English Spread as ‘Structural Violence’

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Abstract
The author proposes new terminology to describe the spread and domination of English-language use throughout the late 20th and early 21st century. Through a review of the pertinent literature, he suggests that the term, “linguistic imperialism,” first coined by Phillipson in 1992, is inaccurate in that it suggests the domination of English, and the subsequent extinction of other languages, is directed by some agent with shadowy ulterior motives. Instead, the term “structural violence,” taken from the writings of John Galtung, the founder of the field of peace and conflict studies, is more appropriate. This terminology suggests that English dominance is an imposition because of the role it has assumed as a global lingua franca the related societal structures that have developed to adapt to its worldwide spread and use.

Keywords: English-language spread, linguistic imperialism, structural violence

1. Introduction
The English language developed in the second century A.D. from a mix of Lower Saxon and Anglo-Frisian dialects spoken by peoples who lived in what is now southern Denmark and northwestern Germany. By the turn of the 20th century, some estimates were that approximately 1.7 billion people throughout the world spoke English as a first or second language (Crystal, 1997). Perhaps more amazing is that this global spread of the language occurred predominantly over the past 150 years. Initiated by the requirements of the Industrial Revolution and the concurrent
strength of a British Empire, this spread continues today due in large part to advances in communication technology while the United States of America is the economic powerhouse of the world. As articulated by Kachru (1991), English has spread from the “Inner Circle” lands of the native speakers (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to an “Outer Circle” where English is the second language primarily for business and education (e.g., India, Nigeria, Singapore, and South Africa) to an “Expanding Circle” where English has only recently played any role for purposes of business and technology (e.g., China and Japan) (Figure). “World English” has come to refer to the use of the English language once it spread beyond the Inner Circle.

Subsequently, the following question can be posed: Should language be forced on people who do not speak it through the creation of situations in which these people must learn it as a second language to continue to function in society, thereby pushing smaller, regional languages toward extinction? It was Robert Phillipson, in his important publication, *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992), who suggested English spread was creating an unfairness and imposition of inequality. Additionally, he stated that English had become a dominant language because it was promoted as an instrument of foreign policy first by England and later by the United States. His work is groundbreaking because it was a first attempt to provide a comprehensive, theoretical analysis of the spread of English and its status as a world language. As the book’s title implies, Phillipson considers World English and its continued spread a result of “English linguistic imperialism,” which he defines as “the dominance of English . . . asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages [Phillipson’s italics]” (p. 47). Further, he states, “English is now entrenched worldwide, as a result of British colonialism, international interdependence, ‘revolutions’ in technology, transport, communications and commerce . . .” (p. 23).

Such a thesis has proved controversial. It has attracted proponents (e.g., Pennycook [1994], Skutnabb-Kangas [1998], and Rannut [1999]) and opponents (e.g., Gates [1992], Conrad [1996], and Brutt-Griffler [2002]). Brutt-Griffler’s attack (1998) of Phillipson’s analysis (1992) in her unpublished doctoral dissertation is especially scathing. “Phillipson’s (1992) attempt to substantiate the thesis of English ‘linguistic imperialism’ was not based on a sufficient investigation of the subject,” she writes. “He never asks, in a precise, coherent, and consistent way, just what would constitute a linguistic imperialist policy . . .” (p. 37).

Describing the expansion of English-language use as a purposely planned “linguistic imperialism” may have been an accurate characterization from the onset of the Industrial Revolution to the middle 20th century, but it is a mischaracterization of English spread today. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, those responsible for English-language expansion and domination could be readily identified. However, over the past five decades, such identification is not so apparent. For example, who is the “establishment” to which Phillipson (1992)
refers? Is it American government-managed language-policy formulators carrying out a covert plan to conquer and dominate the world?

Nevertheless, whoever or whatever is behind the language’s spread, having to learn English to function within aspects of society is an imposition. Ask nearly any student struggling to learn it as a second language. Therefore, resistance to English spread exists. But is this the result of linguistic imperialism?

I submit that “linguistic imperialism” is not an accurate term to describe the mechanism of English spread from the late 20th into the early 21st centuries. Instead, the term “structural violence,” borrowed from the founder of the field of peace and conflict studies, Norwegian sociologist John Galtung (2005), better characterizes how English continues to affect people in every country of the world today.

