* before the Minute was written. Macaulay functioned as a spin doctor. English has retained its position as the language of power in former colonies.

This has been achieved through continuous Western efforts to promote English in a changing world. American foundations were active in funding work on establishing English as a 'world' language on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1930s (Phillipson 2009: 112-118). *The diffusion of English culture outside England. A problem of post-war reconstruction*, written by an adviser to the British Council in 1941, articulates a rationale for establishing English as a 'world-language and culture based on our own': he advocates the creation of a new career service, an 'army of linguistic missionaries' (Routh 1941: 59, 11), a modern-day Hydra. USA and UK strategy was coordinated in the 1950s and 1960s. The English Language Teaching (ELT) profession was established, impelled by concern to maintain the value of American and British investments, and to consolidate and influence links with newly independent countries (Phillipson 1992).

The British Council has spearheaded the promotion of British English worldwide since the 1930s, for political, geostrategic, and economic reasons. Ensuring a major place for English in education is a key goal. It is marketed with the claim that Britain has the expertise to solve language learning problems worldwide, which is paradoxical and counter-intuitive when one recalls that the British are notoriously monolingual. How is this dubious Hydra nourished? The issue will be explored by contrasting the arguments in the early imperial rhetoric of commercially-driven British colonisation (Macaulay, 1835) with those used in the market-driven commodification of English in the 21st century (the British Council's language consultant, David Graddol, *English Next India*, 2010). The evidence shows remarkable continuity in the types of argument used. It reveals the smooth transition from colonial linguistic imperialism to contemporary linguistic neoimperialism.

Graddol collected and processed a large amount of information on the economic, linguistic and educational problems and challenges that India faces. Official governmental studies are cited, a 2009 World Bank report, and the views of industry. Many observations stress inequalities in India, the inefficiencies for many children of what is supposed to be education, and the wish of all classes and castes to attain the benefits that proficiency in English offers. However, Indian scholars figure only very selectively in the study, and the role of Indian universities is unexplored.

I have major reservations about the entire exercise. The unstated agenda is to strengthen the British ELT industry. In Graddol's earlier reports for the British Council, *The future of English* (1997), and *English Next* (2006), the connection between a multi-faceted analysis and British ELT was made openly: the purpose was to equip the British ELT establishment (universities, publishers, language schools, consortia exporting language teachers, etc.) to maintain the position of the billion-pound industry. *The covert assumption in the Indian report is that the UK has the expertise to solve India's English-learning educational problems.* This assumption is subtly packaged, as no explicit advice is forwarded in the report, but there are many misrepresentations and false arguments.

British interest in India has always been essentially political and commercial. British India was run from 1757 to 1858 by the East India Company, which exercised military and administrative functions and was outstandingly profitable for the British economy. The 2009-2010 Annual Report of the British Council, 'the UK's international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities', reports a turnover of £705 million, with 'business operations' (primarily teaching and testing English) generating '£2.50 for every £1 of public money received'. The 'UK's second biggest charity' has as a primary purpose to 'support the English language industry, worth £3-4 billion a year'. The organization's self-promotion is riddled with such contradictions. The 2012-2013 Annual Report describes the organisation, active in over 100 countries, and with 9 centres in India, as increasingly profitable. Its executive directors have a personal incentive to increase their astronomic salaries through improved 'business' results. This replicates colonial financial priorities: Macaulay's personal salary was the same as the total budget for educational activities in India.

A policy survey conducted by a pro-government NGO suggests how the British Council could be more effective: the students it teaches worldwide and 'the 800,000 people who take exams administered by the Council every year ... would make good targets for public diplomacy activity', as part of 'Diplomacy by Stealth: Working with others to achieve our goals. ... The general lesson is ... make sure it appears to be coming from a foreign government as little as possible. Increasingly ... it must

work through organisations and networks that are separate from, independent of, and even culturally suspicious toward government itself” (Leonard, Stead and Smewing 2002: 81). Thus the activities of English teachers - some of whom may dislike their own government - can stealthily serve a national cause, local English for the global purposes of Britain.

Continuities in discourse

Juxtaposed extracts from the two key documents exemplify how the case for English is argued.

