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Phillipson, Robert

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A Response to Anna Kristina Hultgren's Position Paper

Robert Phillipson, Copenhagen Business School

Abstract

I am grateful to Anna Kristina Hultgren for launching a debate on these important issues, and giving me an opportunity to contribute. Hultgren's argument suffers, in my view, from a failure to define global English stringently or even to specify what specific characteristics of the use of the language she is most concerned about. Her essay raises many important issues, but each is in brief summary form. It strikes me as academic discourse that remains detached from the existential challenges that most work in language education and language policy engages in. What Hultgren refers to as applied linguistics (which is inexplicably capitalised, unlike other disciplines that the text refers to) is not rigorously specified. Nor is social justice exemplified or defined. Some of her argumentation consists, in my view, of dubious over-generalisations—which I will exemplify—embedded within pretty robust denunciations of applied linguists who are caricatured as out to 'save' and 'salvage' the world, no less!

Keywords: Applied linguistics; Global English; social justice; *lingua franca*; *lingua frankensteinia*; multidisciplinary; linguistic imperialism; language planning; linguistic justice; public policy; university language policy

1. Describing Languages

Hultgren distances herself from terms like *lingua tyrannosaura* (popularised by John Swales), linguicide (defined for the UN in the 1968 when drafting international human rights law principles, as part of the International Year of Human Rights), and *lingua frankensteinia* (my metaphorical way of challenging loose use of *lingua franca*, to vividly impersonate linguicidal use of a dominant language). These concepts are in fact of direct relevance when considering the evidence of the deliberate extermination of most of the languages in the Americas and Australia, through explicitly linguicidal policies that are integral to cultural genocide. In many contexts in the modern world, similar consequences are being achieved by more discreet means (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson and Dunbar 2019), with the mythology of the 'need' for global English playing an important role, for instance in British Council discourse (Phillipson 2016a) and in activities funded by the UK Department for International Development that aim at privatisating

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public education and an expansion of English-medium education in education systems (Global Justice Now and National Education Union 2019). Applied linguists who write about the role of English internationally can, through their research and teaching, either support such policies (see Phillipson 2016b) or counteract them (e.g. Bunce et al, eds., 2016).

2. What is Applied Linguistics for?

When looking at the formation of academic linguistics, Bourdieu notes Saussure's distinction between 'external linguistics' (the social and political functions of a language), and 'internal linguistics' (linguistic forms). Bourdieu concludes that by so doing, Saussure separates the study of linguistics from the 'social conditions of the production and utilisation of languages' (Bourdieu 1982, 8, my translation). Hultgren distances herself from concepts that belong in external linguistics (sociolinguistics and language policy), and considers that applied linguists are too concerned with internal linguistics.

The website of the British Association of Applied Linguistics (baal.org.uk) cites a former BAAL chair, Guy Cook, for what applied linguists do:

Applied linguistics addresses the most pressing and controversial areas of contemporary language use, including intercultural communication, political and commercial persuasion, the impact of new technologies, the growth of English, language in education, and foreign language teaching and learning.

Hultgren draws on a book by Deborah Cameron, but this, like several of David Crystal's, is probably mainly aimed at a British public that has little awareness of language issues. Verbal hygiene is primarily a question of the 'internal linguistics' of social or linguistic justice. Language policy and language planning (LPP), which much of Hultgren's paper is concerned with, is intrinsically much broader.