2. A Cause of Language Extinction?

Anderson (1983) notes that Latin was the language-of-state of Austro-Hungary until the 1840s but disappeared almost immediately afterward. “Language-of-state it might be,” writes Anderson, “But it could not . . . be the language of business, of the sciences, of the press, or of literature, especially in a world in which these languages continuously interpenetrated one another” (p. 75). Thus it follows that languages are not necessarily targeted for extinction by some directed power controlled by a strictly defined group or individual. Societal developments initially unrelated to language use can come to influence a language’s advancement or contribute to its death. Bisong (1995) shows that, although English is the official language of Nigeria, it has not displaced or replaced any indigenous languages there.

In October 2008, The Economist reported that the 89-year-old last speaker of the language of the Alaskan Eyak people had died. The extinction of her language was added to the list of other languages—Akkadian, Chibcha, Etruscan, Manx, and Tangut, to name a few—that have been lost forever. According to The Economist, 50%–90% of the approximately 6,900 languages spoken today will be gone by the dawn of the 22nd century. The domination of imperialistically established English has been blamed in part for the dwindling number of other languages. Yet Crystal (1997) writes that the death of a language is independent of the emergence of a world language (p. 17). In fact, he states the emergence of English as a global language has resulted in greater efforts to preserve local languages, such as those spoken by the Maori in New Zealand and the aborigines in Australia. The Economist article concludes that “in an age of mass communications, the threats to linguistic diversity are less Draconian and more spontaneous” (p. 73). For example, parents want their children to be successful so encourage them to use a global language. The word “spontaneous” suggests the imposition caused by World English happens without direct cause. Linguistic imperialism, by contrast, is carried out directly. This is the basis of the inaccuracy in Phillipson’s terminology.
3. The Case for Phillipson’s Linguistic Imperialism

In *Nation of Nations*, the 1,400-page tome of American history, Davidson *et al.* (1991), writes:

It is an unusual culture indeed that does not fancy its own ways superior to those of foreign peoples. The Cheyenne called themselves “the human beings,” implying that no one else had ever reached that rank. The Greeks and Romans, and, later, other civilizations of Middle Ages Europe believed their culture to be superior. But the Industrial Revolution gave Western expansion in the 19th century a worldwide aggressiveness that had seen no equal in Western history. Added to this expansion was Darwin’s notion that the fittest animal species survived through a process of natural selection. Social Darwinists, such as England’s Herbert Spencer and America’s William Graham Sumner, had taken Darwin’s ideas and stated the social order developed the same way; that is, the fittest people—in this case, Anglo-Saxon and Teutons, could assert themselves over inferior people. This brought along an obligation to impose order and teach the inferior peoples of Western ideas (*e.g.*, Christianity, law, and government), which could raise the people from their inferior status. (pp. 799–800)

By the 19th century, industrialization was well under way. Countryside dwellers were attracted to opportunities for employment in the hubs of industrial networks. These hubs became growing cities, which needed access to raw material and markets for the finished products. The result was a move by the Western nations to gain this access. The European powers were motivated to acquire and dominate new territories. By the end of the century, America joined Europe, having first been able to expand its access domestically to a Reconstructed South and the previously untapped territories of its West. The needs of the dominant nations trumped those of the peoples in the newly controlled lands. Selected native children were sent to boarding schools to learn the language of their colonizers; if they were caught using their native language, they were punished. Black miners in South Africa were woefully underpaid, laborers in India died clearing jungle for tea plantations, and Native Americans lost their land to prospectors and ranchers. Davidson *et al.* (1991) write: “Through imperialism . . . the modern industrial states spread their political dominion across the world, as migrants traveled in search of jobs and land, merchants sought new markets, industries explored and extracted raw materials, and nations established colonial regimes” (p. 644). The authors suggest that the term “imperialism” developed negative connotations because of its “racist undercurrent” largely ignored by the whites of Europe and America (p. 644).

