

## Unit A3

# Lingua franca or *Tyrannosaurus rex*?

A third issue which shapes and confronts EAP is the consequences of the dominance that English has assumed in higher education and research throughout the world. Depending on one's perspective, English in these circumstances can be viewed as neutral lingua franca, efficiently facilitating the free exchange of knowledge, or as a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, 'a powerful carnivore gobbling up the other denizens of the academic linguistic grazing grounds' (Swales, 1997: 374).

### THE GROWTH OF ACADEMIC ENGLISH

While figures are hard to come by, perhaps one in five of the world's population now speaks English with reasonable competence (Crystal, 2003) and English is now the world's predominant language of research and scholarship. This growth has, inevitably, been at the expense of other languages (Balduf and Jernudd, 1983) so that now more than 90 per cent of the journal literature in some scientific domains is printed in English and the most prestigious and cited journals are in English. Countless students and academics around the world must now gain fluency in the conventions of English-language academic discourses to understand their disciplines, to establish their careers, or to successfully navigate their learning.

These developments are largely the result of historical circumstances, particularly the legacy of US and British colonialism, the expansion of a single market across the world, and the promotion of English by US and UK governments and private companies. Phillipson (1992), for instance, has charted the role of political and economic interests in making English-language teaching a multi-billion-dollar industry. The increase in the number of world organizations, transnational corporations and the internet has accelerated this process in recent years (Gray, 2002) and its growth in higher education has been particularly dramatic, changing the conditions under which language learning takes place. Commenting on the political and economic roots of EAP, Benesch (2001: 34) argues that:

EAP's discourse of neutrality has presented the history of this field as a consensual and inevitable chronology of pedagogical events rather than a well-crafted and organized effort on the part of governments, businesses, and foundations working together to promote English language teaching,

conferences, publications, and faculty exchanges, ensuring that markets and labor would be available to promote their economic interests.

These developments have been accompanied by an enormous expansion of second-language speakers studying academic subjects in English around the world. By the early 1990s, for example, foreign nationals outnumbered American students studying science and engineering in US graduate schools (Jenkins *et al.*, 1993), and by 2004 over one million students were studying in English outside their home countries (Ward, 2004). At the same time, the expansion of higher education in postcolonial territories such as Hong Kong, South Africa, India and Singapore has meant that more teachers are using English as a medium of instruction. More recently, countries in the former Soviet bloc, Latin America and Asia have increased their use of English in education while countries such as Germany, France and Malaysia have begun to compete for overseas students by providing courses in English in a range of disciplinary fields.

This expansion of EAP has also been fuelled by the economic imperatives of modern education provision and current 'user pays' ideologies. Fee-paying foreign students are increasingly important to universities in the anglophone world to compensate for shortfalls in government funding. There were, for instance, more than 270,000 overseas students in the UK in 2004, almost half of whom were postgraduates, contributing £23 billion to the British economy (Ward, 2004). This dependence on generating income from students has led to plans by the leading UK institutions to restrict admissions of home students to accommodate more international students (Henry, 2004), and so perhaps inevitably increasing the demand for EAP provision.

### Task A3.1



- Reflect on this issue for a moment. Is the growth of English as the international language of academic communication a force for expanding participation in global knowledge networks or a means of restricting such access and tying it to vested corporate and academic interests? What arguments might persuade you of the opposite view to your own?

## SOME CONSEQUENCES OF THE DOMINANCE OF ENGLISH

The causes and outcomes of the global spread of English in academic life are complex, but it is worth highlighting some of the effects which have dominated the debate, particularly the erosion of other academic languages and the difficulties of many non-native English speaking scholars to engage in an English-dominated academic world.

The first concern is the loss of linguistic diversity. Many European and Japanese journals, for instance, have switched to English, with Swedish, Dutch and

German-medium journals being particularly hard hit. English has superseded Russian as the academic language of the old Eastern bloc since the Cold War, Swedish has virtually disappeared in academic publications (Swales, 1997) and there is evidence that many doctoral students internationally are completing their Ph.D. theses in English where they have a choice (Wilson, 2002). With libraries increasingly encouraged to subscribe to online versions of journals, the impact of English-language journals becomes self-perpetuating as it is in these periodicals that authors will be most visible on the world stage and receive the most credit for recognition and promotion.