Global English needs identification and definition for analysis of it to be effective. Terminology in this field is a minefield, often obscuring power relations and hegemonic practices, nationally and internationally, as can be seen when Michael Halliday, a very distinguished linguist, attempted to sort out *world*, *global* and *international* English,

unsuccessfully in my view, since he labels what others call *world Englishes* as *international English* (Halliday 2006, 362-3):

Halliday's *international* is an unfortunate label, since he is in effect referring to *local* forms and uses of English, comprehensible within a country, for instance. His terms also elide the anchoring of *global* English in the English-dominant countries, where it is the primary *national* language, one that also opens international doors, and is a crucial ingredient of the globalisation of the second half of the twentieth century. (Phillipson 2012, 221)

In my article 'Lingua franca or lingua frankensteinia? English in European integration and globalization' (Phillipson 2008, reprinted in Phillipson 2009) I elaborate a set of variables that it is relevant to consider when assessing whether the expansion of English is positive or negative, whether its adoption and impact on other languages represent linguistic capital accumulation or linguistic capital dispossession. The parameters are grouped under three main headings, English as *project* (the expansion of English worldwide), as *process* (how English is marketed, and internalised as necessary), and English as *product* (the words, forms, discourses etc.). This article was produced when I was asked to give a keynote lecture for the Nordic Association of English Studies. It aimed at stimulating analysis of how and why the use of English is expanding in the Nordic countries, a concern that figures prominently in Hultgren's essay.

I do not regard global English as a reality, if this is understood as meaning that it is used in all parts of the globe or is necessarily relevant in all contexts. Global English is a project behind which lie really powerful forces that can be traced throughout recent centuries. The processes and products that promote this project are identifiable, as are the key agents, on which there is an extensive literature. Whatever English is in the modern world, it is not an irrelevance, a distraction—a red herring.

Hultgren's text is puzzling because she writes as though she is unaware that many of the issues that she proclaims a need to see addressed have in fact been pursued in depth in applied linguistics and related disciplines over the past half century. Her valid insistence on integrating language issues with wider economic, political, and social factors requires multidisciplinary. This is taken for granted by many researchers in this field. Gramsci insightfully noted nearly a century ago

that language controversies are a lightning rod for wider social issues. This understanding is also fundamental to the work of Bourdieu, Bernstein, May, and many other influential social science scholars who write about language issues. Hultgren acknowledges this in the final part of her paper, but this was rather unexpected earlier.

3. Multidisciplinarity

Applied linguistics has expanded in many directions. How applied linguists can collaborate with scholars in other disciplines can be seen in a volume that I edited for Tove Skutnabb-Kangas's 60th birthday, *Rights to language. Equity, power, and education* (Phillipson 2000) with contributions by scholars who had influenced Tove's thinking, and whose own work had been influenced by her work on language issues. The authors write from many perspectives: Indigenous cosmologies (Vuolab), cultural and biological diversity (Maffi), sociology (Joshua and Gella Fishman), Deaf studies (Branson and Miller), politics (Hassanpour, Rassool, Hussain), minority studies (Lindgren, Druvietė), language policy (Pattanayak, Dasgupta, Alexander), poetry (Sanchez, Leporanta-Morley), philosophy (Beutel), communication (Hamelink), law (de Varennes), discourse analysis (van Dijk), linguistics (Mühlhäusler), liberation applied linguistics (Menk), language rights (Annamalai), ecology (Fettes), creative writing (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Gaski), economics (Grin), non-native norms (Ammon), linguisticism (Oda), public policy (Municio-Larsen), minority education (Lainio, Peura), language and conflict (Kontra), plurilingualism (Martel), multilingualism (Clyne, Heugh), bilingualism (Huss), bilingual education (Lanstyak), educational language policy (Desai, Taylor, Brock-Utne, García, Cummins, Joan and Dawn Wink), sign language education (Jokinen), and social psychology (Toukoma).

A comparable multidisciplinary diversity can be seen in the texts of the four volumes on *Language Rights* that Tove and I recently compiled and co-edited (Routledge, 2017). Language rights are referred to in Hultgren's text but also not explored. The range of concerns in language rights can be seen in the names of the four volumes:

1. Language rights: principles, enactment, application.
2. Language policy in education: violations or rights for all?

3. Language endangerment and revitalisation; language rights charters and declarations.
4. Language rights: challenges in theory and implementation.