Romaine (1997) claims the role of language policy during colonialism has long been recognized. At the Third International Conference on World Englishes, held at the East-West Center in Honolulu (December 19–21, 1996), she stated that “Europeans dismissed as primitive and barbaric the languages spoken by those whom they regarded as uncivilized. At the same time, they saw the spread of their own languages as instruments of both civilization and political control” (pp. x–xi).
Phillipson (1992) likely based his concepts on those articulated by Calvet (1987), who believed language spread was analogous to a conquering army during war, and Wardhaugh (1987), who stated that language spread worked like the free market. Phillipson himself claims the starting point for his attitudes regarding World English is Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel, *Robinson Crusoe*. Specifically, Phillipson cites one part of the story in which Crusoe expresses the belief that his companion and servant, Man Friday, would be of no use until he had learned to speak and understand Crusoe’s language. (Because of Crusoe’s dominant position, even on an isolated, tropical island, the main character never considered learning his servant’s native language.) Yet, at the beginning of *Linguistic Imperialism*, Phillipson sounds more like he subscribes to the “war” metaphor of Calvet. “. . . Whereas once Britannia ruled the waves, now it is English which rules them,” Phillipson writes (p. 1).

Further, he may also have drawn from Quirk’s “imperial model” (1988). Quirk maintains that language spread occurs due to the political control over colonized people. He gave three models of spread:

1. **Demographic.** Language spreads with the migration of people who speak it.
2. **Econocultural.** Language spreads based on the necessity of its use for economic and commercial reasons and conveyance of culture worldwide.
3. **Imperial.** Language spreads because of political control over colonized peoples.


1. English is spread by linguistic imperialism and only by imperialism.
2. Linguistic imperialism means that English needs to maintain its dominance.
3. English is spread to the detriment of other languages.

Numerous examples exist of English being forced on dominated people. Phillipson (1992) mentions the Maccanley Doctrine, a series of language-policy decisions that imposed English on the people of India through education in the 1830s. During the last decade of the 1800s, the colonial British government in Papua New Guinea announced it would establish English as a common language (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, p. 31). During American rule in the Philippines, the colonial government forced English on the population. The publicly announced reason was to enhance “national solidarity” (*Annual Report of the Governor General of the Philippine Islands*, 1926, p. 5).

### 4. The Case against Phillipson’s Linguistic Imperialism

Conrad (1996) cites Gates (1992), who criticizes use of the term “cultural imperialism,” “an animal from which linguistic imperialism is perhaps derived”
(Conrad, p. 27). Based on this term, Gates asks: “Should the global circulation of American culture always be identified as imperialism . . .?” (p. 190). He writes that imperialism, as described by Phillipson (1992), does not “acknowledge the specificity of cultural interactions” (Gates, p. 191). Conrad states that those individuals who support Phillipson’s notion of imperialism subsequently believe “America to be center-stage when in fact America may not be center-stage at all, either as villain or hero” (p. 27). Gates says succinctly: “The world itself has outpaced our academic discourse” (p. 191).

Fishman (1996) also identifies problems with the concept of linguistic imperialism. First, he writes that “imperialism” is a “slippery term” (p. 5). Then he turns his attention to the supposed agents of World English:

. . . It is not enough, of course, merely to ask whether Great Britain and/or the United States—the world’s demographically largest and economically mightiest predominantly English mother-tongue countries—consciously pursue policies of spreading English abroad . . . . The industrial, commercial, cultural, and even political endeavors of their firms and of their citizens may have very definite English-language status consequences and may go far beyond formal governmental policy; indeed, they may even elicit governmental support without literally mentioning English either in legislation, in policy formulations, or in conventions of daily practice. Thus, if “the business of America is business,” and if American business is generally conducted in English and almost exclusively so, throughout the world, then the power of the American economy may itself become a spearhead and an ongoing support system for the worldwide diffusion of English. (p. 4)