Macaulay’s <i>Minute</i> 1835	Graddol’s <i>English Next India</i> 2010
<p>... the Orientalists. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.</p> <p>Whoever knows that language [English] has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations... the literature now extant ... is of far greater value than all the literature which 300 years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together.</p> <p>We are attempting to raise up a large class of enlightened natives. I hope that, twenty years hence, there will be ... thousands of natives familiar with the best models of composition ... and Western science. Among them some persons ... will have the inclination and ability to exhibit European knowledge in the vernacular dialects.</p>	<p>The rate of improvement in the English-language skills of the Indian population is at present too slow to prevent India from falling behind other countries which have implemented the teaching of English in primary schools sooner, and more successfully.</p> <p>English is now seen as a 'basic skill' which all children require if they are fully to participate in 21st century civil society.... It can now be used to communicate to people from almost any country in the world ... We are fast moving into a world in which not to have English is to be marginalised and excluded.</p> <p>India now aspires to make English universal ... is it necessary? Is it desirable? ... engaging with globalisation ... building on the extraordinary human resource offered by India’s existing linguistic and cultural diversity. English may be a useful catalyst ... a vital ingredient ... but the final goal must lie beyond English.</p>

The point of departure for both authors is that what India needs is English. They both refer to local languages, but Macaulay bombastically execrates Indian languages: Sanskrit, Persian and Bengali have failed to make India a ‘wise nation’. Indian brains are seen as *tabula rasa* waiting for European

enlightenment. Graddol sees English correctly as ‘a casualty of wider problems in Indian education’. There are, however, fundamental flaws in Graddol’s line of argument.

- Graddol cites no evidence for English being taught successfully in primary schools elsewhere. The only country that could demonstrate this is Singapore, where English is the sole medium of education. As a result of several decades of this policy, well over half of Singaporeans now use English as the main language of the home. This is an extreme case of forcible language shift.
- The claim that English is a ‘basic skill’ (left undefined) is also undocumented. It is a deceptive mantra voiced by uncritical promoters of ‘global’ English, which is a project rather than reality. ‘Basic’ implies a privileged position from early in general education. The effect is to put English onto a comparable pedestal to Macaulay’s.
- The idea that you can communicate in English with ‘people from almost any country in the world’ is fraudulent. Two-thirds of the world’s population have no proficiency in English. In most parts of the world, including former colonies, you don’t get far in English outside elite circles and tourist sites.
- Graddol rightly wonders whether making English universal in India is an appropriate policy, but the ‘final goal ... beyond English’ is possibly an oblique reference to participation in globalisation, as though this is what the entire population needs. While English is of major importance for the global economy, assuming that it is so ‘basic’ that it is a requirement for economic success or general education is contradicted by the fact that the successful economies of China, Japan and Korea use local languages in basic education, as do continental European countries.

Graddol’s reference to English as a ‘basic skill’ assumes instruction through the *medium of English* rather than as a school *subject*. He conflates the two. The falsity of his argument is at its most visible when he refers to northern European countries. Here ‘the majority of the adult population can now speak English’ but it has taken ‘50-60 years to reach this stage’ (page 122). The reality is that good English in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and Finland (which in fact varies hugely) has been achieved in countries which are more egalitarian than all others, with free education in a national language for the entire population, and well-qualified teachers with reasonable fluency in English. English is taught and learned as a *foreign* language, i.e. as a *subject*, and virtually *never as a medium of instruction*. In any case, the English proficiency of the Scandinavians, Dutch, and Finns is much more limited than that of a large elite of English-users in India for whom it is in effect the dominant language. Graddol’s comparison is completely false.

The overall thrust in the two texts is fundamentally similar:

Macaulay’s <i>Minute</i> 1835	Graddol’s <i>English Next India</i> 2010
It denigrates and stigmatizes the local.	Indian learning of English is inadequate.
It glorifies Western culture and English.	English is the key to success in the modern world.
It rationalizes the asymmetrical relationship between colonizer and colonized.	The UK has the solution to India’s language in education problem.
A British intellectual can decide matters.	A single expert from the UK can cover the issues.
It conceals the economic interest of the	The potential benefits to the UK economy are not

colonizers.	mentioned.
It fails to refer to the reality of British military occupation of India.	Geostrategic political and military interests are not considered relevant.

