

ON TRYING TO BE CRYSTAL-CLEAR: a Response to Phillipson

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Applied Linguistics published a review article by Robert Phillipson on David Crystal's book *English as a Global Language* in issue 20/2. Here follows a rejoinder by David Crystal.

When the review was published it had already appeared in a similar but shorter version in the *European English Messenger (EEM)*, the publication of ESSE, the European Society for the Study of English. Since then there has been a reply by Crystal and a further response by Phillipson in the *EEM*.

It is not the general policy of *Applied Linguistics* to republish material that has already appeared in any form elsewhere, but in the circumstances we feel that it is appropriate to publish a reply by Crystal.

Any further contribution related to the matters raised in Phillipson's review and Crystal's reply should be submitted for publication in the article section of this journal.

It is an axiom of contemporary linguistics that language events should always be seen in context. This applies to books as well as to the reviews they receive. And in accepting the editors' kind invitation to respond to the review by Phillipson (1999a) of *English as a Global Language (EGL)*, I must begin by doing some contextualizing—some discourse analysis, even—for it is not otherwise possible to make sense of it. Only by careful reanalysis of the quotations used, and of the context in which they appear, can one identify the hidden agenda which motivates a review of this kind. I hope the exercise will be useful to readers, who will undoubtedly encounter the ideology involved from time to time, and who may be wondering how best to deal with it.

What mindset has Phillipson brought to the task? Here are two illuminating extracts from towards the end of the review. 'The assumption that experts from countries such as the UK or the US, deeply monolingual and with a very patchy record of foreign language learning, can contribute to policy on education and language matters in multilingual societies is completely counter-intuitive' (p. 271). And next: 'linguistic hierarchies reminiscent of the colonial period, and master-minded by the type of linguistics and applied linguistics department that Crystal used to work for, still underpin much World Bank and IMF policy' (p. 271). You might like to read these quotations again—yes, you from any linguistics or applied linguistics department anywhere—he is talking about you, not just me. Simply by being professionally involved in linguistics you are, it seems, imperialist and triumphalist, and if you are from a department in Britain or the USA, your inherent monolingualism makes you incapable of saying or doing anything useful in relation to multilingualism. Ignore the fact that hundreds of linguists from monolingual countries have spent years working with minority and multilingual situations, are fluent in more than one language, and are worried sick at the moment by the endangered language situation in the world today. Ignore the vast amount of work that has gone on within sociolinguistics. None of that can help. Linguists are misguided, incapable, conspiratorial people, with a colonialist political agenda.

Phillipson complains about me: 'his loyalty is to linguistics' (p. 266) (ignore his reference to my page 113, where there is no mention of this issue). He's absolutely right—but the kind of linguistics he is thinking of isn't anything like the world I know. Apparently if you're a linguist, so says this review, your work is valueless when you come to study globalization, education, or the media. Eat your hearts out, educational linguists, anthropological linguists, sociolinguists, clinical linguists, critical linguists, and others. You're all wasting your time. Personally, I think it is an insult to 30 years of sociolinguistic research to suggest that linguists have nothing to say about 'multilingualism, official, national and minority languages' (p. 266). In fact, where would such topics be today without sociolinguistics? 'Lack of any grounding in the social sciences is a major weakness of the work' (*EGL*, that is) (p. 266). But to me, linguistics is a social science.

Let me begin by doing some basic discourse analysis to show how an ideologically fuelled selection of information works in a review of this kind. The account of *EGL*'s content is a good example. Phillipson's summary is in terms of chapters. Why? Because that suits his argument. If you look towards the beginning of his review (p. 266), you will find the briefest of remarks about each chapter, with the whole summary taking up 20 lines in all; and of this 20, he devotes 10 to an account of ch 5. He states that 'nearly half of this chapter' is on US English, 'implying that Crystal's understanding is that the internal affairs of the present-day US are central to the future of "global" English'. It sounds impressive—half a chapter devoted to this topic. That sounds like real evidence of a right-wing plot lurking somewhere around.