4. Problems and Solutions

Several of Hultgren's claims need challenging: "English has also been described as causing 'linguistic imperialism', 'linguicide' and 'epistemicide' (Phillipson 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1995; Bennett 2007)". This reifies the language (portraying English as an agent), and is factually incorrect in relation to my work. I have frequently written that any language can be used for good or evil purposes. What many of us have documented is the *misuse* of English, for instance when the expansion of English is at the expense of other languages. This linguisticism constitutes linguistic imperialism. This worldwide phenomenon can be seen in the many cases presented in the two Hydra books, Rapatahana and Bunce, eds., 2012; Bunce et al, eds., 2016. It is people's decisions and their implementation that cause linguistic imperialism, as a result of many push and pull factors, supply and demand characteristics. It invariably involves material resources (structure) as well as values and policies (ideology). Applied linguistics must necessarily be concerned with these two constituents, whereas theoretical linguistics à la Saussure and Chomsky does not.

When my *Linguistic imperialism* was published in 1992, some British applied linguistics grandees denounced it, and perhaps hoped that the book would soon disappear. The opposite has happened, triggering what some have seen as a paradigm shift in English language education. Even if I analyse how five fallacies in language education contribute to inequitable and inappropriate educational language policies, the British English Language Teaching (ELT) industry still operates essentially in a monolingual, monocultural paradigm. This has a strong presence in universities in the UK, USA, and Australia, which generally choose to ignore critical scholarship. It is a totally different professional world from foreign language teaching and learning in Scandinavia, which is the context of most of Hultgren's examples.

The claim that "Language Policy and Planning (LPP) to name but a few, have been founded wholly or partly on some sort of rescue mission" is only partially correct. As the name of the journal *Language Problems*

and Language Planning indicates, among the key problems and challenges were the management of linguistic diversity in education and nation-building, and in the case of the EU, ensuring that many languages (currently 23 for 27 member states) function effectively in supranational law and institutions. LPP was founded by Uriel Weinreich, Einar Haugen, Joshua Fishman, Björn Jernudd, Robert Cooper and other pioneers in the study of bilingualism, multilingualism, linguistic diversity, and language policy in many contexts. LPP scholars in less industrialised parts of the world, India, Pakistan, Latin America, West and East Africa, and later South Africa are equally eminent: Debi Pattanayak, Lachman Khubchandani, Probal Dasgupta, Tariq Rahman, Rainer Enrique Hamel, Ayu Bamgbose, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Neville Alexander et al. LPP has for half a century invariably been deeply involved in a wide range of existential sociolinguistic challenges and socio-political issues.

Scandinavian higher education language policy scholars have, with few exceptions, entered this field relatively recently. The Nordic countries have been able to build on scholarship in much of the rest of the world. Hultgren's perspective, while ranging over diverse academic territory, is Western-centric, but the text is written as though her arguments have universal validity and relevance.

Scholars who work for greater linguistic justice are actively involved in masses of activities worldwide that represent not so much 'saving the world' as involvement in and commitment to addressing serious local socio-political challenges, with considerable success in some cases. Many formerly minoritised languages are experiencing cultural and linguistic revitalisation, on which see the impressive *Routledge Handbook of Revitalisation* (Hinton, Huss and Roche 2018) and *A world of Indigenous languages. Politics, pedagogies and prospects for language reclamation* (McCarty, Nicholas and Wigglesworth 2019). For a study of whether the education of the Inuit in Canada is criminally inadequate, see Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson and Dunbar 2019. Its presentation at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York in April 2019 is reported on briefly in <https://nunavutnews.com/nunavut-news/nti-unveils-report-at-un-nunavut-education-a-crime-against-inuit/>.

While one might argue that the cases referred to in these references can be seen as rescue missions, it is important to stress that each case

represents a contribution to the creation of a more equitable society, and is therefore also in the interest of the dominant group. Mother-tongue based multilingual education leads to minorities also learning a dominant language better. In a world of increasing inequalities, nationalist extremism, disaffection with long-established political parties in many countries, a major climate crisis, and an excessive focus on English in many education systems, it is important that applied linguists relate their expertise to these wider socio-political tensions. ‘Global’ English is deeply embedded in them in many contexts. The brilliant climate activist Greta Thunberg uses English in her activity internationally, and is deeply grounded in her mother tongue, Swedish. This is balanced bilingualism.

