The Problem of World English: 
Reflecting on Crystal and Phillipson

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Please Call Me by My True Names

Do not say that I’ll depart tomorrow
because even today I still arrive.
Look deeply; I arrive in every second
to be a bud on a spring branch,
to be a tiny bird, with wings still fragile,
    learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.
I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry,
    in order to fear and to hope,
the rhythm of my heart is the birth and death
    of all that are alive.
I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the
    surface of the river,
and I am the bird which, when spring comes,
    arrives in time to eat the mayfly.
I am a frog swimming happily in the clear water of a pond,
and I am the grass-snake who, approaching
    in silence, feeds itself on the frog.
I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
    my legs as thin as bamboo sticks,
and I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to
    Uganda.
I am the twelve-year-old girl, refugee on a
    small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea
    pirate,
and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable
    of seeing and loving.
I am a member of the Politburo, with plenty
    of power in my hands,
and I am the man who has to pay his “debt
    of blood” to my people,
dying slowly in a forced labor camp.
My joy is like spring so warm it makes
    flowers bloom in all walks of life.
My pain is like a river of tears, so full it fills
    all four oceans.
Please call me by my true names, so I can hear
    all my cries and laughs at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.
Please call me by my true names, so I can wake
    up and so the door of my heart can be left
open, the door of compassion.

Thích Nhất Hạnh, 1993
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1. Introduction

This paper emerges from work on the presentation *Linguistic Human Rights: Considering the Role of Terminology*, which I held on January 4th, 2005. The presentation highlighted the research of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson and involved students in an informal discussion on the competing views of the spread of English. The protectionist views of Skutnabb-Kangas/Phillipson were contrasted with the more liberal views of David Crystal.

This paper aims to further explore the positions of Phillipson, Skutnabb-Kangas and Crystal and to consider how to address and how not to address the global language situation. The chapter *Gazing into the Crystal Ball* focuses on Crystal’s vision of global English. The chapter *Linguistic Imperialism* explores the positions of Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas and contrasts their views with several others. The chapter *Crystal on Phillipson on Crystal* looks at two journal articles in which Crystal and Phillipson attack each other’s views, the first, Phillipson’s book review of Crystal’s *English as a Global Language*, and the second, Crystal’s response to Phillipson’s review. The chapter *Six Views on Global English* builds on the research of Alastair Pennycook and summarizes – as you might guess – six different positions on the spread of English. The chapter *Too Much Thinking Doesn’t Help* discusses the inadequacy of theoretical perspectives and calls for a more enlightened approach to global human problems. The final chapter *English in a Fragile World* sees English as one problem among many and tries to give the proper perspective to the problem of English.

2. Gazing into the Crystal Ball

Professor David Crystal is one of the world’s leading authorities on the English language. After his first major publication in 1964, Crystal went on to write nearly 100 books, nearly all of which are in some way related to the English language. His research work covers many topics. Some of his most significant research areas are intonation and stylistics and the application of linguistics to religious, educational and clinical matters.

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1 A crystal ball is used by magicians and mystics in some cultures to predict the future. Robert Phillipson, a harsh critic of David Crystal, uses the “crystal ball” metaphor ironically, as he refutes Crystal’s predictions regarding the future of the English language. See Phillipson (2001: 1).
In his book *English as a Global Language*, Crystal explores the worldwide “explosion” of the English language in recent decades. This chapter examines Crystal’s views and their possible weaknesses. While Crystal’s supporters tend to feel that he presents the realities of the global spread of English from a fair and balanced perspective, his critics claim that Crystal exaggerates the global status of English and ignores sensitive issues facing non-English speakers, most specifically in third world countries.

It is Crystal’s view that those who don’t speak English will be, in almost every case, empowered by learning English. Furthermore, Crystal postulates that the explosive growth of non-native English speakers has resulted in a *world English*, which is being shaped and directed just as much by these non-native English speakers as by mother-tongue English speakers. Crystal emphasizes a new world view, based on global interdependence, which “sees English playing a central role in empowering the subjugated and marginalized, and eroding the division between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’.”  

Robert Phillipson, an intense critic of Crystal, feels that the “idea that English has been taken over by its users worldwide, who can decide on their own norms, independently of Anglo-American gatekeepers, is pure fantasy”. Phillipson’s work and some of his major criticisms of Crystal will be discussed in the next chapter.

Crystal travels extensively to give lectures about the future of the English language to audiences all around the globe. His “celebrity status” as an unprecedented expert on the English language implies that Crystal himself, as an individual human being, may play a significant role in the future of English. Clearly it is an essential responsibility of the academic and intellectual community to view all powerful authorities with a healthy distance and skepticism. Consequently it is morally important for us to be critical of Crystal, regardless of how balanced he is or may appear to be. Crystal, like most accomplished intellectuals, probably has strong opinions about the future of English. It is important to uncover these views and any subtle agendas, which may be buried cleverly under what may appear to be a fair representation of the facts.

A cultural and ideological bias likely arises from the fact that Crystal sees the world through English eyes. Crystal grew up speaking English in Northern Ireland, attended school in

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4 Crystal mentions this in a brief biography on his own website <http://www.crystalreference.com>.
Liverpool, England, and began his studies at the University College of London. **David Crystal is English.** When considering various arguments of a more subtle nature, we need to consider this obvious fact as well.

How we choose to perceive the English language will most certainly have an effect on the development the English language. Furthermore, decisions about the English language may also play a role in the success or failure of human beings as a species on this planet. This may seem, at a glance, to be a rather ridiculous suggestion. But we must remember that language is a fundamental component of identity and that nationalism is also closely tied to identity. We know, from historical precedent, that wars are often precipitated due to nationalist conflicts. In our modern era, war can mean *nuclear war*. And nuclear war can be devastating, even catastrophic, for the future of humanity.

As we move into the future, more and more languages are facing extinction. Decisions regarding language education policies in third world countries may imply *fatal consequences* for many indigenous languages. Africa and India are the two most significant parts of the world where serious questions are being raised about the appropriateness of local language education policies. Policies which blindly anoint English a supreme status may be inappropriate for certain parts of the world. In spite of Crystal’s claims to the contrary, learning English may not be for everyone.

Is it true, as Crystal suggests, that “we have moved from a situation where a world language was a theoretical possibility to one where it is an evident reality”\(^5\)? Or are Crystal’s claims about the status and the future of English too bold? Critics of Crystal suggest that his depiction of global English may be a mixture of fact and hype. Some have even called Crystal *triumphalist*.\(^6\) While Crystal seems, in one passage, to be prophesying a *brave new English-speaking world*, he appears, in the next passage, to be detached and philosophical. In the final chapter of *English as a Global Language*, Crystal hints at the likelihood of the emergence of English as a global language, but warns us that we must be cautious regarding our predictions:

\(^{5}\) Crystal (2003: 28).

