Multilingualism and English

The Canton of Zurich as a linguistic paradigm

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Agnieszka Stepkowska

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Agnieszka Stępkowska

UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Chapter One

English in rivalry

1.1. Introductory remarks

This chapter aspires to encapsulate the most important aspects related to the dynamics of the development and proliferation of the English language. Therefore, the key issue running throughout the following pages will be the concept of language spread and spread-related aspects. Each of the following parts of chapter one divides into two focal points. The order of the respective sections is intended to span the problem in question starting from the adoption of necessary definitions, through diverse typologies and models, to inferences based on the evaluation of the consequences of presented phenomena and situations.

The unheard-of expansion of English in today's world is a fact. From among many recurring questions asked and answered every now and then, there is the one that deals with the origins of a global language. Naturally, it is neither the structure nor undeniable riches of big languages that account for this. We know that the reasons are to be looked for in social, demographic, economic and political conditions. Thus, if the existential laws are to be discussed, the contacts between languages should be taken into account. Such a contact amounts to the relationship of the mother tongue and foreign languages. The main interest here will not concern linguistic interferences, but situations in which a particular language is used.

The first thematic section of this chapter (1.2.) deals with the unrivalled position that English has acquired in the world. Writing on language spread, I will examine those factors, functions, features and status of English which might account for its becoming a global language. I will analyze the agents of the spread, critically considering the notion of linguistic imperialism. Here I will mainly deal with the sociological strand of the phenomenon which entails several larger, yet related themes, such as power, ideology and globalization.

In section 1.3. much attention is devoted to language standards and varieties viewed in conjunction with the concentric circles of Kachru's model. This model of language spread, regarded as the most 'classic' one, will be scrutinized in the context of comments and selected parallel proposals. The discussion reveals the problem of classifying the world's Englishes, further complicated by the emergence of new varieties. A related issue to be mentioned is the

societal bilingualism referring to the functional division of language varieties (diglossia), either on a world or national scale. Quite a number of interpretations and modifications made in connection with diglossia prove its complex socio-linguistic character and the relevance to our times. In a quest for congruence of theoretical assumptions with real situations, I will concentrate on one of the four examples used by Ferguson in 1959, i.e. the relationship between Standard German and its Swiss variety.

Section 1.4. highlights the multiplicity of names accrued around English. These names reflect the status, functions and roles played by English in different sociolinguistic settings around the world. Some of the names have been too long or descriptive, others simply did not catch on. Still, some names have successfully been used internationally, many of them as acronyms. Recently, there has been a tendency to bring out the neutrality of English by labelling it as 'basic,' 'neutral,' 'aterritorial,' or 'nuclear.' One of the most debated names of English is that of a lingua franca understood as a language of contact between non-native users of English. In consequence, the most recent attempts aim to teach a simplified English, particularly at the level of grammar, lexicon and pronunciation.

The last section of chapter one (1.5.) treats of motivation, attitudes and language choice, i.e. the sociolinguistic aspects which seem relevant in the context of language spread. The different approaches taken towards these issues allow to theorize about a variety of relationships in conjunction with multilingual settings and globalization in general. I applaud bold linguistic pragmatism, which I see as the main driving motive to learn and use languages on a personal level. It seems to me that linguistic pragmatism best brings out, or at least helps diagnose, our authentic language needs.

1.2. The nature of a dominant language

1.2.1. Language spread

English can be said to be the most prevalent or, as Wardhaugh (1987: 15) phrases it, "the least localized of all the languages in the world." Millions use it as a mother tongue and still more speak it as a second language. Nothing augurs an early change of this situation which, in addition, escapes simple explanation. Since it is not possible to approach language spread in a way other than by picking up a string of contributive aspects, I propose to concentrate primarily on its causes as they usually constitute the actual knowledge or understanding of any process. Thus, a reflection about the factors of language spread is hoped to disclose the nature of a dominant language.

I will refrain myself from drawing on the somewhat hackneyed comparisons with Latin[2] by postulating that the spread of English has generated a new sociolinguistic reality. Language spread is nestled in a macro-level language situation which co-relates with the rise of English to the position of an auxiliary language.[3] The lack of precedents restricts a reasonable judgement about the extent of English. As a result, we do not know what to expect, as our 'lesson' in this respect is yet to be learnt. The key factors regarding the worldwide spread of English are best described as 'unprecedented.' They include the geographical spread, the number of speakers, the speed and the current growth in the language all having a history hardly longer than half of a century (Crystal 1994: 112). Thus, apart from Old English, Middle English and Modern English, the history of English may be said to have gained another 'historical period' – the period of Global English (Graddol 2006: 58; cf. McArthur 2002, 2003).