It is essential to situate language policy in public policy when universities are increasingly being run as businesses rather than functioning as a public good, and enjoying institutional autonomy and academic freedom. These are seriously constrained, not least in the UK (Collini 2017) and Denmark. The challenge for individual academics, and applied linguists in particular, is to situate language research and key dimensions of language policy firmly within public policy (Phillipson 2019, Grin et al 2019.)

Exploring this reality would not lead to the claim that ‘language is always a contingent and secondary factor and not a root cause of inequality’. This is postmodernist misrepresentation of the complexity of social injustice in which language plays a role. Language is one variable that can be influenced in well-informed language policy. Hultgren also writes: ‘In the context of higher education, a review of the literature was unable to conclude that medium of instruction has a bearing on learning outcome (Macaro et al. 2018). This is a very dubious conclusion. Macaro’s team investigate English-medium higher education worldwide, which is only one of the constituents of higher education. Far from being ‘authoritative’, as is claimed, the study is a technocratic run-through of countless variables and contexts. It is unconvincing when one is familiar with the detail of the issue in local contexts. The study is a follow-on from British Council efforts to promote British interests worldwide.

Since scholarship is united in concluding that bilingualism correlates with intellectual and intercultural advantages, the medium of instruction is a decisive variable when selecting which languages can best promote these individual and societal benefits, in basic and in higher education. Universities that operate monolingually, as in ‘English-speaking

countries' (itself a misnomer that occludes the multilingual variety within the UK, USA etc.) does not promote these advantages. Nor does monolingual higher education when dispensed in the export business of Australian, American and British universities in their satellite campuses in China, Malaysia, or the Middle East.

School education that is subtractive rather than additive fails children. This is currently a massive problem worldwide, one that the drive for English-medium education—a monolingual perspective—is aggravating in school and higher education in India (Mohanty 2018) and in the Middle East (e.g. Qatar, see Mustafawi and Shaaban 2019) and in Africa (Kamwangamalu 2019). Having spent a lifetime analysing such issues, in Scandinavia and worldwide, and having recently taught graduate courses on language policy in China and India, and lectured in Qatar, where I also met the Minister of Education, any suggestion that language is an unimportant, 'contingent' variable strikes me as misleading and uninformed.

I am more sympathetic to Hultgren's description of what has been termed domain loss in Denmark, though the limitations and fuzziness of this concept have been pointed out by many scholars. I agree that claims about the impoverishment of Danish have been exaggerated, even by some representatives of the Danish Language Board. But it is an oversimplification to conclude that what is at stake is 'to reverse the shift to English', when what is important in higher education and in the wider society is to ensure a healthy balance between a greater use of English, and Danish as a unifying national language. This is why it is government policy in the five Nordic countries that universities have a duty to ensure quality and use of both a national language and an international one, which currently means English. We need both-and policies, not either-or thinking.

Clarification of domains, and domain loss can benefit from assessing agency, and by seeing change as entailing negative linguistic capital dispossession (domain 'loss') or as constructive linguistic capital accumulation (domain sharing or domain expansion), an issue that needs continuous monitoring.

There have long been controversial issues within applied linguistics, as Barbara Seidlhofer's collection (2003) demonstrates. On the flawed conceptual universe of currently fashionable concepts—among them superdiversity, languaging, commodification, and English as a Lingua

Franca, see Pavlenko 2018, and Grin 2018. On ‘global’ English it is relevant to refer to my reviews of books by Crystal, de Swaan, Brutt-Griffler, van Parijs, and Blommaert, scholars who tend to endorse an uncritical expansion of English—for details see my website www.cbs.dk/en/staff/rpmc.

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