While this process is more pronounced in some fields than others, academics all over the world are increasingly less likely to publish in their own language. They are also likely to find their English-language publications are cited more often. References to English-language publications, for example, have reached 85 per cent in French science journals (Navarro, 1995) and, more generally, English makes up over 95 per cent of all publications in the *Science Citation Index*. Clearly a lingua franca facilitates the exchange of ideas and the dissemination of knowledge far more effectively than a polyglot system is able to, but equally there is a danger that many L2 writers may be excluded from the web of global scholarship (Gibbs, 1995), so depriving the world of knowledge developed outside the metropolitan, and anglophone, centres of research.

There is evidence, however, which strongly points in the opposite direction. The *Science Citation Index*, for instance, has been criticized for a bias towards English-language journals and, in particular, to those published in the US. Swales (2004: 40) points out that large countries with strong research traditions such as China and India are grossly underrepresented in the database, but that research communicated in English from European countries is not. Wood (2001) finds publication rates for non-native English speakers in the highly prestigious journals *Science* and *Nature* to be relatively high. Similarly, Tomkins *et al.* (2001) and Iverson (2002) show that US journals in surgery and medicine have evidenced a steady decline in US-based contributions. Swales (2004: 52) summarizes the position thus:

In today's Anglophone research world, the status and contribution of the non-native speaker of English has become somewhat more central than it used to be and increasingly (albeit slowly) is perhaps being recognised as such by native speakers of English.

In other words, while research may be largely communicated through English, it is increasingly coming from countries where English is a foreign language.

Perhaps more serious barriers to research visibility are the structural divisions between the advantaged northern and disadvantaged southern hemispheres (Wood, 2001). Canagarajah (1996), for instance, discusses how 'non-discursive' financial and physical aspects of the research and publication process can create difficulties for periphery scholars, with access to the literature, printing quality, postal costs

and editor–writer interaction posing serious difficulties. These difficulties are compounded by the need to pay for appearance in some journals, especially in the sciences. As a result, such scholars often feel themselves to be ‘off-network’ outsiders (Swales, 1990) in relation to work going on in the centre, although the growth of e-connections and electronic publishing may eventually make this less problematic. Indeed, the massive expansion of e-journals, the rapid access to author offprints through e-mail, the availability of paper journals on line, and the fact that international publishers offer lower-cost programs to developing countries in fields such as biomedicine or agriculture, may indicate the beginnings of a shift towards greater accessibility and participation. It is important to recognize, however, that cost is still a limiting factor for libraries in many parts of the world.

Another challenge is that of the rhetorical standards demanded by editors, referees and other gatekeepers who frequently reject non-standard varieties (Flowerdew, 2001; Gosden, 1992). Second-language academics often lack confidence in their ability to meet these standards, and in many disciplines editors insist on having submissions vetted by native English-speakers, often requiring writers to pay editors to correct or rewrite their prose before it is accepted. Clearly EAP has a major role to play here in assisting academics in developing the rhetorical skills they need to publish their work in English.

Perhaps more immediately relevant for EAP teachers, English can also have potentially negative consequences for students as they find it hard to bridge the domains of English in the classroom and their vernacular language in everyday life. Canagarajah (1999), for instance, discusses the tensions experienced by Tamil students in an EAP class in a Sri Lankan university while Flowerdew and Miller (1992) catalogue the difficulties experienced by Cantonese L1 speakers in English-medium universities in Hong Kong. Tardy (2004) similarly found that L2 post-graduate science students felt frustrated at having to spend time mastering a second language to communicate in English. The task of teachers is to bridge these linguistic worlds, not by privileging the home literacy of learners against the literacy of academic study, but by helping them to see the discourses of academic engagement as central to the study of their disciplines.

### Task A3.2



- The problems experienced by many peripheral scholars in publishing their work in English are clearly an area which should concern EAP teachers. Identify what you see as the main difficulties for academics in the developing world and how EAP teachers can best respond to these.