Eventually, Fishman (1996) states the idea that if experts perceive that the “self-seeking capitalist economies of the metropolitan (i.e., the colonizing) centers” are directing the imposition of English, then these experts should consider the reverse, namely, that English is being imposed upon by the “colonized” who use the language for their own purposes (p. 8). Brutt-Griffler (1992) subsequently argues against linguistic imperialism because it implies the influence of English is unidirectional, when it appears to be bidirectional. There are many examples of this two-way influence. Wiley (2000) tells how Native Americans “recognized their necessity for English literacy given their disadvantaged position in treaty and legal transactions without it. At stake was the negotiation and retention of their rights to continue to occupy their ancestral lands” (pp. 79–80). Gonzalez (1987) explains that the writing of Philippine literature in English is “elitist” and “confined to the segment of Philippine society most at home in English—those in Philippine academia and business” (p. 154). Yet the Filipino writers are still able to show “innovation within the traditions of American and British literary creation” (p. 154). Additionally, Bamgbose (1982) claims a Nigerian variety of English is used with the indigenous languages to express Nigerian culture.

The unidirectional change suggested by linguistic imperialism assumes that language is monolithic and unchanging. This is explained by Widdowson (1997):
“One might accept the conspiracy theory that there was an intention [Widdowson’s italics] to use English to dominate, but assumption that the intention was successful, which is often taken as a necessary corollary, is based on a belief in the invariability of the language” (p. 136). Alatis and Straehle (1997) state, however, that “English has proved quite malleable, adapting itself more to the needs and cultures of those who use it, rather than the other way around” (p. 8).

In fact, it is not even a given that a language that spreads due to an imperial takeover will ultimately survive. Brosnahan (1963) notes that the language of Attila the Hun has vanished from Europe, and the domination of the Turkish language was sharply diminished with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Brosnahan lists four features that must be present to establish and impose a language:

1. The language is spread through military conquest and is the language of the imperial administration.
2. The military authority is maintained for centuries.
3. A unified administration promotes language spread in multilingual areas by supporting commercial, political, and religious interaction among linguistically diverse peoples.
4. Language spreads because it is accompanied by material advantages associated with learning the language.

The language of Attila and the language of the Turkish people did not have all four of these features.

Further, Brutt-Griffler (1998) states that an explanation of English spread as linguistic imperialism must be based on the following presuppositions:

1. Linguistic imperialism results from an overt language policy by an imperial power to impose its language.
2. This policy emanates from Kachru’s Inner Circle.
3. The spread of English is based on some ideology.
4. English is imposed on those who do not speak the language natively.

She explains that, in contrast to these presuppositions, the globalization of business and economic relations may preferentially use English simply because it constitutes a ready-made worldwide communication channel. Thus, she believes World English is now expanding according primarily to Quirk’s econocultural model, not due to colonialism-style coercion. In addition, Brutt-Griffler (2002) does not believe that with political control comes linguistic control, an idea reflected most notably in the works of Said (1978, 1993). Once non-Western peoples are freed from imperialism, they do not continue to be controlled ideologically by their past masters through continued use of the masters’ language. Thus, World English cannot be characterized as the medium that makes a type of post-colonial colonialism possible.

Phillipson’s work has been criticized further for his research design. Canagarajah (1999), in particular, complains that Phillipson’s database is too small and is drawn
from the wrong subjects. He asks: “How can one find out about linguistic imperialism in the periphery [Kachru’s Outer and Expanding circles] from the very personnel and agencies from the center [Kachru’s Inner Circle] who implement this domination?” (p. 43). He concludes that Phillipson’s methodology is one of “indirection” (p. 43).

5. Galtung’s Concept of ‘Structural Violence’


Galtung (2005) writes that violence occurs when individuals are prevented from realizing their “potentialities” (p. 22); that is, violence is the gap between the actual and the potential. He believes the definition of violence relates too narrowly to “somatic incapacitation or deprivation of health . . . (with killing as the extreme form), at the hands of an *actor* who *intends* this to be the consequence [italics Galtung’s]” (p. 23). He then divides the definition of violence into four “distinctions”:

1. **Physical and Biological Violence.** Physical violence constrains human movement. Galtung states that this not only includes imprisonment and bondage but, for instance, an inability to use “unevenly distributed” public transportation (p. 24.)

2. **Negative and Positive Violence.** This is more commonly referred to as the “carrot-and-stick” approach. Punishment or rewards may be given or withheld; constraints may be increased or reduced. Galtung considers this violence because the approach is manipulative and limits the “potentialities” of humans (p. 25).

