Impacts of Globalization: 
Hegemonic Threats of English in Taiwan *

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With the spread of globalization and information technology, the status of English as a lingua franca worldwide is undisputable. Consequently, the impact of globalization on ELT (English language teaching) is phenomenal. In responding to the impact of global competitors and internationalization, English teaching is often regarded as a principal issue in education. English education is treated as a tool to keep up with the rapid globalization of the world economy. Discussing ELT in Taiwan as an example, this paper aims to raise caution among the periphery educators that under the impact of globalization, the imposition of western culture and language via ELT could be potentially hegemonic and harmful to the local culture and language. This paper will be organized into three parts. Firstly, the impact of globalization on the dominance of English will be discussed. Secondly, the potential threats of linguistic hegemony via ELT will be analyzed. Thirdly, proactive solutions to the hegemonic threats of ELT are proposed as the key to ride out the wave of globalization.

Keywords: globalization, ELT (English language teaching), linguistic hegemony, EFL (English as foreign language)

Introduction

With the spread of globalization and information technology, the status of English as a lingua franca worldwide is undisputed and the impact of globalization on English education is phenomenal. In the face of the impact of global competitors and internationalization, English teaching is regarded as a principal issue in education. As a result, English education is treated as a tool to keep up with the rapid globalization of the world economy.

In Taiwan, the enthusiasm for learning English has been growing at an astonishing rate over the past few years. In response to “English fever”, the educational policies of ELT (English language teaching) have undergone drastic changes. Since 2001, one of such changes is to teach English as a compulsory subject starting from the fifth grade. Thereafter, people in Taiwan have been fervently talking about children learning English at an early age in order to obtain a “jump start” in the academic race. In 2003, the MOE (Ministry of Education) lowered the introductory year of English from the fifth to the third grade with one to two hours of instruction per week at the primary level. Soon after the implementation of this new education policy, numerous prominent scholars began to voice their concerns over teacher preparation, teacher qualifications, curriculum planning,

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textbook adaptations, and pedagogies of ELT in Taiwan (Chern & Liaw, 1998; Shih, 1999; Chan, 2000). In spite of these concerns, starting from 2004, the MOE began to hire NESTs (native English-speaking teachers) on a regular basis to bridge the gap in teacher qualification and resource availability between urban and rural areas. Pros and cons of recruiting NESTs into elementary schools have cross-fired but unable to reach consensus.

Despite the impact of these drastically changed educational policies on children, “English fever” in Taiwan has reached epidemic proportions. In the face of global competition and internationalization, many people consider English competence to be the key to a competitive advantage and success. As a result, many people are eager to catch up with this trend, which has given rise to a unique phenomenon in Taiwan. That is, English language cram schools outside the classroom have mushroomed in recent years. According to the cram school survey sponsored by MOE (2007), from 1998 to 2007, the number of the foreign language-related cram school has grown from 1,142 to 5,330. Parents send their children to English cram schools after school to boost their English test scores. Public and private sectors encourage their employees to go to English cram schools to learn basic conversational skills.

All of these reactions to English fever have happened too rapidly to allow contemplation. It is, nevertheless, important for us to reposition ourselves in the wave of globalization. Do we manage to ride out the storm of globalization towards a far-reaching destination? Do we have any strategic plan? Or do we just let the storm carry us or submerge us? These are the questions the author intends to call attention to, especially the attention of the ELT profession. The rest of this paper, therefore, aims to sensitize the readers to the impact of globalization on ELT, namely the potential threats of the hegemony of English. To achieve this end, the definition of globalization and its impact on the dominance of English are discussed first. Secondly, the definition of hegemony and its consequence on the local culture and language are discussed. Last but not the least, following the review of alternative paradigms to the hegemony of English, solutions are offered as to the successful resistance to the linguistic hegemony of English in a global sphere.