But when we summarize the book in terms of pages, a very different picture emerges. Excluding the preface and further reading, *EGL* takes up 140 pages. Ch. 1 (pp. 1–24) asks why there is a global language; Ch. 2 (pp. 24–63) outlines the historical context; Chs 3 and 4 (pp. 64–112) present the cultural context; and Ch. 5 (pp 113–40) discusses the future. Note that only 27 pages—just over an eighth of the book—are devoted to Ch. 5. And only just over 11 of these are devoted to the official English issue in the USA. It is plain that the US English issue is not a major topic for me. Nor, indeed, is the book chiefly about the future of English—an emphasis, which distinguishes Graddol (1998) from mine. The bulk of my book is elsewhere.

I put those pages about US English in, incidentally, because I had had an opportunity to learn a great deal about the official English movement while I was writing the book, and I had not found a summary of the arguments for and against it anywhere in my reading. Most people outside the USA are not aware of what has been going on there. References to the US situation are often wrong, and usually oversimplified. Phillipson is no exception. He says, ‘the intellectual community in the United States . . . is massively against English Only’ and ‘one would not suspect this’ (p. 271) from reading *EGL*. There are two points here. First, my exposition was chiefly about US English, not ‘English Only’: there are important differences between the various US protectionist movements—but it is important not to oversimplify what is a very complex situation. Second, I don’t know what Phillipson means by ‘the intellectual community in the United States’, but I would have thought that my extensive quotation in *EGL* from the Linguistic Society of America’s official statement on the matter, and some associated proposals, would do to represent that perspective. But I was forgetting. They’re linguists, of course. They don’t count.

The content summary of the book is just one example of the way Phillipson’s political views have led him to misrepresent *EGL*. But the whole review is like this. Phillipson begins with politics, quoting my observation that the book has been written ‘without any political agenda’ (p. 266). Out of context, it does sound silly, and this then allows him to impute political naivety: ‘even the wish to be apolitical involves political choices’ (p. 266). But the context of my remark, in the preface, was the competing agendas of the two positions outlined there. My observation refers to the fact that I was not adopting either of those agendas. It is well-known that there are two senses of the word ‘political’ in English, one referring to a general concern for the state and its citizens, and the other for the partisan world of party politics (compare *OED political*, senses 1 vs. 4). Phillipson has blurred those meanings: I say I am not taking sides (sense 4); Phillipson tries to get you to believe that I am saying my book is outside politics (sense 1).

Phillipson then moves on to history. Here’s how he tries to justify his claim that my historical account is unimpressive. First, he notices that I head a section in my ‘historical context’ chapter (Ch. 2) ‘America’. ‘Oops’, he says, Crystal ‘does not mean the two continents, but the USA—his synecdoche

reflects a hegemonic preference' (p. 266). Well oops to you too, Phillipson. I chose that title for one reason only: the fact that the section begins with pre-US events, in 1584, and continues with pre-independence issues for two of its four pages. To have used the heading 'USA'—now that would have been a real cause for criticism. But has Phillipson told you in his review that my American section is so wide-ranging? Look very hard before you answer.

Second, he quotes my observation (in relation to the specifically US situation) that 'Rulings are needed to regulate conflict. If there is no conflict there is no need for rulings' (p. 267). He then adds that this must 'suggest that language issues have been free of conflict in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, or the USA'. (In an earlier version of his review (Phillipson 1998), he has 'USA' turn up as 'North America'. Oops again?) How he reads in that implication is beyond me, as on the very next page I refer to the conflicts which have given rise to official language issues in Ireland, Wales, Quebec, and New Zealand. But what you need to notice is that the contested proposition is *his* implication, not mine. This proposition then becomes the theme of the rest of the relevant paragraph in his review. So when he concludes, 'there is a huge literature on these issues' (p. 267), the position which warrants this imputation of ignorance is not one which is actually represented in my book.

He also picks on my South Africa section, in Ch. 2. This doesn't satisfy him either, because I don't use the word *apartheid* (p. 267). On the other hand, such phrases as 'political divisions', 'authority and repression', and the like are very much in evidence in that part of *EGL*. Plainly apartheid is being referred to, in spirit if not in name. The criticism turns out to be trivial. Similarly, he complains that I do not give the names of any African languages. True enough—but what is the force of that observation? Is he saying that when I say 'The 1993 Constitution names eleven languages' I should have listed them all by name? A criticism of 'poor history' needs more than this.