The global perspective ruthlessly reveals the consequences of the spread of but a few world languages, the gravest one being the subsequent death of minority languages. Eleven languages are estimated to be spoken by about two thirds of the world's population. This extremely uneven distribution of languages globally has been noted by several authors (cf. e.g. Graddol 2006: 60, Romaine 1994: 50). Roughly every fourth user of English is a native speaker of English, which means that most English-as-a-Lingua-Franca interactions are controlled by non-native speakers of English (Crystal 2003: 76, Seidlhofer 2005: 339). A separate issue is the level of proficiency in a language that would allow to classify its users as the 'speakers of English.' The problem where to put the borderline between speakers and non-speakers of a given language remains intractable, thereby producing too many uncertainties in counting the number of speakers (cf. Gnutzmann – Intemann 2005: 13, Wardhaugh 1987: 134). What we can talk about are the estimated numbers, but even they differ so largely that the reality emerging from them looks unclear (cf. Crystal 1985, 2004a: 109; Svartvik – Leech 2006: 1-9).

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2   McArthur (1987: 10) writes: "The Latin analogy as a basis for predicting one possible future for English is not (...) very useful, if the assumption is that once upon a time Latin was a mighty monolith that cracked because people did not take proper care of it. That is fallacious."

3   In the context of language spread, the concept of *macroacquisition* proposed by Brutt-Giffler (2002: 138) is defined as "a process of social second language acquisition, the embodiment of the process of language spread and change, or language change through its spread." In this vein, language contact is realized within a bilingual or multilingual community rather than between bilingual persons, as preferred by Weinreich (1953).

1.2.1.1. Elucidation

The study of language spread entails several 'wh-' questions, i.e. *who* is learning a language, *what* language, *when*, *why* and, lastly, *how*. Answers to these questions may be clustered around three sociolinguistic aspects – form, function, and pervasiveness. The conceptualization of language spread has been worded by Lieberson (1982) as "nothing more than a reshaping of the existing pattern of language acquisition and usage" (Lieberson 1982, cited in Flaitz 1988: 18). Cooper (1982: 6) parallels this definition putting emphasis on the time factor and language function, so that language spread is understood as "an increase, over time, in the proportion of a communication network that adopts a given language or language variety for a given communicative function." Thus, it may be not so much the language that spreads, but its users who increase in number. Laponce (2003: 58) argues that most languages have no fliers and resemble "leaves in the wind." However, a *laissez-passer* policy in matters of language probably would lead the competing languages to a specialization of their usage. Consequently, more powerful languages would be ascribed higher functions, whereas weaker ones would serve private domains.

Only the evolution of standardized languages can be at least minimally controlled by governmental supervision of the phenomena interconnecting languages – such as communication, competition, cooperation and conflict. The momentum gained by English in its spread builds on a variety of sources, primarily the former British colonial possessions and, more recently, the North American associations with science, computer technology, the media, tourism, banking, international business and political power. Wardhaugh (1987: 131) describes the ascendancy of English as a 'one-sided competition.' Clearly, from the sociolinguistic angle, English has permeated into an unusually wide array of functional domains. Many voices argue that the more English spreads, the more neutral, or 'value-free,' it becomes. If so, then English has no proprietors. It embraces all kinds of people, political systems, views, cultures and identities.[4] Such a scale of spread sometimes raises the question of the inherent viability of language, which has united linguists in agreement that no built-in features can dismiss any language as 'worse' than others for any purpose. The true reasons for the power of language are non-linguistic in nature; rather, they reside in demographic, economic, and political correlates.

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4   In Wardhaugh (1987: 18) we also find the distinction between horizontal and vertical spread. In the case of the former, language is used merely by a certain segment of society. As for the latter, all segments of society need to be unified by one language.