Macaulay's declared goal was to produce 'interpreters between us and the many millions we govern'. The Minute was essentially about priorities in the short term as well as long-term goals, and was concerned exclusively with higher education. He expressed concern that those educated in Western knowledge would be isolated and estranged from the rest of the population, that there would be inadequate 'filtration' to other groups. This was prescient. An additional consequence of the implementation of the policy, which established the supremacy of English in Bengal within a decade, was to intensify the division between Hindus and Muslims.

Gandhi wrote in 1907: 'To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them. The foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us' (2010: 84). Many scholars from the subcontinent have stressed the pernicious consequences of the decision to put funding into English rather than Indian languages. English has always been causally related to inequality and injustice.

Linguistic imperialism invariably involves pull as well as push factors, demand as well as supply. To consider British promotion of ELT as exclusively a question of meeting demand, which the British Council has done for fifty years, is simply untrue. Graddol correctly writes that there is an Indian demand for English, but his report in reality orchestrates this demand on the assumption that the British can solve India's educational language learning problems. Few Indian educationalists would agree with this idea. Macaulay's cultural arrogance was explicit, while the British Council bombastically proclaims that English is needed for success in the global economy, in Indian education, and in every Indian home:

Macaulay 1835	Martin Davidson, Chief executive, British Council, Foreword to Graddol 2010; British Council Annual Report 2009-10
<p>We know that India cannot have a free government. But she may have the next best thing – a firm and impartial despotism.</p> <p>We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue. [...]</p>	<p>English provides access to the information with which individuals can learn and develop and it provides access to the networks which are vital in building and maintaining economic links.</p> <p><i>English Next India</i> tells us that from education to the economy, from employability to social mobility, the prospects for India and its people will be greatly enhanced by bringing English into <i>every classroom, every office and every home.</i> (italics added)</p>

The British tabloid *The Sun* proclaimed on 18 January 2008, when Gordon Brown made his first visit as Prime Minister to India and China:

Gordon Brown will today pledge to export the English language to the world – and boost our economy by billions. Mr Brown believes teaching English will quickly become one of Britain’s biggest exports. It could add a staggering £50billion a year to the UK economy by 2010.

Brown announced a boost to English language learning, teaching and training facilities for people throughout the world. The British Council announced on its website (highlighting added):

We will help develop a new website to deliver that goal. Gordon Brown also announced how the British Council will be starting a programme in India to recruit 'Master Trainers' charged with developing the skills of 750,000 teachers of English over a five-year period. These initiatives are being developed by our teams in China, India and the UK.

The Prime Minister emphasised that the new website will establish networks between teachers and students *throughout the globe and enable one-to-one tuition between people anywhere in the world*. Martin Davidson, Chief Executive of the British Council, said we are delighted to be working with other organisations to provide access to the best of teaching: ‘We know that right around the world young people want access to English language to give them the skills they need to take part in the *globalising economy* but also to get *access to all the knowledge and understanding that we have in this country*. And our ambition, as an organisation, is that every learner and teacher of English right around the world should have *access to the best of English language teaching from this country*.’

British commercial interest in the Indian market for English was serviced by a study by the market research agency Ipsos MORI for the British Council in 2009, *Demand for English language services – India and China*. This study revealed that the interest of Indians in learning English has little if anything to do with the UK. Graddol’s report does not refer to it.

However, the British know best what India needs in 1835 and 2010. The British will work to establish (British) English in every Indian home. The imperial packaging is renewed and cushioned by neoimperial obfuscation, the Hydra clothed in worthy and wordy good intentions.

To achieve this aim, Graddol brings in a set of myths that seem plausible but can easily be disproved:

- English as *a global language*. This is in fact a project that some are attempting to bring about. It is not a present-day reality except in restricted circles.
- English is ‘*the language of business across Europe*’. In fact, many languages are used in business in Europe.
- European *universities are shifting from local languages to English*. What continental European universities are doing is adding English to their repertoires. There is currently no evidence that this is at the expense of local languages of scholarship.
- There is a *global consensus on how English should be learned*, ‘a new global orthodoxy’. Elsewhere in the report Graddol endorses the idea of a mix of educational approaches being needed, but the notion that one approach is universally valid is false.
- The *early start fallacy*. The age factor is one among many variables that influence educational success, but age is less important than the qualifications and quality of teachers and choice of the most appropriate medium of instruction.