\(^{6}\) Phillipson repeatedly suggests that Crystal is *triumphalist* (i.e. boastful about the superiority of English) in his review of Crystal’s book *English as a Global Language*. Phillipson’s review appears in *Applied Linguistics*. See Phillipson (1999: 268).
The overwhelming impression […] must be that the [English] language is alive and well, and that its global future is assured. But linguistic history shows us repeatedly that it is wise to be cautious, when making predictions about the future of a language.7

Crystal goes on to discuss the death of Latin, which in the Middle Ages would have been perceived as completely ridiculous. Is Crystal really being so triumphalist? Crystal does seem to repeatedly emphasize that nothing is certain. In an online chat in 2001, Crystal, who at the time was marketing his latest book about “Netspeak”8, Language and the Internet, spoke about English’s uncertain future:

There are no real precedents to go on. We just don’t know what happens to a language when it is spoken by so many people in so many places. A quarter of the world’s population use English now. On the other hand, that means the burden is shared, to some extent. No-one ‘owns’ English now. What happens to it is on the shoulders of all of us.9

Crystal seems rather humble here. At the end of the first chapter of English as a Global Language, Crystal again expresses caution:

It is impossible to make confident predictions about the emergence of a global language. There are no precedents for this kind of linguistic growth, other than on a much smaller scale.10

In the final chapter of the same book, Crystal is again philosophical and measured. He again points out that there are no historical precedents of a language achieving such a wide level of use. He sees the emergence of “world English” as an opportunity for future research and recognizes “a fresh testing ground for sociolinguistic hypotheses”.11 While painting an uncertain future, Crystal suggests that we can look forward to an era of excitement and wonder. According to Crystal, “if we cannot predict the future, we can at least speculate, and there are some fascinating speculations to be made.”12

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8 Netspeak is a term discussed at length in Crystal’s Language and the Internet. See Crystal (2001: 17-23). Generally speaking, this is a term which refers to the multitude of new modes of language interactivity (e-mail, chatting, web publishing, etc.) which are made possible by the Internet.
9 See Wordsmith’s A Chat with David Crystal at <http://www.wordsmith.org>
Considering the significant imbalance of political, economic, and military power in the world, there are clearly many people who feel quite upset about the recent emergence of English as the global language. The United States of America, under the recent leadership of President George W. Bush, has become, more than ever before, a symbol, throughout much the world, of arrogance, insensitivity, imperialism, commercialization, moral bankruptcy, fast-food lifestyle, workaholism, and environmental neglect. In spite of all these huge negatives, American values and attitudes are making their way around the world at an unprecedented rate. Because the dominant language of the United States is English, the emergence of English as the global language must be seen as a highly sensitive issue. For it is largely through the global language that controversial American attitudes and ideologies are being transmitted. The success or failure of English as a global language appears, at least in many ways, to have significant parallels to the success or failure of the American way of life as a global culture. To many people, this is understandably a cause for great alarm. What feelings might a person in Asia or Africa have when reading the following words from Crystal?

By the end of the [19th] century, the population of the USA (then approaching 100 million) was larger than that of any of the countries of western Europe, and its economy was the most productive and the fastest growing in the world. British political imperialism had sent English around the globe, during the nineteenth century, so that it was a language ‘on which the sun never sets’. During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted almost single-handedly through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower. Economics replaced politics as the chief driving force. And the language behind the US dollar was English.13

Few can argue about the raw facts contained in this brief historical assessment of modern English. But sensitive readers, with feelings of outrage about American foreign policy, are likely to be angered simply by the choice of individual words or phrases in this text: “most productive”, “fastest growing in the world”, “a language ‘on which the sun never sets’”, “single-handedly”, “economic supremacy”, “superpower”.

People don’t like feeling inferior. This kind of language may automatically alienate certain readers. But Crystal’s intention is not to speak boastfully about English. Crystal is trying to be candid. Perhaps he is too candid for some. To his credit, Crystal tends to write concisely, using potent language with sharp and explosive expressions. He seems to consistently be able to find the most suitable word to deliver the maximum “literary punch”. Perhaps this “talent” becomes a bit dangerous when writing about topics of such controversy and sensitivity. But

we cannot say, here at least, that Crystal is being dishonest. Crystal addresses the issue of reader sensitivity in an article in *Applied Linguistics* where he admits that he was perhaps not aware of how delicate an issue he was dealing with.

I know there are those around who cannot see a sentence such as ‘English is a world language’ without condemning it [...] so I took the trouble to spell out my position clearly. At the time I thought I was overdoing it. Now I realize that maybe I didn’t stress the point enough.\(^{14}\)

Language is a sensitive topic. In an online chat, Crystal pointed out that the issue of “language raises the strongest feelings in everyone”.\(^{15}\) Language is often tied to nationality. And most Third World countries are, in subtle and not so subtle ways, exploited economically by richer, more powerful countries. The United States and Europe are major “exploiters” in this sense. The emergence of English as a global language will have unpredictable consequences for less privileged individuals in the Third World. Crystal appears optimistic. He characterizes this situation as one of opportunity. This is one case where his judgment might be premature. Critics of Crystal, like Robert Phillipson, strongly disagree with the view that English will become the language of opportunity for all people. In the next chapter we will take a look at Phillipson’s work. We will ask some difficult questions. Will global English mean fortune and prosperity for most of the world? Or will the new global language trigger an unprecedented age of economic exploitation?

### 3. Linguistic Imperialism

Robert Phillipson is another important writer in the area of English linguistics. He grew up in London, England, received his doctorate from the University of Amsterdam, and is currently a professor at the University of Roskilde in Denmark. He has worked extensively on English education issues in northern and central Africa and the former Yugoslavia. He is probably best known for his book *Linguistic Imperialism*, as well as his “connection” to David Crystal. Phillipson’s wife, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, is also an important researcher and has written prolifically about some of the same topics.