Several parts of the review compete for the prize of 'selective quotation of the year'. He complains that I don't describe past language policies in South Africa and have 'invisibilized' the blacks (p. 267)—a typical piece of polemic, which quickly becomes nonsensical as you read the relevant pages. For there you will find such phrases as 'spoken by the black population', '[used] by increasing numbers of the (70 per cent majority) black population', 'a series of government surveys among black parents', and so on. The word 'black' turns up repeatedly. Why would anyone not see this? Only if they don't want to see it.

Or again, 'There is no reference to the many African scholars who have pleaded for the upgrading of African languages and denounced "aid" that strengthens European languages' (p. 268). Yet in the next paragraph he acknowledges that I have referred to Ngugi, and if he had wanted to he could have mentioned my references to Chinua Achebe and others. Chapter 5 in fact begins by referring to the rejection of English. Why would a reviewer not want to draw the reader's attention to this?

And when I do say something about South Africa that Phillipson wants to

see—referring to the country's new multilingual policy, and the position of English in the new political situation—this is dismissed as a 'passing reference' (p. 267). So let's try another piece of elementary discourse analysis here. The section on South Africa is 80 lines long. What would you expect a 'passing reference' to be—3 or 4 lines max? I begin my comments on these matters with the remark 'There is thus a linguistic side to the political divisions which have marked South African society in recent decades'—and developing the point from there to the end of the section takes 35 lines. Why call something 'passing', when it plainly isn't, or say there is no description of past language policies when there plainly is?

Another thing about political mindsets is that they tend to be obsessed with certain words and phrases, and if they are not present, the content they represent is deemed to be absent. Their owners look for the letter, and not for the spirit. So, Phillipson objects to the way my narrative 'avoids any upsetting talk of bloodshed . . . capitulation . . . domination . . .' (p. 268). Evidently my use of such words as 'slavery', 'stealing our talents and geniuses' and 'humiliating experiences' (pp. 114–15) doesn't count as being part of the language of domination. Or again, Phillipson reduces my deeply felt concerns about dying languages to a word, picking 'anxieties' out of context, and allowing that to represent my position (p. 274). He might have selected other words I use—'urgency' or 'tragedy' (p. 18), for instance—but that of course wouldn't have suited his purpose.

Where Phillipson recognizes that I do refer to other views, such as Gandhi's and Ngugi's, he says I have 'buried' their remarks 'in comments on the expense of bilingualism' (p. 270). If you look at the relevant quotations in *EGL*, you will find that they are spread over two pages, in a section prominently headed 'The rejection of English' (p. 114), and that the reference to the cost of bilingualism occurs in a single sentence over a page later. This does not sound like 'buried'. Moreover, the sentence on bilingualism is immediately preceded by one in which I applaud 'the promotion of bilingual or multilingual policies'. Phillipson doesn't draw your attention to that.

'Buried' is just one of several loaded terms scattered throughout this review. Here are a couple more examples. He says that 'some of the formulations . . . are lifted verbatim' from my *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (p. 268). Note the shiftiness implicit in the term 'lifted'. However, the reliance on *CEEL* is something I've already drawn the reader's attention to in my Preface. Or again, 'Crystal . . . writes blithely' (p. 269) that I overstate the role of America in my account of the growth of global English. Note the weasel word, suggestive of an uncritical carelessness. I stand by my phrasing—I said 'almost single-handedly'—and the book certainly doesn't ignore the British Council and ELT, for example (see pp. 103–4). But I remain convinced that, without America, English would not be a global language now; and that only America could have put English in this position. It may be a debatable view, but it certainly isn't a blithe one.

Here are some other Phillipson imaginings. '[Crystal] sees no causal

relationship between the globalization of English and the demise of other languages' (p. 265). Phillipson ignores my section on language death, in which I deplore such demise. I call it 'an intellectual and social tragedy' (p. 17). That's pretty strong, wouldn't you say? I say quite clearly that we need a general perspective on language dominance and loss. Big languages have been killing off little languages throughout history. Today, thanks to decades of work in sociolinguistics, we stand a chance of becoming aware of what the issues are and doing something about it. But, from a modern perspective, the 'bad guys' have been the languages of all the major expansionist nations—and I include Russian, Chinese, and many languages of Africa alongside such cases as English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. I agree that as English becomes more global, there are increasing risks for some other languages, but the view that there is a 'causal relationship between the globalization of English and the demise of other languages' is the kind of gross oversimplification that I want nothing to do with. English as the cause of the death of languages in Australia? Certainly. In Brazil? I don't think so.