What is dangerous about these claims is that bureaucrats and an Indian readership might take them as gospel, whereas most scholars with a profound familiarity with language policy issues would not.

If there is any paradigm or orthodoxy in educational language policy and planning, it is one that is presented in books with contributions by scholars from Africa, Canada, Europe, Latin America, and the United States, and with strong representation from India and Nepal (Mohanty et al. 2009, Skutnabb-Kangas et al. 2009). This paradigm is in conformity with the global consensus on how multilingual education can best be achieved. UNESCO published an influential report explaining criteria for successful multilingual education in 1953, and updated it in 2003, *Education in a multilingual world*. Most foreign ‘aid’ has tended to invest resources in ex-colonial languages. It has failed a large section of the population as a result.

The ‘communicative’ focus in ELT of recent decades, in its British and American variants, is essentially monolingual, and does not require familiarity on the part of its adherents with the languages or cultures of the learners. Nor does it require that native speakers should themselves have learned other languages successfully. The monolingual Hydra paradigm ensures that ELT can be marketed globally. By contrast, foreign language learning is generally undertaken in the Western world, including the UK, by teachers who have gone through the experience of acquiring the language in question, and who are therefore in a position to undertake metalinguistic analysis in relation to the two languages and translation. Should this not be a requirement for British involvement in education systems anywhere outside the UK, and specifically in India, if it is to be considered relevant?

English linguistic imperialism has been cumulatively asserted in independent India. A report on a British Council conference in 1950 in Mahabaleshwar, attended by a single British academic and 30 Indians, is dogmatic about the need for the ‘Direct Method’ and an early start. It cites the familiar fallacy of ‘standards’ of English dropping if Hindi is promoted, and proclaims that the British had the key to ‘the most modern methods of teaching English as a foreign language’. This was strategic opportunism at a time when the ELT profession was virtually non-existent. Enter the Hydra to post-independence India.

British self-interest also influenced the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages at Hyderabad, established in 1958. An evaluation in 1975 (Kachru 1975) is devastatingly critical of the quality of British academic leadership. British ELT was a distillation of the English-only approach that evolved in adult education and in colonial education, and was consecrated in the 1960s (Phillipson 1992: chapter 7). It was based on five fallacies: monolingualism, native speakerism, the early start fallacy, the maximum exposure fallacy, and the subtractive fallacy. These are still central to the US-UK ELT business, and to most World Bank policies for postcolonial education. Native speakerism means a blind faith in the superiority of one language, one culture and one pedagogy. The Hydra remains not only alive and kicking, its ravenous heads are multiplying apace.

Scholarly underpinning for this approach, which essentially legitimates the idea that native speaker skills are universally marketable, was provided at an Anglo-American conference held in Cambridge in 1961. The eminent literary scholar, I. A. Richards, with professorships simultaneously at Harvard and Cambridge, wrote that ‘in an underdeveloped country, the students’ world becomes restructured’ by

English, and, echoing Macaulay: ‘English, through its assimilations, has become not only the representative of contemporary English-speaking thought and feeling but a vehicle of the entire developing human tradition’ (cited in Phillipson 1992: 167). This is a prescription for global linguistic apartheid.

Linguistic imperialism has these defining features (Phillipson 1992, 2009):

- it is a form of *linguicism*, a favouring of one language over others in ways that parallel societal structuring through racism, sexism and class: linguicism also serves to privilege users of the standard forms of the dominant language, those with convertible linguistic capital
- it is *structural*: more material resources and infrastructure are accorded to the dominant language than to others
- it is *ideological*: beliefs, attitudes, and imagery glorify the dominant language, stigmatize others, and rationalise the linguistic hierarchy
- the dominance is *hegemonic*, it is internalised and naturalised as being ‘normal’
- linguistic imperialism interlocks with *a structure of imperialism* in culture, education, the media, communication, the economy, politics, and military activities
- in essence it is about *exploitation*, injustice, inequality, and hierarchy that privileges those able to use the dominant language
- this entails *unequal rights* for speakers of different languages
- there are invariably push and pull factors, *supply and demand* mutually reinforcing each other
- linguistic imperialism is invariably *contested and resisted*
- language use is often *subtractive*, proficiency in the imperial language and in learning it in education involving its consolidation at the expense of other languages.