3. **Whether or Not an Object Is Hurt.** Even if no object is hurt, Galtung believes violence—in this case, “truncated” violence—exists. He maintains that just the threat of physical violence can constrain human action. The concept of mutually assured destruction, which prevented the United States and the Soviet Union from annihilating each other in a nuclear conflagration during the Cold War, is an example of truncated violence (p. 25).

4. **Whether or Not There Is a Person Who Acts.** Galtung asks: “Can we talk about violence when nobody is committing direct violence?” (p. 25). His answer is “yes.” He says that violence “where there is an actor that commits the violence” is “direct” or “personal”; if there is no actor, the violence is “indirect” or “structural.” He writes: “Violence with a clear subject–object relation is manifest because it is visible as *action*. It corresponds to our ideas of what *drama* is, and it is personal because there are persons committing the violence. It is easily captured and expressed...”
verbally since it has the same structure as elementary sentences in (at least Indo-European) languages: subject-verb-object, with both subject and object being persons. Violence without this relation is structural, built into the structure [Galtung’s italics]” (p. 26).

5. *Intended vs. Unintended Violence.* Galtung clarifies this distinction by pointing out that guilt is associated with intended violence but that structural violence is usually unintended (p. 27).

6. *Manifest vs. Latent Violence.* Galtung explains that manifest violence is observable. Latent violence “could easily come about . . . . It indicates a situation of unstable equilibrium, where the level of actual realization is not sufficiently protected against deterioration by upholding mechanisms” (p. 27).

Galtung (2005) then adds one more element to the concept of structural violence. He writes that the basis of structural violence is inequality primarily in the distribution of power, which he says is measurable (p. 31). He concludes this analysis by stating, “Personal violence may more easily be noticed, even though the ‘tranquil waters’ of structural violence may contain much more violence” (p. 29).

Perhaps Farmer (2004) gives the most vivid example of structural violence. He spent time in Haiti as a medical doctor. He noted that most hospitals in the area were empty because patients had no money to pay for care. However, the hospital he worked at was crowded because it provided medicine and laboratory work for free. Every bed was filled, and, one day, more than 100 people, having slept outside through the night, stood in a nearby courtyard waiting to be seen. As Farmer made his way through the crowd, a young woman stopped him. The ensuing description is nearly stomach turning:

> “Look at this, doctor.” She lifts a left breast mass. The tumor is not at all like the ones I was taught to search for during my medical training in Boston. This lesion started as an occult lump, perhaps, but by this September day has almost completely replaced the normal breast. It is a “fungating mass,” in medical jargon, and clear yellow fluid weeps down the front of a light-blue dress. Flies are drawn to the diseased tissue, and the woman waves them away mechanically. (p. 306)

The woman, named Anite, told Farmer (2004) that it had taken a week for her to come from a small town on the opposite side of Haiti. Consequently, Farmer realized she must have traveled through the capital city, Port-au-Prince. But Anite bypassed the private clinicians and oncologists there because it would have cost her at least $700 to visit any of them (p. 307). According to Farmer, this is one of the worst forms of structural violence as defined by Galtung (2005). No one person or organization committed overt violence against Anite. Her marginalized place in Haitian society prevented her from accessing healthcare services before her cancer progressed and became terminal. Certainly, her ability to realize her potential, even within the poverty-stricken country of Haiti, became severely restricted. “Those
who look only to powerful present-day actors to explain misery will fail to see how inequality is structured and legitimated over time,” Farmer writes (p. 309).

6. English Spread as ‘Structural Violence’

6.1 Language as Imposition

Until the middle of the 20th century, language was generally thought to be a neutral entity with no connection to ideologies. However, structuralist linguistics, based on the analysis of Saussure (1959), holds that language is a socially constructed system of symbols that reflect the values of the language speakers. Language, then, has the power to influence or impose in potentially beneficial or adverse, multi-extensive ways. In contrast, Phillipson (1992) appears to take a step back from the concept of structuralist linguistics and states that language is neither good nor evil, but its imposition is based on how it is used by power structures (p. 318).