\(^{14}\) Crystal’s rejoinder to Phillipson. See Crystal (2000b: 421)

\(^{15}\) See Wordsmith’s *A Chat with David Crystal* at [http://www.wordsmith.org](http://www.wordsmith.org)

\(^{16}\) Chapter title happens to have the same name as Phillipson’s most significant book *Linguistic Imperialism*. See Phillipson (2000a). The term *linguistic imperialism* however predates Phillipson.
Some of their interests include linguistic human rights, the role of English worldwide, minority education, racism, language and power, approaches to linguistic, imperialism, spread of English, ethnicity, gender issues and language planning. As most of their articles tend to be cowritten, Skutnabb-Kangas’ and her husband’s work should, according to some, be viewed as a unit. Others might find this observation problematic. Here, in this paper, I tend to focus more on Phillipson. This is not because Phillipson is more important than Skutnabb-Kangas, but rather because Phillipson has been the most outspoken critic of David Crystal. Crystal has also been an outspoken critic of Phillipson. I am interested in exploring their differences. The fact that both have published harshly censorious journal articles about each other’s books will (hopefully) make for a rich, more revealing analysis of the topics addressed.

At the core of Phillipson’s writing are the notions of linguistic imperialism and linguicism. What do we mean by linguistic imperialism? In English as a Global Language, Crystal explores the possible rejection of English as the world language. Crystal offers a quote from Gandhi\textsuperscript{17}, written in 1908, which seems to capture the idea of linguistic imperialism in a nutshell:

To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them … It is not a painful thing that, if I want to go to a court of justice, I must employ the English language as a medium; that, when I became a Barrister, I may not speak my mother-tongue, and that someone else should have to translate to me from my own language? Is this not absolutely absurd? It is not a sign of slavery? \textsuperscript{18}

Does global English imply a kind of slavery? During the age of classical colonialist imperialism, the European powers saw themselves as the liberators of various uncivilized races. They saw it their sacred task to rid the colonies of their indigenous “heathen” culture, to teach them how to live “properly”, to become more “civilized”. This perspective was, at its core, terribly racist, arrogant and destructive. Phillipson argues that what is happening today is really just a more subtle kind of imperialism. He explains that colonial control, once enforced through brute force, is now achieved by more invisible, more sophisticated means. As it is no longer perceived as morally acceptable to discriminate due to physical appearance

\textsuperscript{17} Crystal (2003: 124).
\textsuperscript{18} Gandhi (1958: 5).
racial), new, more vague forms of discrimination have been introduced. The new foundation of discrimination is culture. And here a major component of culture is language.

Because the most powerful countries of the world (in this case, the USA and European countries) have the financial strength to influence opinions and attitudes in poorer countries, they can psychologically dominate indigenous cultures. How does this work exactly? When English is paraded as the supreme language, indigenous languages will consequently be seen as inferior. This will have several destructive consequences. The most obvious is the overt suppression of indigenous culture and language. Less obvious perhaps is the “brain drain” phenomenon. The most talented individuals within an indigenous population, tempted to exploit the power of English, will abandon their own culture and their own people. The Kenyan author, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, characterizes this tragic situation in *Decolonizing the mind*:

> I am lamenting a neo-colonial situation which has meant the European bourgeoisie once again stealing our talents and geniuses as they have stolen our economies. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Europe stole art treasures from Africa to decorate their houses and museums, in the twentieth century Europe is stealing the treasures of the mind to enrich their languages and cultures. Africa needs back its economy, its politics, its culture, its languages and all its patriotic writers.\(^\text{19}\)

Phillipson explains that linguistic imperialism works in a similar way to the religious proselytization of the colonial era. Here dominated groups are not physically attacked (as is the case in racism). It is their languages and cultures that are denigrated. As dominated groups are subtly conditioned into seeing their language and culture as inferior, they slowly, but surely, lose their affection for their culture and language. According to Phillipson, dominated groups that face this kind of control tend to suffer more than dominated groups from the era of colonialism. Victims of this new, invisible kind of control are not simply stripped of their power (as in colonial times). They are stripped of their culture, their language, and their very identity. It is clear that dominated groups, once they have lost a sense of who they are, are extremely vulnerable to exploitation.

Phillipson defines English linguistic imperialism as the process by which “the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of

\(^{19}\) Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986: xii).
structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. Linguicism, another key concept for Phillipson, was originally introduced by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. She defines linguicism as “ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language”.

Richard Dawkins created a huge controversy when he wrote about the inherent selfishness behind the genetic process that drives living organisms (mostly notably humans). This was often (especially by those with strong moral positions) misinterpreted as an affirmation of selfishness. Dawkins describes the problem:

Critics have occasionally misunderstood […] [the book] to be advocating selfishness as a principle by which we should live! Others […] have thought that I was saying that, whether we like it or not, selfishness and other nasty ways are an inescapable part of our nature. […] Actually, it is probably best not to burden a scientific work with political asides at all, since it is remarkable how quickly these date. The writings of politically aware scientists […] are significantly marred by their anachronistic barbs.

Dawkins statement may offer insight into the relationship between Crystal and Phillipson. While Crystal strives to describe the phenomenon of the new global language with as much scientific distance as possible, Phillipson writes with an intense linguistic agenda. Phillipson is out to change the world. Deeply invested in the role of “passionate defender of the dominated”, Phillipson sees Crystal’s book as a proud endorsement of the global dominance of English. And Phillipson is, because of his hopes and beliefs about the future of English, understandably angry.

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, whose views closely parallel those of her husband’s, discusses a view of scientific research that is much different than the one that Dawkins advocates above. She feels that it is not only desirable, but essential, that researchers are emotionally involved when they report their findings. She finds it distressing that a researcher can describe, in detail, the pain and suffering of dominated minorities without sharing some of this pain. She believes that it is not enough to talk about the methods of dominant language learning or existing

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21 Skutnabb-Kangas (1986: 45).
language rights. According to her, researchers must recognize and write about the relationship between scientific knowledge and moral obligation. Researchers must involve their entire selves in their work, their hearts, their stomachs and their minds. Peter Mühlhäusler, a researcher of language change in the Pacific region, also sees the significance of the moral perspective. In his book *Linguistic Ecology*, he touches on the heart of this problem and consequently may reveal an essential difference between Phillipson and Crystal:

> Linguists, for a long time, have argued for the ideological neutrality of their own position, a strategy which has neither benefited their profession nor the speakers of the numerous languages that have been their subject matter. A principal aim of this book is to expose the unsoundness of such an attitude and to make future generations of Pacific and Australian linguists aware of their responsibility to the linguistic ecology of the region.

Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas appear, in some passages, to lose touch with the scientific perspective. How much emotionality is acceptable in linguistic research? Is there a point at which too much linguistic drama damages scientific credibility? Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson don’t appear afraid to use hyperbole.

> Monolingualism is a psychological island. It is an ideological cramp. It is an illness, a disease which should be eradicated as soon as possible, because it is dangerous for world peace.

