



Mark Pegrum was, until July 2005, the Programme Co-ordinator of the online Master's in Teaching Modern Languages to Adults at the University of Dundee, Scotland. He has recently moved to a new post as a Lecturer in TESOL in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia.

The colonizer within?

Mark Pegrum looks at potential issues of hegemony in the ELT industry.

In his 1998 study of linguistic colonialism in ELT, Alastair Pennycook states: 'if I can play any role in helping reduce the pernicious effects of colonialism, then, as a European, I must first seek out and question the colonizer within myself' (1998: 28). Examining this text recently with participants in an online Master's course, I was struck by the strength of initial reactions from native speaker (NS) teachers of English. One, based in Germany, professed herself to be 'shaken up' by the sentence quoted; another, located in the UAE, said he would 'hate to think' that 'there is "the colonizer" within us'.

In the course of an intense online debate, both NS and non-NS participants came to agree that ELT might be guilty of some collusion in linguistic and cultural imperialism. At the same time, however, many NS teachers retained a sense of indignation at being tarred with this brush—understandably so.

It is hard to deny that the EL industry can be seen as supporting a neo-colonialist agenda, both ideologically and structurally, given its historical origins and its ongoing affiliation with the global interests of the UK and US, its persistent reliance on the NS paradigm derived from 'inner circle' countries, and its continued exporting of NS teachers and Western methodologies to the rest of the world. Nevertheless, it does not follow that all NS teachers are simply modern-day colonialists. Of course, Pennycook does not claim that they are, but this point is sometimes overlooked in the now plentiful literature on linguistic imperialism.

As my students pointed out, many of them entered the profession not in order to spread their own language and culture but for the opportunity to visit, get to know and perhaps eventually integrate into other cultures. Indeed, while they owe their career opportunities to the hegemony of English and ELT, teachers' day-to-day interactions with local populations abroad are often anti-hegemonic.

If the EL industry can be accused of supporting the neo-liberal push for a homogenised world market, teachers frequently skirt commodification, enriching course books' bland diet of shopping and tourism by creating space for students to voice local issues. Moreover, in helping students exploit the language to express their own perspectives and truths, teachers may foster the formulation of counter-discourses in which learners can find a way of 'writing back' (Pennycook 2001: 85) against the colonial past and neo-colonial present of the English-speaking inner circle. I know, for example, of one teacher in the Middle East who bravely contravened institutional regulations to discuss the recent invasion of Iraq with students desperate to air their views. In diverse places, in diverse ways, teachers are

offering their students access to the counter-cultural possibilities of English.

It has been recognised for some time that binary models of linguistic domination/repression are too simplistic (Canagarajah 1999). Lately, there has been much discussion of linguistic hybridism, a notion which underpins strategies such as code-switching and is crucial to the development of localised World Englishes as well as calls for an International English. Both NS and non-NS educators are nodes in the network from which such hybridism emerges. Even if they are discouraged from doing so in the classroom, many NS teachers code-switch in everyday life; many have

It is hard to deny that the EL industry can be seen as supporting a neo-colonialist agenda, both ideologically and structurally.

contributions to make to developing Englishes; and many possess the multilingual competence and the willingness to step out of their native culture which are essential for International English projects. In short, they seek, create and maintain points of contact between English and other languages, cultures and ways of being.

As participants on the Master's course conceded, it is important to be aware of the dangers of linguistic imperialism and to remember that even hybridism may occur within a particular ideological and structurally unequal context. Beyond this, it's necessary to consider, as one teacher put it, 'how these newly gained insights might inform our teaching' and to realise that 'we teachers can achieve a great deal on the micropolitical level'. In fact, whether consciously or not, a large number of NS teachers have long been playing their part to empower learners 'to use rather than imitate' English, in the words of another participant. With the additional awareness brought about by an acknowledgement of 'the colonizer within', accomplished teachers can continue to do so—with an added degree of sensitivity.

mark.pegrum@uwa.edu.au

References

- Canagarajah, A.S. 1999. *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pennycook, A. 1998. *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*. London: Routledge.
- Pennycook, A. 2001. 'English in the World/The World in English' in A. Burns and C. Coffin (eds.). *Analysing English in a Global Context: A Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 78–89.