6.2 Language Imposition as the Cause of Inequality

The imposition caused by World English is not as extreme as the imposition of unaffordable medical care was on Anite, as described above. Nevertheless, the continuing advance of international communication and commerce, led predominantly by an English-speaking America, has continued to impose English on peoples in Kachru’s Outer and Expanding circles. When individuals have to struggle with a second language to function within society, “potentialities” decrease. Ammon (2000) notes that German scientists believe the use of English in worldwide scientific publications limits their ability to communicate. Individuals who cannot or will not learn their society’s dominant language lose access to parts of their society and, according to Bourdieu (1991), are “condemned to silence” (p. 55). For Bourdieu, language is a reflection of one’s societal position, thus signifying through symbols, as defined by structural linguistics, whether that person is in a weak or strong position. This inequality is the foundation of structural violence.

6.3 Language Imposition without an Identifiable Actor

Alatis (Alatis & Strathie, 1997), at the 1996 Third International Conference on World Englishes in Honolulu, discussed his reactions to the idea of an American linguistic imperialism based on his personal experience with U.S. government agencies. “It strikes me as naïve . . . to invoke the image of a well-coordinated, explicit U.S. government-driven scheme—one that involved various private organization and agencies as well—to promote the spread of English globally,” he told conference attendees (p. 3). He called those who supported the notion of linguistic imperialism “paranoid” (p. 3).

Brutt-Griffler (1998) adds that it is economic conditions that create English-language supremacy, not the cultural aspirations of the native English speakers. Further, she points out that English has spread to parts of the world where neither England nor the United States ever exerted colonial control. She concludes that if English is not spread by economic motives but by imperialistic motives, a “conscious attempt to spread the language” should be in evidence, but she sees no
such conscious attempt (p. 45). Ultimately, Brutt-Griffler defines an “imperial language policy” as “conscious and systematic language planning on the part of the governing bodies situated in the Center [the Inner Circle]; it is primarily ideologically driven and leads to a replacement of the existing language(s) and its societal functions in a given community” (p. 47). Yet the United States never had an explicit, ideologically based national language policy.

Phillipson (1992) writes: "English has a dominant position in science, technology, medicine, and computers, in research, books, periodicals, and software; in transnational business, trade, shipping, and aviation; in diplomacy and international organizations, in mass media entertainment, news agencies, and journalism, in youth culture and sport, in education systems, as the most widely learnt foreign language . . . ." (p. 6). Today, English is dominant because it is the communicative medium for all those parts of life Phillipson lists (and more). It is embedded in those aspects of society.

6.4 Language Imposition as a Result of Practicality

English imposition results from practical motives. For example, with the post-World War II development of international organizations (the International Atomic Energy Agency, United Nations, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization, for example), only a small number of languages can be designated as “official.” The United Nations established five official languages (Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish). Crystal (1997) writes that reducing the number of languages used in these types of organizations is done for reasons of cost-effectiveness. It reduces the numbers of translators and clerical workers needed. He states that half the budget of a global organization is spent in translation costs (p. 10). Since the world currently lacks an invented *lingua franca*, English is playing that role. In addition, the need for a *lingua franca* has become more pressing with the rise of the internet. It is now possible, explains Crystal, for physicists in India, Italy, and Sweden to speak to each other (p. 11). But that can only happen if they adopt a *lingua franca*, and, most times, that is English.

The English language has periodically enabled the powerful to segregate, marginalize, or otherwise diminish the weak, who were thought inferior based on Social Darwinism. Even Brutt-Griffler (2002), in her book, *World English: A Study of Its Development*, devotes a chapter to how English-language education was reserved for the colonial elite and denied to the vast majority of those living in British-occupied territory. But after World War II, the English-language-based imperialist ardor had cooled. The mighty British Empire was gravely and permanently weakened. Although America then carried the mantle of “world leader,” its imperialistic tendencies were blunted by its belief “that the United States was democratic and free and, therefore, was above the selfish interests that had driven the expansion of the Old Europe powers” (Davies, 1996, p. 794). Therefore, America’s worldwide influence was re-articulated as a need to spread the benefits of Christianity, the capitalist system, and the fruits of democracy. A forced spread of English was never a stated goal of postwar American leaders.
Crystal (1997) claims that language can be made a priority through a nation’s policy that emphasizes foreign-language teaching. He goes on to say that Russian had privileged status in the countries of the former Soviet Union, Mandarin has a high status in Southeast Asia, and English is the most widely taught foreign language. Yet in all these instances, the teaching of these languages developed as a result of the privileged status of the languages; the languages were not taught to cause the languages to become privileged.