Is there a clear message here? Or is this just an angry outburst? Perhaps monolingualism is dangerous for world peace. But the text this quotation is taken from has nothing to do with world peace. Does this dramatic writing style seriously take away from the topic at hand, which in this case is the definition of the term ‘mother tongue’? I sense that a text that is arguing for a more practical and sensible organization of linguistic terminology should avoid political rants of this nature. Apparently Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas do not agree.

> A positive attitude towards multilingualism would require becoming conscious of the fact monolingualism and attitudes which see monolingualism as a natural norm are a dangerous disease [sic]

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24 Perhaps not surprisingly, Mühlhäusler describes both Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas as his friends. See Acknowledgements in Mühlhäusler (1996: xiii).


which should be prevented from spreading further. The centre for the contaminated area is Europe/North America.\textsuperscript{27}

Will the general population of European and North American linguistics be compelled to reorganize the existing linguistic terminology when melodramatic researchers, who characterize Europe and North America as the center of contamination, cry for significant changes? It seems unlikely. But what is the alternative? Tove Skutnabb-Kangas talks about this topic.\textsuperscript{28} She considers the problems and benefits of using dramatic metaphors like “linguistic genocide”, “killer languages”, “language murder”. She concludes that such powerful metaphors help to make endangered language situations more visible.

Both Crystal and Phillipson/Skutnabb-Kangas seem to tell an important story about the future of English and its effect on smaller languages. The fundamental difference between Crystal and Phillipson is one of distance. David Crystal, like Richard Dawkins regarding modern genetics, finds it important to describe the linguistic circumstance of English, as it really is, without trying to judge whether it is good or bad. Interviews\textsuperscript{29} with and other books by Crystal reveal that he indeed has opinions about the future of English. But in English as a Global Language he tries to avoid taking sides on this very sensitive issue. He writes to inform, perhaps also to entertain, but not to influence. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson feel that it is their moral duty to influence and see Crystal’s neutrality as morally dangerous. One might consider, however, to what extent their view of themselves as moral leaders is blinding.\textsuperscript{30} One might also consider whether their angry rants about “killer English” seriously damage their scientific reputation.

In the next chapter I discuss two articles in which Crystal and Phillipson write about each other. The hope is that this will lead to more detailed insights about the nature of their respective positions.

\textsuperscript{30} Krishnamurti discusses the vanity and dishonesty of any moralist agenda. See “A politician who wanted to do good.” in Krishnamurti (1991: 156-9).
4. Crystal on Phillipson on Crystal

In this chapter, I will specifically look at two articles. The first is Phillipson’s review of Crystal’s book *English as a Global Language*. The second is Crystal’s rejoinder to this review. Phillipson, who claims to have found some of Crystal’s earlier books admirable, has very little positive to say about *EGL*. Crystal, not surprisingly, has very little positive to say about Phillipson’s book review. I will begin with a brief summary of, what I feel to be, the most significant points made by both articles. After this, we will suggest some more detailed theories about the positions of Crystal and Phillipson. I should explain that I may, in this chapter only, sometimes neglect creating footnotes in those contexts where the source I am quoting is obvious and requires no additional explanation.

As I embark on a summary of Phillipson’s review on *EGL*, I would like to try to remain as neutral as possible, cautiously refraining from judgements and interpretations. I sense that this may prove a difficult challenge, as the Phillipson’s review is mostly made up of judgements and interpretation. With this in mind, I begin.

Phillipson begins by quoting Crystal’s remark that the English language was “the natural choice for progress”. Phillipson points out that Crystal’s subject matter “the future of English” is of “momentous importance” for the future of humankind, quickly makes note of the slimness of Crystal’s book and then proceeds to make a list of the important issues that Crystal’s book neglects. The neglected “critical” issues are topics such as colonialism, linguistic imperialism, globalization, cultural hegemony, language education, minority languages and linguistic human rights. These topics are – it is worth mentioning – at the core of Phillipson’s linguistic writings and research. Phillipson refers to Crystal’s claim that *EGL* has no political agenda and refutes this claim, arguing that Crystal is attempting to promote the dominance of English. He then characterizes Crystal as a mere linguist, implying that

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32 The article “On Trying to be Crystal-Clear: A response to Phillipson” appeared first in the *European English Messenger*, but a revised version of this article was published in *Applied Linguistics*, 21/3 (2000: 415-25).
34 We will subsequently refer to Crystal’s *English as a Global Language* using the abbreviation *EGL*.
Crystal lacks competence in other significant social sciences. He then criticizes the book’s depiction of the history of English. The shortcomings which Phillipson finds are rather trivial, but they touch on politically sensitive issues. In brief, it is felt that Crystal overemphasizes the importance of the USA, ignores the American Indians, oversimplifies South African history, which Phillipson sees as “the invisibilization of blacks”. Phillipson does point out two or three real errors in some details about West Africa. Phillipson then deems the book “eurocentric and triumphalist, despite his [Crystal’s] protestations to the contrary”. He points out that Crystal describes some of the most horribly tragic and unjust events in human history with shockingly neutral language. One example of this is where Crystal describes an unjust war, which Phillipson sees as an illegal campaign of mass murder, as a mere “struggle”. Phillipson then reemphasizes that Crystal makes no mention of linguistic imperialism and linguistic human rights, topics of Phillipson’s (and Skutnabb-Kangas’) books, but also topics, according to Phillipson, that have been subsequently advanced by other leading researchers in linguistics. Phillipson then discusses, in considerable detail and with little connection to Crystal’s book, the issues of linguistic imperialism, globalization, cultural hegemony and linguistic human rights. At the core is the message that English has emerged as the global language due to injustice, insensitivity and cruelty towards indigenous cultures, a message that Crystal, according to Phillipson, underemphasizes or, in some parts of the book, neglects completely. Phillipson finishes by declaring Crystal’s book a “celebration of the growth of English” and sees it as embodying Tsuda’s “Diffusion of English Paradigm”\(^\text{36}\), namely a blind “endorsement of capitalism, […] the Americanization and homogenization of world culture, linguistic, cultural and media imperialism.”