Or again, Phillipson notices that I refer to 'economic imperialism', but because I put it in quotes he sees me as finding it 'unpalatable' and wanting to 'distance' myself from it (p. 268). What I find unpalatable, in fact, is Phillipson's naive historicism, in which the past is interpreted through the mores of the present. The reason why I use quotes should, once again, be obvious from the context, where I am describing a historical sequence of events, and the quotes symbolize the novelty of the concept at the time.

Or again, 'Crystal notes that as soon as minorities achieve rights, the majority needs to have their rights affirmed' (p. 272)—as if I was recommending this to be a desirable procedure. In fact, I am simply stating what has so often happened: 'In such cases, the dominant power would sometimes take measures to preserve it . . . by giving it special recognition' (p. 76). Of course 'the guiding principle of human rights law is that it is the oppressed that need protection' (p. 272). *EGL* never suggests otherwise. Indeed I make several suggestions in that direction. 'It is good to see' the endangered languages protection movements, I say at one point (p. 18), and then: 'movements for language rights . . . have played an important part . . .'. A little later: 'Languages of identity need to be maintained' (p. 22). Phillipson doesn't quote these sentiments, of course. They would militate against the stereotype he is attempting to create.

'Fundamentally,' Phillipson says, 'Crystal's story of globalizing English is eurocentric and triumphalist, despite his protestations to the contrary' (p. 268). It is difficult to know what to say, when someone hides behind pompous language in order to call you a liar. Younger, better-built, and more explosive linguists would probably go and punch him on the nose. Older, flabbier, and mild-mannered ones have to be content with simply restating their position. I am not triumphalist about English. Never have been. Never will be. Anyone who has read my work on language would know that. This is the point about context again: authors need to be taken as wholes. Phillipson

purports to admire my earlier books, but anyone who has actually done me the honour of reading my views over the years knows how much I value languages, and celebrate them in all their forms. I have spoken and written on behalf of minority languages for years. I have had an active interest in the position of my other language, Welsh. I could list my successes (and failures) in promoting Welsh in my corner of Wales. I was even once—I offer this point to Phillipson, no charge—called anti-English. So when I said, clearly and quietly, in my Preface, that I have tried to write a book which is not triumphalist, I meant it. When I talk about ‘the unpalatable face of linguistic triumphalism’ (p. 13), I meant it. I know that there are those around who cannot see a sentence such as ‘English is a world language’ without condemning it as triumphalist, so I took the trouble to spell out my position clearly. At the time I thought I was overdoing it. Now I realize that maybe I didn’t stress the point enough.

It is difficult to avoid the impression that Phillipson wishes I had written some other kind of book, in which his own views should have figured more largely. At one point, he thinks *EGL* should be a book on minority languages, in which the European Union situation would be fully explicated (pp. 272–3). At another, he wants it to be about the American indigenous peoples and their languages (p. 266). At another, he seems to want it to be about language dominance in general: *EGL*, he says, ‘ignores the fact that global (and local) inequalities are increasing, and that the “innovations” of the global system are having catastrophic ecological and cultural effects’ (p. 265). I found that point especially ironic, because just after I had finished writing *EGL* I began work on various projects to do with endangered languages (see Crystal, 2000). Perhaps my awareness of these impending projects kept me from including more on the endangered languages issue in *EGL*. If it did, the imbalance has now been made good.

I can understand Phillipson wanting the position he espouses in his own book to be given greater prominence in mine. He’ll be pleased to see that I added a reference to it, and a few others, when the Press gave me the opportunity to make some minor changes for the paperback edition (Phillipson 1998). But that’s as far as I would want to go. When I read *Linguistic Imperialism*, I was unimpressed by the curious hotchpotch of political innuendo which it manifested. I was unconvinced by the ‘great plot’ scenario painted there. Whatever truth there might be in the view that there is a correlation between linguistic and political hierarchy, I felt that the case was blown by its overstatement. There was nothing to be gained by attempting to restate or counter that kind of polemic, I thought. There are real issues of pain and tragedy caused by language policies around the world, but they are not helped by the one-sided, black-and-white picture which Phillipson presents. I think I can see—I certainly try to see—both sides of the coin. Phillipson does not even try. And along with all polemicists he condemns any attempt at a balanced statement, using the classic language of their trade to do so. All polemicists say of their opponents that they have been ‘selective’, that they

use 'biased and ideologically loaded claims', that they 'trivialize' the issues. They fail to see the ideological mote in their own eye. They fail to detect subtlety. Phillipson, for example, has totally missed the conventional irony implicit in my use of the phrase '[English being] in the right place at the right time' (p. 273). When someone says this, they are typically reflecting on the unexpected and often undeserved good fortune of the recipient. If I say, when John turns up at the bar just as I'm offering to buy a round of drinks, 'John's always in the right place at the right time', I am not praising him, nor being triumphalist about him. The usage is ironic. Rather than trivializing the issue, the phrase adds a depth to it, which Phillipson has completely missed.