**Globalization and the Dominance of English**

Researchers have long tried to grasp the meaning of globalization and to this end, various definitions of globalization have been put forth. Those definitions differ greatly depending on how globalization is viewed with regard to values and culture. On the one hand, globalization symbolizes the empowerment and prosperity associated with the increasing flow of goods and capital, and subsequently better and higher living standards. On the other, it connotes hegemony and stands for the imposition of western values and ways of life, and a real threat to local cultures. According to one of the most prominent scholars on globalization, Robertson, a sociologist, globalization is a concept that refers to “the crystallization of the entire world as a single place” (as cited in Arnason, 1990, p. 220), or “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (Robertson, 1992, p. 8). Apart from the sociological view of globalization, the following definition sounds most appropriate when education is concerned:

> Globalization is the acceleration and intensification of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations. This process has effects on human well-being (including health and personal safety), on the environment, on culture (including ideas, religion, and political systems), and on economic development and prosperity of societies across the world. (Rothenberg, 2005, p. 2)
In the era of globalization, we cannot isolate ourselves from its influence as it has affected almost every aspect of our life. Globalization has had an economical, social, cultural, linguistic, and environmental impact on us. Among others, the author believes culture is the most significant one, because it informs and justifies our life, including education. As long as globalization is economically driven, culture is shaped accordingly. In the economic realm, globalization is taking place in a more concrete sense as transnational corporations are conducting business and trading beyond national boundaries. As a result, we are immersed in a “global culture” where our daily life is filled with merchandise and information imported from economically strong nations. Tsuda (2001) of Nagoya University in Japan contended that globalization causes Anglo-Americanization of the world culture, McDonaldization of the society, and the dominance of English on the Internet. He further argued: “… The dominance of English operates as a means of promoting globalization. The dominance of English doubtlessly serves to facilitate globalization. Globalization, in turn, assumes and encourages the use and dominance of English” (Tsuda, 2001, p. 5). In his view, globalization and the dominance of English go hand in hand perpetuating unequal linguistic and national relations in the global scale.

### Globalization and the Demand for NESTs

Because of globalization, communicative competence in English is far more emphasized than before. One solution to revamp the limitation in spoken English of many locally trained English teachers is to include native speakers of English in the teaching staff. Since 2004, MOE has been recruiting NESTs from Western countries to boost CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) in local settings. English teachers are in demand around the world, but this phenomenon raises a question: What kind of teachers do we need to teach English in the EFL (English as foreign language) context, NESTs or non-NESTs? It is still hotly debated who serves as the best model for ESL/EFL instruction. In Taiwan, the author believes this is also true for many Expanding Circle countries; language institutes favor and appreciate NESTs. The reason is quite simple: NESTs attract students and help generate revenue. This is particularly true for private language schools, which mostly prefer to hire a NEST instead of a more experienced non-NEST. Recently in Taiwan, the phenomenon that NESTs are hired as instructors is very common as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English learners</th>
<th>The percentage of students taught by NESTs (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a cram school for children</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In elementary school</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In high school</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In college/university</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In an adult cram school</td>
<td>8.0</td>
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1 Kachru (1985, 1992, and 1994) conceptualized the uses and users of English internationally in terms of three concentric circles: Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle comprises the old-variety English-using countries, such as the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The Outer Circle comprises countries where English has a long history of institutionalized functions and standing as a language of importance in education, governance, literary creativity, and popular culture, such as India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Singapore, South Africa, and Zambia. The Expanding Circle countries are those in which English has various roles and is widely studied for more specific purposes than in the Outer Circle; such countries currently include China, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Korea, and Nepal.
Medgyes in the book *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (2001) edited by Celce-Murcia contended that NNESTs often feel disappointed with the unequal job opportunities especially when they have more extensive teaching experience or higher credentials than their NEST counterparts. Moreover, the payment of native-speakers is usually higher than that of the non-native speakers. Most parents in Taiwan would like their children to be taught by NESTs while some parents are concerned about the qualifications of the NESTs.

A survey (Chang, 2003) conducted with 299 parents of second graders from Taichung area suggests both NESTs with teacher training and local English teachers are considered equally qualified. The teachers working in the so called “bilingual” preschools/kindergartens, however, do not think they have an equal teaching role as their NEST partners. Thirty-five out of 50 local kindergarten teachers surveyed revealed their subordinate teaching role in their classrooms. One teacher mentioned:

> From day one, I know I am kind of like a helper to my foreign partner. So, I try to be very helpful and kids know that. They know who to talk to when they have different needs. I would say Jennifer (her foreign partner) is more like a teacher and I’m kind of like a care taker. (personal communication, May 3, 2004)

The unequal status between the NEST and local kindergarten teacher reveals the hegemonic threats of English. That is, English and its native speakers are dominating the local language and its native speakers.