We continue now with Crystal’s rejoinder to Phillipson’s review. It begins with a reflection on exactly how to make sense of Phillipson’s review. After speculating about possible strategies, Crystal aims for a sensitive area, namely Phillipson’s negative depiction of linguists. He explains that Phillipson is unjustified to think that linguists are not serious social scientists, and furthermore, it is unfair that Phillipson has characterized all American and British linguists, by virtue of the dominant monolingualism of their respective countries, as incapable of having anything meaningful to say about multilingualism. He details how Phillipson has misrepresented his book, a mixture of selective quotation to support his theories and ignoring parts of the book that contradict his theories. Crystal goes on to defend himself regarding rather specific criticisms, explaining why he chose a particular approach at

\(^{36}\) See Tsuda (1994).
a certain point and why Phillipson’s observations were either inaccurate or misguided. While Crystal is able to defend each criticism of Phillipson’s elegantly and in detail, he seems, at times at least, defensive, even angry:

It is difficult to know what to say, when someone hides behind pompous language in order to call you a liar. Younger, better-built, and more explosive linguists would probably go and punch him on the nose. Older, flabbier, and mild-mannered ones have to be content with simply restating their position. I am not triumphalist about English. Never have been. Never will be. Anyone who has read my work on language would know that.

Crystal concedes that the topic of global English is a sensitive one, enough to create uncomfortable feelings for defenders of indigenous languages. Crystal’s makes a noteworthy comment about the issue of EGL’s topic:

It is difficult to avoid the impression that Phillipson wishes I had written some other kind of book, in which his own views should have figured more largely. At one point, he [Phillipson] thinks EGL should be a book on minority languages […]. At another, he wants it to be about American indigenous peoples and their languages. At another, he seems to think it should be about language dominance, in general.

After thanking Phillipson for a handful of errors that he had pointed out regarding Africa, Crystal concludes the review with several excerpts from more generous reviews of EGL, including one where Crystal is described as having a deep concern for those in the world who are not English mother-tongue speakers.

This is the part where I do some interpreting of my own. Where to start? The best place to start is to praise both writers for their talents. Clearly both are extremely gifted and have a lot to contribute to the discussion about world English. Having taken care of that, we can get a little more detailed. Let us start with Crystal. I must say that I agree with Phillipson to some extent about Crystal’s celebration of English. While this may not have been an intended effect, Crystal’s book does seem to overemphasize the triumphs of English and underemphasize the tragedies of indigenous languages and cultures. This decision of book topic and focus might be an arbitrary one, especially if Crystal were just writing a harmless book, but the topic of EGL, as Phillipson astutely points out, is truly of “momentous importance”. The day-to-day lives of many Africans and Asians may be indirectly, but nevertheless profoundly, affected by Crystal’s characterization of global English. This writing situation demands careful choices, as it has real consequences for the lives of real people. Crystal’s work seems to be aiming, at least to some extent, for popularity. Perhaps, from a
certain perspective, this is no great sin. One must concede that truly comprehensive scientific writing\(^{37}\) is often too tedious to have widespread appeal. Crystal’s writing has appeal. His talent as a writer is unquestionable. Even Phillipson admits this.\(^{38}\) Successful popular scientific writing tends to maintain a cheerful mood, to nurture a love of learning and to awaken a natural curiosity. Crystal’s writing has appeal. His talent as a writer is unquestionable. Even Phillipson admits this.\(^{38}\) Successful popular scientific writing tends to maintain a cheerful mood, to nurture a love of learning and to awaken a natural curiosity. Crystal’s book is successful in all these areas. No one enjoys hearing about how brutally man has treated his fellow man, over and over again. The real truth about man’s past is often ugly, even depressing. Unraveling the adventurous thriller of world English is something Crystal does well. From a moral perspective, Crystal’s gift for writing, however, may be seen as a problem. A “slightly sweeter” version of English’s rise to power may distort the deeper reality.

Crystal seems genuinely pained by Phillipson’s remarks, suggesting that there might have been some truth in them. Crystal defends himself in detail, perhaps struggling, more than anything else, to prove to himself that he did do a good job with *EGL*. I truly believe that Crystal has the best intentions and that his book was written with a serious effort to be impartial. Unfortunately, writing about highly sensitive topics, much like brain surgery or land mine removal, requires a great deal of caution and sensitivity. Perhaps Crystal should have been more careful. Or alternatively, Crystal might have chosen another topic. Sensitive book titles like *The Benefits of Abortion*, *The Softer Side of Adolph Hitler* or *The Success of the Atomic Bomb*\(^{39}\) will always arouse anger, regardless of how well a book is written. To some, *English as a Global Language* is such a title.

Now we turn to Phillipson. Phillipson’s review of Crystal’s book was, as Crystal points out, politically motivated and unfairly represents Crystal’s work. Nevertheless, Phillipson does make several good points. But Phillipson seems to have a heroic vision of himself, which leads to a certain kind of arrogance and hypocrisy. In his attack of Crystal for portraying an unbalanced picture of global English, Phillipson is even more unbalanced. While I can not say for sure what is going on inside Robert Phillipson, I would guess that he might be bitter and angry about something. Perhaps he feels a certain superiority to his colleagues because of his extensive international work, specifically in Third World countries and most notably in

\(^{37}\) Fishman, Cooper and Conrad’s *The Spread of English*, for example, is an exceptional piece of research, featuring page after page of detailed experiments with length statistical analyses, but it is not “a fun read”. See Fishman, Cooper, Conrad (1977).

\(^{38}\) See Phillipson (1999: 266).

\(^{39}\) These book titles were invented. They do not actually exist, as far as I know.
Africa. Clearly his expertise and experience in Third World language education and social issues are exceptional. Perhaps Phillipson resents that popular authors, like Crystal, who have visited comparatively few countries can make such grandiose speculations about the world language situation in spite of a certain intercultural naivety. In addition to his outrage at the dominance of English over indigenous languages, Phillipson may be angered by what he sees as the undeserved success of popular writers, like Crystal, over more serious researchers like himself.

Phillipson appears deeply distressed by the arrogance of western institutions, and most specifically, the existing global hegemony and tendencies toward cultural imperialism. While his feelings are understandable and his assessment of the unjust global situation is often accurate, his overpowering anger and anti-western prejudice destroy his ability to keep things in perspective. His anger manifests itself often as an arrogance that has much in common with traditional western arrogance. Phillipson, born and raised in England, must be seen, at least on some level, as deeply European. He seems to not want to acknowledge this. It is interesting to reflect on how Phillipson’s anti-imperialist ideologies have a kind of imperialist “let-me-teach-you-inferior-monolingual-English-speakers-how-civilized-people-do-things” attitude.