The analysis of language spread proposed by Quirk (1988) runs along a threefold framework of demographic, econocultural and imperial models.[5] Thus, briefly speaking, a language spreads if the population spreads, but also if multinational business is conducted, and through political control respectively. Interestingly, the second and third models do not need to be based on population spread. The demographic model consists of three offshoots, marked as A, B and C. The first one is quite rare in practice as it features the correspondence between a nation and one language like in Japan. The second one represents multilingual nations where one example could be Switzerland. Again, a less common model, C, stands for separate countries that share the same language like French in France, Switzerland, Canada and Belgium. In Quirk's opinion, the econocultural model of language spread best reflects the current situation of English (cf. also Quirk 1985). It concerns both general and restricted areas. The general area concerns mostly authorities whose main concern is the identification of standards in educational systems as well as the issue of English varieties. The restricted area brings under one heading special uses of English, e.g. in transnational companies, in service manuals, or in air navigation. The standards established here are to be useful on an international scale. Finally, the imperial model of language spread, like the econocultural one, does not correlate with population spread.

One of the fairly convincing arguments accounting for the global shift towards English has been put forward by de Swaan (2001) who argues that human communication depends on individual plurilingualism and that the mutual interactions between different language communities have formed 'the global language system.' De Swaan employs an economic approach to languages which are 'hypercollective' goods available to anyone ready to invest in learning them. Also, languages are comparable with standards as they can be conventional, or with networks which can provide connections. A language viewed as a valuable and sound investment will be the one used by the biggest number of people.[6]

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5   Cf. Laponce (2003: 59) who argues that the power of language does not depend on the language itself, but it is to be looked for 'outside' a language code, i.e. in its demographic, economic and political correlates – a division practically the same as that of Quirk's.

6   De Swaan (2001: 33-40) proposes to calculate the value of language to its speakers and learners. The so-called Q-value (communication value) of a language results from its prevalence (the number of speakers) and its centrality (the number of people who can use another language to communicate). For instance, in Europe German has a high prevalence, but its centrality is lower than that of English, which has the biggest number of second language speakers; for exemplary cases in the European Union see de Swaan (2001: 151-175). See also Ammon (1996) who

The effect observable here reveals a direct proportion between the number of speakers and the benefits for an individual. Or, the more speakers a major language has, the more people aspire to learn it (cf. Spolsky 1998: 77). Viewed in this way, the phenomenon of language spread is modelled on a snowball effect, where the popularity of a language reaches its peak and then simply continues under its own momentum.

1.2.1.2. Factors of language spread

No single factor creates a lingua franca. It is rather a combination of causes and the number of its non-native speakers that determines the fate of a spreading language. The contributions of many authors make up a long list of factors responsible for language spread, which is by no means complete due to the changeable nature of the phenomenon (cf. e.g. Ammon 1989: 257). Nevertheless, the *why*-question that is veiled behind the factors of language spread stands the best chances to be answered satisfactorily in this section.

In the study of language spread some researchers (e.g. Bailey – Görlach 1982) adopt a descriptive approach to outline the linguistic ecology of a given area, whereas others try to isolate factors for the further analysis and projection of language spread. Those[7] who seek to abstract factors think fit to start from Brosnahan (1963) who singled out military conquest,[8] duration of authority, linguistic diversity, and material incentives. To these above, Fishman *et al.* (1977: 77-80) added five more factors, such as urbanization, industrialization, educational development, religious composition and political affiliation, where the first three are closely intertwined. Lieberson (1982, after Flaitz 1988) observed quite rightly that the factors sparking off and, later on, those perpetuating the language spread are not the same. Such is the case of English: the factors that caused its spread initially occurred at the time of the expansion of the British Empire (military power), and then the United States (economic power) took

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writes about the economic strength of a language, and Fishman (1996b) who sees English as a language of great yet imposed value in the former Anglo-American colonial world. An author who is well recognizable for correlating language and economic variables is Grin (1996a, 1996b). He worked out a concept of 'the economics of language' which refers to "the paradigm of theoretical economics and uses the concepts and tools of economics in the study of relationships featuring linguistic variables" (Grin 1996a: 6).

7   See e.g. Chen (1997), Fishman *et al.* (1977), Spolsky (2004), Wardhaugh (1987).
8   In the opinion of many authors the premier reason for the glory or decline of languages is the arrangement of power; cf. e.g. Aitchison (2001: 212), Lotherington (2004: 696), Maurais (2003: 28).

over the reins in the form of its scientific and technological advancement (cf. also Crystal 2003). In addition, Lieberson (1982) points out the attitudes taken by 'third parties' in any competition between languages. The example from the last century concerns French being favoured by other countries as the language of international diplomacy, although, somewhat contrary to that, Fishman *et al.* (1977: 106) emphasize the role of individuals, not countries, in acquiring English for communication.