Phillipson concludes: 'My analysis of Crystal's book has tried to concentrate on its scholarly shortcomings rather than any assumed differences between his ideology and mine' (p. 274). Well, he has tried and failed. The review is a mass of ideology, innuendo, and misrepresentation. My favourite is 'Crystal's apparent assumption that English is exclusively for the good' (p. 269), though a close second is the 'daunting challenge' I am supposed to have set myself, in writing this book, namely 'how a British view can present itself as universally relevant and appropriate' (p. 265). The review, in short, is little more than a pastiche, in which a selection of pages (about a fifth, I estimate) have been used to represent the book as a whole. And then, after all the selective quotation, Phillipson says it is me who is excluding types of information 'that do not fit into the world-view underpinning his narrative!' (p. 271). It is me who is supposed to have 'unjustifiably over-simplified the complexity and reality of global English!' (p. 271). This kind of thing does not help me, nor the audience interested in world English issues.

Did I get anything useful from this review at all? By hunting behind the verbal smokescreen ('inconsistency and errors') I did actually get something out of his remarks on Africa. I described Cameroon as multilingual, but not Nigeria (I certainly should have done that—in my other writing Nigeria is my main example of West African multilingualism). Also, when I said 'Ghana was the first Commonwealth country to achieve independence, in 1960', I meant 'in Africa', and it was silly not to have made that clear. Also, I didn't include separate sections on Namibia, Botswana, and Lesotho, and it would have been good to do so. This is the sort of helpful comment one likes to see in a review, as it can genuinely improve the quality of a work. If only there were more points like that in Phillipson's review. But most of the important linguistic issues which I do raise in *EGL* he passes over in silence. Is the possible emergence of a World Standard Spoken English a plausible scenario? Is a global language such a unique event? Is there really a research advantage to those who have English as a first language (let us hear the views of those whose English is fluent)? Are there other factors which have fostered the growth of global English in addition to the ones I list? Have I overestimated any of the ones I do list? Phillipson pays no attention to Chapters 3 and 4, which are (in my view) the core of the book, taking up a third of its pages. I hope the debate in *AL*, if it grows, will concentrate on such substantive issues.

In his penultimate paragraph, Phillipson affirms the validity of a two-paradigm view of the world, as labelled (by Tsuda): a 'diffusion of English paradigm' and an 'ecology of language paradigm'. Phillipson puts me 'squarely' within the former. Unpalatable as it is to be made to think in this two-term way, I would place myself just as 'squarely' within the latter, citing various publications as evidence (including Crystal 2000). But I do not share Phillipson's black-and-white view of life. I see the issues as more dynamic, interactive, and multi-faceted. Phillipson's review demonstrates a truth recently reiterated by Alberto Manguel: 'a reviewer is a reader once removed, guiding the reader, not through the book, but through the reviewer's reading of that book' (Manguel 1999: 217). Phillipson has seen in my book only what his ideology lets him see, and when he has not found what he expected to be there, he has read in meanings to suit. Other reviewers, I am happy to say, have seen things differently. To take an example, chosen because it addresses Phillipson's basic accusation that *EGL* is 'triumphalist', one reviewer—reading the same book—observes that 'the tone is not triumphalist' (Maley 1999). Another concludes that 'Crystal deplors the triumphalism in English articles about the spread of English' (Rogaly 1997). A third, having suggested the scenario that English is so far ahead of other languages that English speakers can relax, says: 'Actually, Crystal does not want us to relax, and urges against triumphalism. He warns of the resentment, envy, anger of the non-English mother-tongue speakers who feel disadvantaged. Or who, worse still, feel their mother tongue or identity threatened' (Hanson 1997). I agree with that, and rest my case.

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