One gets the feeling that Phillipson may not even have read much of EGL. Of course, this is only speculation. I sense, however, that Phillipson decided quite quickly that he didn’t like the book and, instead of listening to the story that EGL was telling, he actively searched for individual sentences that confirmed his disappointment. In the review, Phillipson writes primarily about himself and his own linguistic imperialism agenda, asking repeatedly why Crystal doesn’t write more about this agenda. It is not clear to what extent Phillipson’s misrepresentation of EGL’s content was mean-spirited, and to what extent it was the result of “linguistic imperialism fever”. Alberto Manguel’s quote explains, “a reviewer is a reader once removed, guiding the reader, not through the book, but through the reviewer’s reading of that book.” Phillipson’s review, while offering some insight into the possible political issues surrounding Crystal’s book, tells us very little about the book’s depth and positive content, which is substantial. In closing this section, we should offer some kind words to Phillipson. While Phillipson may, at times, be blinded by his own anger, his extensive experience in indigenous language issues, his dedication to language ecology, his compassion and concern for dominated peoples around the world and his unquestionable courage to write things that are unpopular must be commended.

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5. Six Views on World English

As I considered the positions of Crystal, Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, I looked at what other researchers were saying about them. One piece by Alastair Pennycook was particularly enlightening, as it enumerates, clearly and in detail, the most significant positions on global English. Additionally it discusses the basic problem with each perspective. Before I go on to my own discussions, I would like to briefly summarize Pennycook’s work.

Pennycook outlines six models that are used to understand the role of the English language in the world. She goes on to endorse and elaborate on the sixth position. My own perspective is based on observations that surround this sixth model, but also integrates insights from more general perspectives. Below is a diagram that shows Pennycook’s six perspectives, along with their cultural, developmental and pedagogical implications.

<table>
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<th>View of the global spread of English</th>
<th>Implications for culture and development</th>
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<td>Colonial celebratory</td>
<td>English an inherently useful language</td>
<td>teach English to those who can appreciate it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernization</td>
<td>English a crucial tool for modernization</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laissez-faire liberalism</td>
<td>English a functional tool for pragmatic purposes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imperialism</td>
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<td>Postcolonial performativity</td>
<td>Cultural politics of change, language, knowledge and difference</td>
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(Pennycook: 1999)

The colonial-celebratory position is one that markets English as a superior language, both in its nature and its practical potential. The glorification of English, its history, its grammatical features, its scientific achievements is perceived as troublesome by most researchers. Nevertheless it is still very popular and can be witnessed in many tributes to the English

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41 Pennycook discuss the shortcomings of Crystal, Phillipson and several others. See Pennycook (1999) and Pennycook (2000).
language. As Pennycook explains, “this view has no place for a sense of diversity: to promote diversity is [would be] simply to deny people the access to the most important language of our time, English.” Phillipson appears, in his review of Crystal’s book, to want to slot Crystal into this category, but, in truth, Crystal’s position is more complex than this.

The modernization view is what it sounds like. Human beings, in general, are becoming increasingly more involved with and dependent on science, advanced communication systems, the Internet and other forms of technology. In this modern world, a knowledge of the language of modernization is essential. That language is English. What is the problem with this view? Many feel this view has serious merit, as a more globally networked planet will imply (or already implies) frequent and efficient communication between people of different mother-tongues. This view, however, neglects the potential harm that English may inflict on other languages and cultures. It also neglects the important issue of power, where the exporting of English may be seen a subtle form of domination (linguistic imperialism).

We might call the laissez-faire liberalism position the true Crystal position. This position aims to address two major problems simultaneously. The first problem is that of international intelligibility, which can be more or less equated to the modernization view. The second problem is that of historical identity. The mother tongue must be preserved. Crystal envisions an ideal world where everyone speaks English and, at the same time, maintains their traditions and culture. Crystal points to Scandinavian countries as existing examples of this ideal situation. According to Pennycook (and several others), “the ideology of laissez-faire liberalism, with its emphasis on personal choice, neutrality and complementarity may be seen as potentially the most dangerous of these three paradigms.” Here I must disagree. While Crystal’s view may indeed be problematic, I can not see it as being more problematic than the colonial-celebratory or modernization views.

As one might suspect, the imperialism view is the Phillipson/Skutnabb-Kangas perspective. I’ve already talked about this above. Its major components are language ecology, linguistic imperialism, linguicism (language based discrimination), and the establishment of linguistic

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42 A truly blatant example of the colonial-celebratory position, see McCrum, Cran & MacNeil’s *The Story of English* (1986).
43 Pennycook (1999).
45 Pennycook (1999).
human rights. Problematic with the *imperialism* view is the tendency to oversimplify the complex realities of real language situations and the omission of the individual language learner from the equation. Canagarajah, author of *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*, is a major critic of Phillipson. As she explains, "in considering how social, economic, governmental, and cultural institutions effect inequality, his [Phillipson’s] perspective becomes rather too impersonal and global. What is sorely missed is the individual, the particular. It is important to find out how linguistic hegemony is experienced in the day-to-day life of the people and communities in the periphery. How does English compete for dominance with other languages in the streets, markets, homes, schools, and villages of periphery communities?"\(^{46}\) A perspective that sees humankind as divided into two clear camps, the dominating English mother-tongue elites and the dominated “rest of the world” is too simplistic and may lead to more problems than it solves.

Another view is that of *linguistic hybridity*, a view made popular by Rajagopalan. This view looks at how English has been taking on new forms throughout the world and sees these hybrid forms of English as distinct entities which have established a strength and identity of their own. These new forms are seen as relatively immune to western cultural dominance. While this position clarifies some of the weaknesses of the imperialism position, it has problems of its own. The hybridity theory, according to Canagarajah, “leads to apathy (as languages are seen as deconstructing themselves, transcending domination) or even playfulness (as the provision of new meanings to these constructs is treated as subverting the status quo).” \(^{47}\) As the view loses sight of the more subtle, long-term dangers of western globalization, it suffers from some of the same weaknesses as other apolitical arguments. According to critics like Canagarajah, the *perhaps not so playful* question of how English will shape humanity’s future must also be considered.

*Postcolonial performativity*, the view developed and argued by Pennycook, attempts to walk a line between the imperialism and the hybridity positions. Pennycook emphasizes the notion of *appropriation*. By appropriation, we are talking about how non-English mother-tongue speakers absorb words or phrases from the English language and make these their own. The performativity view also emphasizes *context*. As no language learning situation is exactly the same, each language context should be evaluated individually. Pennycook points out that the emerging postcolonial world must also be seen as profoundly complex, not capable of being

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\(^{46}\) See Caragarajah (1999: 43-44).

\(^{47}\) Caragarajah (1999: 207).
described by simplistic theories of domination and globalization. Pennycook argues, that “from this point of view, both the liberal approach of Crystal, with its global and local languages in mutual relationship, or the more critical view of Phillipson and others, with its local diversity threatened by global homogeneity, may be inadequate.”