As a way of leading-in to the presentation of decisive factors resulting in language spread, I will begin with the all-embracing reason pinpointed by Kachru (1988) with regard to English:

> One reason for this dominance of English is its propensity for acquiring new identities, its power of assimilation, its adaptability to 'decolonization' as a language, its manifestation in a range of lects, and above all, its provision of a flexible medium for literary and other types of creativity across languages and cultures.
>
> (Kachru 1988: 222)

It is both the facts about English as well as the 'propensity' it is believed to have that make it so attractive to actual and potential speakers. English is associated with Anglo-American lifestyles, the latest developments in the field of science, computer technologies, business, the mass media and entertainment which, in turn, carry around an aura of fashionable prestige (cf. Ross 1997: 33). In this connection the growing use of English has given rise to such terms as "McDonaldization" relating to the United States, or "Westernization" that originated in Atlantic Europe (Gnutzmann – Intemann 2005: 11). Fishman (1994: 70) confirms that "switching into English, if only for a few words here and there, has become the metaphorical indicator of being young, carefree, technically competent, in touch with the current world" (see also Flaitz 1988). Especially younger individuals regard English as the language of mobility, and their level of education correlates highly with positive attitudes toward the use of a lingua franca (see Flaitz 1988: 29, Wardhaugh 2002: 361). Next, globalization is responsible for language spread, particularly if understood as "structures of international communication which have been carried out in English and which cannot be reorganized by simple political decisions" (Königs 1999: 249). English took the lead also thanks to politics. On a more formal level, in international institutions, it has been given the status of a working language (see Königs 1999: 248). Hence, political decisions created and still do create circumstances that secure the strong standing in international diplomacy of English.[9]

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9   For English making inroads into the diplomatic realm of French, see Ammon (1996: 261) and Flaitz (1988: 5). Also, for differences in developments between English and French as International Lingua Francas, see Flaitz (1988) and Wardhaugh

The political category also applies to the factor suggested by Wardhaugh (1987: 12), namely, neo-colonialism, which he interprets as "the persistence of old colonial ties and dependencies long after the dissolution of the empires that created them." Although the old colonial masters are gone from the territories which are now independent nations, the languages of former colonialists retained their power and prestige, invariably associated with mobility and opportunities.

It may be assumed that the above factors of language spread contribute to the development of a global language. Following Brutt-Griffler (2002), we can identify four major features of such a process. First, the language becomes coloured by the more 'global' economic and cultural functions. Second, the language becomes accessible to all levels of society, not just to elites. Third, the language coexists with other languages, thereby stabilising bilingualism. And, fourth, the language undergoes the processes of convergence and divergence on a worldwide scale. The potential benefit from various approaches to the study of language spread comes from the understanding of the patterns of language use and change in that use. More importantly, the spread of World Englishes appears just as natural as neutral.

1.2.1.3. Prestige, function and status

Mackey (1989) argues that there is a fundamental difference between prestige, function and status[10] which corresponds to the distinction between past, present and future respectively. The prestige of a language builds on its record or "what people think its record to have been." The function of a language is the actual usage readily observable in the language behaviour of any population. The status of a language is its potential, i.e. what people can do with it. Therefore, status can be regarded as the sum of prestige and function or, in other words, it

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(1987). In fact, the comparison of spread between French and English reveals quite clear differences. The French had an imperial mission, a part of which was to civilize the subjugated peoples not only by imposing their language on them, but also the French ideals and views. In contrast, the British pursued their imperial ambitions for more pragmatic reasons. Colonial peoples were not expected to feel 'British;' rather, what really counted was their work and loyalty. Wardhaugh (1987: 14) describes the French as very possessive of their language, ready to approve of only its most 'correct' form. Speakers of English are more tolerant of differences in their language spoken and used worldwide. Thus, English can be learnt without subscribing to another set of values. Wardhaugh (1987: 14) concludes that English seems more 'open' to the acquisition of new speakers than French.

10   Ammon (1996) made an interesting outline of the change in the status of English compared with other languages within the last fifty years.