**Hegemonic Threats of English**

Hegemony comes from the Greek word “to lead”. The term was conceptualized by Gramsci (1985), an Italian political writer, to explain how dominant groups secure and maintain their power through persuasion and consent. Hegemony refers to the dominance of one group over other groups, usually without force, to the extent that the dominant group can dictate the terms of trade to its advantage. The concept of hegemony offers an insightful view into various social power relations, such as the one between dominant and subordinate languages and language groups. Wiley (2000) defined linguistic hegemony as the following:

> Linguistic hegemony is achieved when dominant groups create a consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usage as standard or paradigmatic. Hegemony is ensured when they can convince those who fail to meet those standards to view their failure as being the result of the inadequacy of their own language. (p. 113)

The above definition was mostly used to analyze the social power relations between the majority and minority groups within a nation, such as Chinese Americans living in America trying to maintain their heritage language. Nevertheless, the author argues that the consensus of viewing English as a more powerful tool of communication and a more desirable language to acquire is well established outside English-speaking countries. That is, the hegemony of English is applicable to analyze the unequal linguistic status of different languages in a transnational context.

With the spread of globalization, the dominance of English and the prevalence of Anglo-American culture reign. Consequently, parents are convinced that their children need to learn English at a very early age with maximum exposure to a native speaker of English. For instance, Chang’s 2003 survey of 299 parents in Taichung area reveals that 28% of them believe their children should start learning English in preschool whereas 40.3% regard kindergarten or first grade the best time to begin English instruction. Eighty percent of these same parents believe their children should be taught through English-only instruction. Chang’s (2003) study also indicated more than half of the responding parents support the MOE policy of recruiting foreign English teachers into
public schools while 30.1% of them disagree on the statement that “the education of Mandarin/mother tongue is more important than studying English” (p. 268).

In order to have a “jump start”, some parents are willing to relinquish their primary role as their children’s first language teacher just because their English is not perfect and they believe their children’s Chinese will come along eventually. The view that English is a more desirable language to acquire warrants “No Chinese” policy in the so-called “bilingual” or “American School” kindergartens. For instance, the kindergarten next door has this big poster with a gigantic red crossing out the word Chinese. Adjacent to the poster is the student list with several x-marks indicating who has spoken the wrong language, Chinese. This scenario gives a picture of the linguistic hegemony of English in action where the Chinese-speaking parents desired for their offspring to start learning English at the expense of children’s mother tongue.

Another problem with the parents’ desire for their children to have maximum exposure to English is the reduced input of Chinese language to the children. English is important; however, it is not as important as Chinese, the primary language upon which the children’s thinking and development are based. We cannot afford to be missing out on the most important formative years for the cultivation of the primary language and its affiliated identity. In his best selling book, *Dignity of a Nation* (2005), Fujiwara argued that starting teaching English in elementary school is the best way to handicap Japan. Despite 86% of the Japanese supporting the idea of beginning English instruction at the primary level, Fujiwara (2005) held a different view and contended that to become an international citizen, English competence is only a means. In his opinion, developing a solid foundation in one’s mother tongue is far more important because through a strong mother tongue, one can express him/herself precisely and insightfully in a second or foreign language.

Fujiwara’s position statement reminds us of being sensitive to the hegemony of English and asking ourselves consciousness-raising questions. Are we paying too high a price just for the sake of catching up with globalization? Are we running the danger of equalizing globalization with Americanization or Anglicization? A real globalization/internalization lies in the equal status among those who are participating. The equality applies to the cultural and linguistic right of the participants. With the growing trend of English becoming an international language of communication, it is time to promote equality in communication. It is, therefore, time for a paradigm shift from the hegemony of English to the one that empowers and emancipates international speakers of English while inspiring native speakers of English.

**Alternative Paradigms to the Spread of English**

Recognizing the linguistic hegemony English language has exerted on the *Expanding Circle* or the periphery, Tsuda (1994) and Aliakbari (2002) offered alternative paradigms to counterbalance this rather pessimistic account of English language learning outside English-speaking countries. Given the limitation of linguistic imperialism in accounting for the language learners’ voluntary use and learning of English as an international language, Aliakbari (2002) called for a paradigm shift from linguistic imperialism to linguistic democracy.

Linguistic democracy is premised on the assumption that, “democracy is the accepted choice for human relations and language as a human attribute is thought to follow the same direction”; therefore, it is “a call for linguistic and cultural democracy among the speakers of English in international situations throughout the world” (Aliakbari, 2002, p. 12).
Under the notion of linguistic democracy, it is expected that English language learners all over the world can take advantage of this globally recognized communication tool to express their cultures. Linguistic democracy also aims to bring native and non-native speakers of English into equal footing. The non-native majority of English speakers are no long peripheral nor are they subordinate to the native central minority. Linguistic democracy also advocates using English as an international language, so that no need to act like a native speaker of English. Therefore, cultural awareness and appreciation for cultural differences can be cultivated on the one hand, and more successful and effective cross-cultural communication can be fostered on the other.