Pennycook explains that we need to understand how globalization really works and not jump to simplistic theories about its effects. She draws from views emerging from philosophical perspectives of Self and Other and explains that the typical reductive approach to concepts such as “person” and “culture” creates a kind of separation where there perhaps isn’t any. In the next section, I would like to extend this idea.

6. Too Much Thinking Doesn’t Help

As Pennycook concludes in her findings, the postcolonial language situation is too complex to be addressed with theoretical approaches. Theories, by their very nature, oversimplify realities. We must acknowledge that each language context is different and contains its own unique set of problems. We must face each new context with an open mind.

As Pennycook also points out, most theories hinge on concepts that are unclear. What is a teaching method? What is a person? What is a culture? These may seem like silly questions, but they’re not. Pennycook explains that thinking in terms of teaching methods is a “highly problematic and reductive way to think.” What about the individual? Harrision explains that human beings in a state of harmony often experience a sense of transcendental identity where individuals may feel deeply united. They become, in a sense, a single entity. So the notion of individual may be rather complicated.

I sense that the intellectual approach to certain kinds of social problems is misguided. Our approach to human problems must involve caring. Caring? Are you kidding? No. I am not kidding. The topic of caring and the love of humankind appear unpopular in academic circles. Perhaps this is because a kind heart need not know a damned thing. But caring is an essential component in dealing with human problems. Albert Einstein, known mostly for his insights in the realm of particle physics, reflects on this simple, yet complex issue:

50 Pennycook discusses perceptions of Self and Other, concluding that these concepts are deeply problematic. Pennycook (2000).
A human being is a part of the whole, called by us the “Universe”, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and of a foundation for inner security.51

The **caring approach** is different from the **laissez-fair liberal** “whatever you like” perspective of Crystal. Caring has no motive and no political position. But caring helps. It helps a lot. And true caring means **taking action**. So, what is the problem with English? **There is no problem with English.** Issues of linguistic imperialism are merely symptoms of a much more serious problem. What more serious problem? The problem is that people do not act responsibly for all of humanity. People often choose self-protectiveness over self-sacrifice. People very often simply don’t care. We need, above all, to teach human beings how to care.52 Phillipson rightly recognizes that the problem of English is more an ethical issue than a linguistic one.53 But I sense that taking a political approach (i.e. defining linguistic human rights, punishing the perpetrators of linguicism) is misguided. It is addressing the symptom, not the disease. The real disease is our overall nearsightedness, which is admittedly nurtured by the existing greed-oriented, capitalist and consumerist ideologies. We need to address this disease directly. Dass explains how this works:

> There is no reason why we cannot bring this quality [caring] to any human exchange. Any act that can be performed in the spirit of unity can turn out to be helpful. There’s no special place we have to be in order to help out. Right here where we are, in whatever we’re already doing, the opportunity to be of service is almost always present. We only need to stay conscious and aware, and then give whatever we can to whoever is right there.54


52 Thich Nhat Hanh, winner of the Nobel Peace prize, addresses the problem of the human compassion in his stories and poems, see Nhat Hanh (1993: 43) and the poem **Please Call Me by My True Names** in this paper.

53 At the core of Phillipson’s writing is imperialism, often in a more general, non-linguistic sense. See non-linguistic concerns about Third World exploitation, Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (1989: 471). See attack on the purely linguistic perspective of Crystal, Phillipson (1999: 266). See the need for ethical terms and political will, Phillipson (2001: 9-11).

54 Dass & Gorman (1985: 236)
If all people truly cared about all people, in everyday life situations, we would not need to worry about the consequences of language change. Things would work out just fine. Moralist ideologies that try to formalize caring do not work. Paradoxically, when people are obliged to care, they tend to care less. People need to be spontaneously motivated to care about people. This caring must not be an idea, something written or researched. It must be real. Caring arises from an awareness of the world, as it is. This awareness requires no method. In fact, a great caring cannot be brought about through any method. A strategy, an idea, a hope for improvement, these things are the very denial of caring. Only caring can bring about profound changes in human relationships.

The caring approach is neither liberal nor conservative. It stands apart from any comfortable ideological position about how things should be. It acknowledges that the world is in trouble and needs help now. Unlike ideological approaches which aim to construct an ideal society which supports its individuals, the caring approach recognizes that the individual and the society are, in a sense, one and the same. It is clear that when the individual human being doesn’t care, then, projected on to the global situation, nobody cares. And if nobody cares, things are going to get ugly. The responsibility for positive change in the world must be carried by each individual person. When individual people disown their global responsibility, leaving it to their government, to their church or to Robert Phillipson, the crisis of global exploitation, competition, environmental destruction, greed and aggression intensifies. We must remember that government and religious institutions have often, based on historic precedent, been extremely violent and destructive. While such institutions may (or may not) have there appropriate place in the world, we cannot depend on them completely. The individual person must take responsibility. If not, who will?

Let us look at the problem of inequity of power, a central problem in the debate about world English. The problem of inequity will not be solved by intelligent researchers who try to “fairly” redistribute power in society. A given strategy may improve circumstances for a short time, but the individual’s desire to dominate will remain. A deeper change must occur. Each of us must understand our desire for power and its problems. We are controlled by our desires, which is perhaps an aspect of Phillipson’s insights. We must see the danger of

55 Krishnamurti repeatedly emphasizes the importance in differentiating between the ideal and reality, the what should be and the what is. See Krishnamurti (1991).

56 Ideas from Krishnamurti’s texts, but based on “core wisdom” of world religions (Buddhism, for example).

57 For more on Phillipson’s insights into the problem of doing whatever we like, see Pennycook (1999).
viewing the world through the existing competitive/consumerist/ownership paradigm. We must also see that ambitious, intellectual strategies (like Phillipson’s) to improve human society stem from this same competitive, progress-oriented western paradigm. Krishnamurti elaborates:

A society based on idea, shaped according to a particular pattern, breeds violence and is in a constant state of disintegration. A patterned society functions only with the frame of its own self-projected belief. [...] A revolution based on idea, on deductions and conclusions, is but a modified continuity of the old pattern.58

A new view on the role of English will only be another limiting perspective. We can speak to other humans beings in English (or in another language) about English (or about something else) without having to have a cognitive interpretation of what we are doing. We don’t need to understand everything. We don’t have to take an intellectual approach. Harrison explains:

When we recognize the nature of our unity, we also discover that, within this unity, problem and solution go hand in hand. Now we can respond spontaneously, free of fear and free of division. We begin to move through life without concern for the past. We act from the depth of our stillness.59