Subtractive language policies in education are clear cases of a Hydra biting off and consuming other languages. This was captured in Louis-Jean Calvet’s term when describing the annihilation of languages by French colonial language policies, ‘glottophagie’, linguistic cannibalism (1974).

The role of foreign ‘aid’ bodies in promoting the interests of the funding country, and the dubious effect that their projects have on strengthening English learning in east Asian countries is analysed in an Australian study (Widin 2010). It documents in great detail that such projects are ‘illegitimate’. They are part and parcel of the ‘web of deceit’ (Curtis 2003) that characterizes the foreign policy of Western governments. This is what underpins and facilitates the activities of the English Hydra.

The British Council has commissioned studies of language education in countries in several parts of the world. Its senior staff are fully aware of the importance in multilingual societies of education initially being in the mother tongue or a related language that the child understands. Even so it promotes the use and learning of English in ways that are in conflict with this principle and doomed to fail. For instance it is involved in an attempt to reform education in Pakistan with English as a medium of instruction - the British Council’s ‘Punjab Education and English Language Initiative’, 2013, using ‘the latest teaching techniques’, presumably British ones, despite the awkward fact that the vast majority of primary teachers are unable to function in English. It has related projects in India and Africa. However well-intentioned the efforts might be, and the goal of improving language competence and educational skills, it is questionable whether UK ‘experts’ who lack deep familiarity with the culture, languages, and local educational norms can be equipped to reform education appropriately. This can be seen in the

failure of many ‘aid’ projects (Phillipson 2010). A persuasive Hydra gets a foot in the door, often funded by the World Bank or a British government department of foreign ‘aid’, and makes a killing.

This looks good in its business turnover. The British Council’s corporate plan 2014-16 (on page 18) identifies many goals, including ‘working more with governments to transform whole education systems to increase opportunity and employability through English’. This is opportunistic when one recalls that the education system in Britain (like the USA) is deeply stratified and divisive, with a substantial proportion of the population deriving little benefit from it. It also functions monolingually. British Council strategy is integral to the UK’s role worldwide in promoting the interests of financial and corporate capital, in league with the USA, with frequent resort to military means (Phillipson forthcoming). I do not dispute the fact that the British Council can spend much of its Hydra-accumulated income in promoting more noble causes in the cultural and educational domains, but assuming that British expertise in education is universally relevant is unjustified.

The British Council and Graddol are in the vanguard in promoting English and British interests worldwide. The similarities between the rhetoric of the early 19th and 21st centuries are strong and disquieting, as are the ensuing structural and material consequences.

Imperial command & Macaulay’s <i>Minute</i>	British Council & Graddol’s <i>English next India</i>
English as ‘universal’	English a ‘basic skill’
Limited budget of £10,000	Budget for BC institutional infrastructure
Good business in consolidating British power	Income potentially massive
Major impact on educational policy	Impact as yet unpredictable
Covert political economy	Covert political economy
Linguistic imperialism	Linguistic neoimperialism

The similarities may seem minor when compared with the enormities of colonial repression and current global militarization, but for the individuals whose lives and educational hopes are impacted, the consequences may be equally devastating. The discourse explored here is influential. It serves the purposes of imperialists ancient and modern and not the mass of the population, the colonial and neoimperial subjects. Dispatching under-qualified native speakers to teach English in schools and language schools (for instance in Asia) is unprofessional. Employing monolinguals as consultants or teacher trainers on language-related projects worldwide is illegitimate. The British Council is increasingly run as a business to make money worldwide out of the teaching and examining of English and native speakerism. This is commercially-driven pseudo-academic opportunism. The ‘expertise’ typically operates within a narrow paradigm, neoliberal and consumerist, and fraudulently legitimates political and racist dominance. It continues linguistic imperialism in new forms and does not contribute to social justice. English functions as a professional Hydra, with tragic consequences.

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