## PERSPECTIVES ON THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH

For some observers, the dominance of English in academic domains represents an impartial and inevitable development. They see it as a movement towards a common language for science which allows individuals to enter networks beyond their locality (Graddol, 2001) and which facilitates the worldwide exchange of ideas and growth of knowledge (Glaze, 2000). Global communication requires a shared linguistic code and English fits this bill owing to its already broad reach, its demonstrable value in a range of functions and domains, and its increasingly supranational character. English is said to no longer be tied to any one culture and does not emanate in a direct way from the Western metropolitan centre, so it is able to operate, in Halliday's terms, as a 'written world of secondary socialization', which performs different functions and is unthreatening to the vitality of local languages (Bisong, 1995).

For other writers, the spread of English is an insidious and destructive force, eliminating other languages, imposing the cultural dominance of the nations which speak it, and straitjacketing L2 academics into the rhetorical conventions of a single variety. Phillipson (1992) describes as 'linguistic imperialism' the process where a powerful language displaces others in some function, while Pennycook (1994) shows how its use restricts the participation of L2 academics in international forums. In Hong Kong, Singapore and India, for example, university students pursue their academic careers in a language which is not their mother tongue, and academics throughout the world are urged to publish 'their best in the West' to gain wider credit for their research.

These different perspectives reflect specific ideological orientations relating roughly to 'dependence or development'. Is English a way for countries and individual scholars to move into global academic and research forums or a Trojan horse of imperialist values and interests perpetuating reliance? While the case for diversity may seem self-evident, there are obvious problems in institutionalizing a plurality of languages as an academic lingua franca, as the majority of languages will obviously still be excluded. Nor should we assume that only native speakers of English have the expertise to participate in academic forums. Multilingualism is the norm in many countries and scholars with cultural loyalties to non-English-speaking communities are among the leading figures of their academic fields. Clearly, a more nuanced view is necessary to understand what is a complex situation.

While inevitably linked with the economic imperialism of the West, English has, at the same time, demonstrated its role outside the confines of the political and economic elites and has flourished much more demotically in such diverse areas as music, advertising and the internet. As Wallace (2002: 107) points out:

While local language and literacies tend to serve horizontal, contingent and solidary functions, global English spans a wider range of contexts, and has universal applicability and resonance.

In academic contexts, therefore, the use of English means that language is no longer a barrier to knowledge as ever larger numbers of people can access the products of research and participate in networks which go beyond the local. As the language of globalization English can be said to empower its users (Pakir, 1999).

The fact that non-native speakers of English now outnumber native speakers (Firth, 1996: 240) means that new varieties of English emerge which do not depend on either childhood acquisition or cultural identity and which are used in contexts where no L1 English speakers are involved (Graddol, 1999). This is referred to as *English as a Lingua franca* (ELF), a variety of English which does not assume adherence to all anglo communication conventions and where traditional native-speakerness holds no advantages. Here academic users of English are no less proficient than native speakers of that language and they are not aspiring to speak a standard English variety. What matters is clarity and comprehensibility and L1 English speakers may need to adjust their language to new norms of international academic communication.

While we may be cautious of seeing English as eventually becoming a universal, culture-free language which privileges no particular group, it is not the case that languages are abstract and monolithic, imposing homogeneous ideologies and identities on passive users. Canagarajah (1999) calls such a deterministic view a *reproduction orientation*. He contrasts this with a *resistance perspective* which:

provides for the possibility that, in everyday life, the powerless in post-colonial communities may find ways to negotiate, alter, and oppose political structures, and reconstruct their languages, cultures, and identities to their advantage. The intention is not to reject English, but to reconstitute it in more inclusive, ethical, and democratic terms . . .

(Canagarajah, 1999: 2)

Precisely how this goal might be achieved remains unclear, but it is obvious that these are complex issues which demand a considered and sensitive response. We cannot see English as a hermetically sealed system unconnected with social, political and cultural issues, but equally it is unhelpful to regard EAP teachers as the unwitting agents of colonialist reconstruction.

### Task A3.3



- Consider your own local context, or one you are familiar with. To what extent does the global spread of English seem to be a neutral or even beneficial feature supporting the inclusion of geographically peripheral scholars, and how far do you think it functions there to restrict access and promote Western interests?