Phillipson also states that “in the neo-colonialism phase of imperialism inter-state actors from the Centre [that is, the Inner Circle] and representatives of the elite in the periphery (their counterparts and collaborators) are the key agents of this linguistic imperialism” (p. 55). However, Brutt-Griffler (2002) maintains this “phase of imperialism” would require “a distinctive language policy” (p. 28). Currently, there is no identifiable, worldwide, English-language–based policy by the United States government that has as its ultimate objective extra-territorial domination. Today, the spread of English, in contradiction to Phillipson’s contention, has, in large part, been left to chance. It expands with the ongoing evolution of multinational integration, led predominantly by an English-speaking America.

Brutt-Griffler (2002) maintains: “Language spread and change cannot be conceived through conceptual frameworks that involve historically active agents imposing their language on passive recipients” (p. 23). World English studies should therefore focus on those who receive the language and modify it for their own ends, not on an attempt to identify and castigate entire hegemonic authorities that ostensibly force the use of English on those who do not speak it as a native language.

7. Conclusion

The concept of structural violence suggests that there is not a “who” behind the spread of English. Hence, “Who makes the rules?” is the wrong question. The more accurate question is: How does World English continue its imposed domination when there is no easily identifiable power behind it? The short, qualified answer is that World English is no longer directed by a “who” but by a “what.” Further, that “what” is communications, international commerce, and the practical benefits of learning the language that currently predominates transnational interactions due to the coincidental economic strength of those in Kachru’s Inner Circle.

The spread of World English may have started in the 19th century as an imperialist design by the British Empire and later by America, as Phillipson (1992) explains. Yet today the engine behind World English spread is the practicality of learning a language that, for the time being, is the de facto worldwide communication medium for business, trade, and culture. Laws intended to force the use of English on individuals are frequently the result of overzealous, ethnocentric-minded leaders in localized areas. They are not a reflection of an Inner Circle-wide movement to conquer the world through linguistic domination. Nevertheless, the imposition of World English continues, embedded in the structures of a globally interactive
society, not by an identifiable actor. It has the potential to cause frustration and disruption in the lives of those who initially do not speak the language. Therefore, the spread of World English is an example of Galtung’s structural violence (2005). Phillipson et al. (1994), Skutnabb-Kangas (1998), and Rannut (1999) are correct, however, in calling for linguistic human rights, which might begin to rectify some structurally violent inequities.

7.1 Search for a Unifying Perspective

Crystal (1997), perhaps in a moment of academic defeat, claims that the emergence of English as a world language cannot be explained:

The story of English . . . is one of rapid expansion and diversification, with innovation after innovation coming to use the language as a primary or sole means of expression. It is not possible to identify cause and effect. So many developments were taking place at the same time that we can only point to the emergence, by the end of the nineteenth century, of a climate of largely unspoken opinion which had made English the natural choice for progress. (p. 75).

Conrad (1996) believes the forces behind language spread need to be analyzed empirically. Rannut (1999) has called for a new paradigm, which includes language “penetrating all domains of society” (p. 100). Brutt-Griffler (2002) states, “The global spread of English exhibits complexities that have yet to be brought under a unifying theoretical perspective” (p. 108). Her cry for such an analysis remains largely unanswered a decade and a half later.

The addition of “structural violence,” a term from peace and conflict studies, to describe the spread of English could add to the theoretical perspectives but would not, admittedly, unify them. Nevertheless, the use of more accurate terminology to describe World English and its spread today might be a first step toward such unification. Because the spread of English no longer seems overtly directed by an easily identifiable actor and because it remains an imposition for those who do not speak English, “structural violence” may be a more appropriate descriptor of English spread today than “linguistic imperialism.”

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