We need not know what we are doing. We can let things happen. We can watch closely as the moment unfolds. We can be aware of the dangers of doing whatever we want. We can be sensitive to the suffering of the people around us. We can do what our heart tells us is right. Dass discusses how this “helping force” in our lives manifests itself:

When we have been used to knowing where we stand at every moment, the experience of resting in awareness without any specific thoughts to hold onto and trusting our intuition, turns out to be a refreshing and exciting adventure. In this choiceless awareness, we don’t necessarily know from moment to moment how everything is going to come out. Nor do we have a clear idea of what is expected of us. Our stance is just one of listening … of fine tuning … trusting that all will become apparent at the proper time. To rest in awareness also means to stand free of the prejudices of mind that come from identifying with cherished attitudes and opinions. We can listen without being busy planning, analysing, theorizing … and especially judging. We can open into the moment fully in order to hear it all.60

A seriously controversial aspect of this apolitical “caring perspective” is its apparent disregard for the fate of indigenous languages (and for English). Critics will argue that the loss of a language is an enormous cultural and intellectual tragedy. Perhaps, but so what! So

59 Steven Harrison explains the importance of “doing nothing”, see Harrison (1997).
60 Dass & Gorman (1985: 111).
what? Yes, so what! *Letting go* means freeing ourselves from the “baggage” of the past. Our past is what enslaves us. We need to wake up. Our attachments to our past – our national, cultural and personal identities – may be pleasurable, but they are also the source of conflict and separation. We need to be united and we need to focus on the “right now”. If we don’t, humanity may not survive. While linguists may worry about dying languages, music-lovers may worry about their favorite songs, historians about ancient Greek texts. Some people even worry about the size of their nose or the color of their furniture. We all tend to worry about what is important to *ourselves*. Our tendencies towards specialization and individuation contribute to our overall lack of perspective regarding the human situation. Endangered languages, unto themselves, are not *that* important. Decisions about endangered languages (and English) will be important to the extent that they indirectly affect world peace, human suffering and environmental stability. It is recommended that we bring openness, sensitivity and awareness into each *language context*. Each context will represent a new challenge, a new relationship between human suffering and language change. Here we must focus on reducing *real suffering* in all its manifestations (exploitation, poverty, conflict, disease, crime, etc.) and put aside our *abstract intellectual/personal agendas* (keeping an endangered language alive, promoting our own ideas, selling books, etc.).

Anthropologists explain that modern humans are evolved from a single community of early *Homo sapiens* that probably spoke a single language. So it is clear that one language can yield many. And as Noam Chomsky emphasizes, the miracle of human language is not the specific set of arbitrary sound patterns we happen to assign to various kinds of objects, but rather the *innate universal mechanism* with which all human beings communicate. Seen with a greater psychic distance, all human beings speak dialects of the same language, *the human language*. The categorization of various “human dialects” into “languages” is a political and intellectual affair. As long as human beings are alive, *the human language* will continue to carry its full creative capacity for new words, for new grammatical variations, for new dialects (and for dialects that gain the status of “language”). This *humanistic view* of language importantly reflects the need to think in terms of the total problem, *the human problem* (how to care for each other, locally and globally), instead of the smaller symptomatic issues (linguicism, sexism, racism, poverty, enmity, war, infidelity, competition, capitalism, terrorism, envy, loneliness, fear, ideological differences, etc.).

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61 the importance of context is emphasized by Pennycook. See Pennycook (2000).


63 “psychic distance” is one of Chomsky’s favorite expressions. See Chomsky (1968: 56).
Phillipson’s (and others’) seemingly praiseworthy effort to save indigenous languages can be seen as a subtle kind of manipulation, even *imperialism*. Once again the western intellectual is playing the role of “hero”, rescuing the indigenous “dominated” people from their “fragile language situation”. Is this so heroic? Or does it reveal (once again) a subtle kind of arrogance, presupposing (as with traditional imperialism) that indigenous people really need or want outside help. A gift, given out of pity or stemming from some arbitrary western intellectual agenda, may be perceived as an annoyance, or even as an insult.

The *caring approach* need not imply that endangered cultures and languages fade away. We may be able to reverse the trend of *imperialism*, when humankind stops thinking in terms of *imperialism*, where indigenous people are portrayed as weak, helpless, disadvantaged, exploited and *indigenous*. Also, we must recognize that concepts like “individual”, “identity”, “culture” and “language” are reductionist in nature. We need, as Pennycook suggests, a more enlightened perspective that respects humanity’s true complexity. Human beings can give and receive, love and nurture, in highly unpredictable ways that transcend their racial, sexual, cultural and linguistic identities. A young Chinese woman (living in Singapore), for example, might learn Fulani because she is inspired by an Internet-friend (living in Lagos, Nigeria) who loves adventure films made in India. She *will* find that Fulani opens her eyes to an amazingly undiscovered world. The child in each of us is full of curiosity and affection. Once freed from more conventional views of right and wrong, of weak and strong, our curious, caring hearts will discover and nurture the real treasures of our Earth.

### 7. *English in a Fragile World*

How important is the problem of English in relation to other world problems? Clearly humankind may face more serious problems in the years ahead. Inadequate water supplies, insufficient sources of healthy foods, global warming, ozone deterioration, overpopulation, new strains of untreatable diseases, the reorientation of energy use away from fossil fuel sources and, most significantly, the risk of nuclear war and widespread global conflict either already are or may soon become critically important issues. Each of these issues, treated individually, is intimidating. Seen as a complex network of interrelated problems, we must

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64 See Pennycook (1999) and Pennycook (2000).

65 The *Fulani* language is spoken in several African countries (Cameroon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal), but there is no reason why someone in Singapore can’t learn it, especially if they are truly curious.
concede that upcoming generations may likely face a precarious future. As we consider the future of English, a sense of perspective must be kept. The most urgent problems must be given the highest priority. As mentioned in the last section, efforts to strategically plan for an “ideal future” are problematic and may lead to even more troubling circumstances. We need to solve issues as they arise, letting go of past experience, living in the moment. Peace manifests itself when we recognize the futility of trying to aggressively manipulate the world for our own benefit.

Decisions about English must be viewed as decisions made within the larger context of human survival and environmental sustainability. The role that language (and more specifically English) will play, within this larger context of global problems, is unpredictable and of secondary importance. If human beings are living happily, peacefully and sustainably in 1,000 years from now, but are speaking only one (or a few) language(s), we might consider this fate, from a broader perspective, a true success story. While linguistic and cultural ecology may be of some intellectual concern, the questions of world peace and of an inhabitable planet clearly must take center stage.

8. Literature