Yukio Tusda, a Japanese scholar, advocates *The Ecology of Language Paradigm* in an attempt to refute *The Diffusion of English Paradigm*, which mainly serves Western capitalism and inclines to promote one language and one culture at the expense of others. In his critical analysis of the spread of English, Tsuda (1994) asserted that the hegemony of English perpetuates inequality, discrimination, and colonization of the mind. The hegemony of English also causes Americanization, transnationalization, and commercialization of contemporary life.

To solve these problems, a theory or a perspective, such as the ecology of language paradigm, is needed to promote a language and communication policy with greater equality. Tsuda (1994) pointed out that the ideas and goals advocated by the ecology of language should be incorporated into the theories and practices of international communication. The above review indicates that concerted efforts are required at all levels from the local to the global to advance the cause of these two conceptual frameworks. This means language policy ought to take priority over political agendas (Phillipson, 2001).

**The Solution**

Despite these rather ambitious paradigms provided by Tsuda (1994) and Aliakbari (2002), some overlap between the two is worth contemplating in the face of potential threats brought on by English hegemony. In the next section, three overlapping points will be elaborated in relation to the literature: teaching English as an international language, challenging native speaker fallacy, and recognizing English for mutual understanding across cultural boundaries.

**Teaching English as an International Language**

Recognizing the fact that EIL (English is spoken as an international language) has far-reaching implications for the ELT profession. It implies that adopting an entirely different set of assumptions from the teaching and learning of any other second or foreign language is necessary (Tsuda, 1994). In the era of globalization, McKay (2002) proposed teaching English as an international language. She claimed that for a language to be an international language, the language has to be developed to where it is “no longer linked to a single culture or nation but serves both global and local needs as a language of wider communication” (McKay, 2002, p. 24). Widdowson (1994) positioned himself similarly as he reiterated the ownership of English: “The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. To grant such custody of the language is seemingly to arrest its development and so undermine its international status” (p. 385). In other words, in learning English as an international language, there is no need for the leaner to be like a native speaker of English. This realization relieves non-native speakers from falling into the trap of acting and thinking like native speakers in order to claim their rightful position as speakers of English.
The growing trend of using English as a worldwide language of communication also calls for attitudinal changes in both native and non-native speakers. Both are recommended to adopt a new orientation toward English and its speakers (Aliakbari, 2002). For native speakers to shift toward English as an international language, they need to give up the monopolistic view and take a universal position. They are also expected to accept the present realities of English being spoken in varieties, which cannot be considered inappropriate. Non-native speakers need to become more tolerant to many varieties of English and learn about the ways other non-native speakers use English. They should also stop seeing themselves subordinate to native speakers.

**Challenging the Native Speaker Fallacy**

The concept of English as an international language means English is a communication skill in the global community. This is to suggest that the primary purpose of English is for communicating instead of speaking pure or authentic like a British or North American person (Aliakbari, 2002). Likewise, Smith (1976) argued: “It is not necessary to appreciate the culture of a country whose principle language is English in order for one to use it effectively. Neither does the effective use of English need to make one more western” (p. 2). Thus, there is no need to adhere to the Inner-Circle varieties of English as the only model.

Sano (1995) and Motona (1995) argued that we should stop seeing native speakers as the ideal model. Such conception not only imposes unrealistic goals on students to attain “native-like proficiency” but also causes students to develop an inferior image as a language user (Sano, 1995). The model of the native speaker should not be overemphasized; it might be more beneficial to recruit English teachers from the Outer-Circle countries. In addition to teaching English, English teachers from the Outer-Circle countries can become the informant of their native culture, so that the students would have a chance to learn about the foreign culture other than American’s or Britain’s.

In addition, the increasing use of English as a worldwide language of communication also makes the dichotomy between native and non-native speakers problematic. As Brutt-Griffler and Samimi contended in Transcending the Nativeness Paradigm (2001): “The more English becomes an international language, the more the division of its speakers into ‘native’ and ‘nonnative’ becomes inconsistent” (p. 105). Taking a similar position, McKay (2002) argued:

> If English continues to spread, it is clear that the majority of users in the coming decades will be bilinguals who use the language, alongside one or more others, largely for purposes of wider communication. In meeting the pedagogical needs of such users it is essential that the native speaker fallacy be challenged. (p. 45)

Given the fact that 80% of English teachers around the world today are bilingual users of English (McKay, 2002), it is time that the native speaker fallacy be reexamined and possibly be abolished.

**Recognizing English Is for Mutual Understanding**

In using English as an international language, there is no need for the user to be like a native speaker of English. As such, English can be seen as a means of expressing the speakers’ culture (Aliakbari, 2002). English is simply a language that is most convenient for intercultural communication; it is the language for Taiwanese to explain Taiwanese culture to foreigners as well as to know about the culture of other countries (Motona, 1995).

Inspired by Suarez’s “Paradox of Linguistic Hegemony” (2002), a concept which delineates a successful strategy of resistance as being proficient in both the dominant and the dominated languages, the author of this
paper reiterates on the notion that “successful resistance may lie in the usefulness of the dominant language” (p. 515) with a twist. Any opposition against the use of English is inherently in vain, because without knowledge of English, one remains marginalized and powerless in the global village. To resist linguistic hegemony of English, therefore, we need to capitalize on that very language to promote genuine two-way communication in the global scale. That is, English is only a means to deepen our understanding of our culture and subsequently communicate our culture to the world. Having these goals in mind, our youngsters will not be submerged into the wave of globalization but take power from it, ride out the wave, and ultimately contribute to the cultural and linguistic pluralism in the global community.

Guard the Minds Against English Hegemony

Counter solutions provided by Tsuda (1994) and Aliakbari (2002) satisfactorily situate English language teaching/learning in a more neutral and promising way; however, they do not speak to the very fundamental make up of linguistic hegemony. That is, both theories are short of specific strategies that people can take to their day-to-day encounters with the language. Different from the aforementioned approaches which put more emphasis on the macro level with policy implications, the author would like to add a micro-level solution to safeguard the minds of parents and English teachers in the Expanding Circle countries against the linguistic hegemony of English. The author’s approach begins with how the hegemony was developed and deals with the agents who give legitimacy and consent to the dominance of English.

English has gained a legitimately privileged position as a school subject, or what the author calls “vocally legitimate” due to its globally recognized standing. To counterbalance its dominant position among the school subjects, the other subject matters, particularly Chinese, need to regain their legitimacy through vocal appeals. The legitimacy of regarding English as a more important subject needs to be examined.

As far as the legitimacy of hiring NESTs into our public schools is concerned, we need not forget the legitimate teaching role that our local teachers are entitled to. It is not legitimate to silence our locally trained, qualified English teachers to the background just because they fall on the wrong category of non-NEST. We need to question and examine whether the ways in which the NESTs are teaching with our local teachers are legitimate. We do not want to consent to the kind of teaching practices that send the message to our children that our local teachers are inferior to the NESTs. This message is potentially harmful to the identity of our children. To guard our minds against the hegemony of English, we need to question and reexamine the issues and educational decisions concerning languages.

Conclusions

In summary, the author believes as educators, it is part of our job to challenge the status quo rather than perpetuating it, let it be social, political, ideological, or linguistic. We need to question the unquestioned, especially when it is potentially threatening to who we are and what we are. We, as educators, have the responsibility to sharpen students’ understanding from a wider perspective and enhance their awareness of being Taiwanese living in a global community.

The emphasis on learning English is tremendous, and the assimilation of globalization is excessive. Evidently, the influence of globalization is inevitable, and the advantage of changing language teaching and learning is noticeable. Besides teaching English, language teachers also have to foster students’ self and cultural
awareness through well-balanced teaching. After all, people should not be ignorant of who they are, where they come from, and what their culture is. As Smith (1987) stated it: “We certainly want to use English well, but this should not require us to try to change our identity” (p. 3). Language teaching not only entails teaching a language, but also encompasses how we address and foster our students’ potential to develop as a global citizen within a local context. The author also believes that schools should nurture children who will be trusted and respected by international society. To gain trust and respect, a person needs to have a better understanding of self and others.

Furthermore, schools should have the vision to nurture our children to be able to voice their opinions to the outside world in a way that they can be understood. We ought to encourage our youngsters to actively contribute to the world by expressing our ideas and our way of doing things. As numerous social changes can be brought about through education, we as practitioners should be the ones who are most responsive to the social issues and take initiative to consolidate our cultural identity.

References


