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11 English for Academic Purposes
A Trojan Horse Bearing the Advance Forces of Linguistic Domination?

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INTRODUCTION

On a global scale there is a divide between the prosperous, industrialized, economically successful, highly educated West and the aspirational rest (Ferguson, 2011). There is a powerful discourse that connects the success of the West and education. The perceived superiority of the English-speaking West extends to educational standards and institutions, and, thus, in the contemporary world, a Western education is perceived as synonymous with opportunities to achieve aspirations of economic growth and prosperity (Gray, 2010). Education has become, in essence, a profitable, globally traded commodity in a high-demand market (Tilak, 2008). This market is regulated by the hegemonic West through an element integral to participation in Western education, the currency of the global education market, the English language. Furthermore, this regulation is additionally achieved through stringent requirements that students have at their disposal, not control of the English language as a generic commodity but, a specific academic variety of English that offers students the educational privileges afforded “owners” of linguistic resources (Heller, 2003, p. 489). Local languages, even local varieties of English, have diminished value in the market and thus a huge industry has emerged with a focus on preparation for study in Western universities that consists of study and testing of academic English. We use the term English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in this chapter to refer to both this specific variety and, by extension, to the infrastructure that commodifies and regulates the EAP variety.

We must emphasize also that EAP instruction is conducted not only for educational studies in countries where English is the mother tongue, but also in other countries where English is the medium of instruction in the higher education sector (Jordan, 1997). There is a clear difference between the needs of EAP students in these two contexts. In countries where English is not the first language of the students, EAP classes are often attended by students from a range of different academic disciplines; in such countries, EAP courses are usually conducted as English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) courses catering for the needs of individual academic departments.
and their students. However, in the international context, historical use by students of local varieties of academic English is not regarded as acceptable to meet the requirements for entry. EAP curricula with a focus on study in Western universities usually build on student awareness that there is a particular language of the academy, and certain ways of talking, reading, and writing about ideas and texts. The centrality of the EAP focus is viewed differently by EAP experts; some view study skills as central to EAP (Beard & Hartley, 1984), whereas some others maintain EAP does not entirely rest on study skills, but on such things as general academic English register, incorporating a formal, academic style, with proficiency in the language use (Jordan, 1997) in addition to study skills. Apart from teaching such students English-language skills, it is also important to create understandings of the skills and knowledge expected of students in their Western academic studies, the problems likely to be encountered in adjusting to teaching and learning styles in Western academia, and how to reconcile their own academic orientation with the academic expectations of the institution.

As a result of various historic, political and economic forces, the population aspiring to learn English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) in order to study in Western institutions has been increasing rapidly (Birch & Liyanage, 2004). This has stimulated the worldwide proliferation of centers of EAP instruction and their associated need for teachers of English and an exponential growth of English-language teaching materials on the market for their use (Phillipson, 2003). Toward the close of the 20th century, there were more than a million students in higher education worldwide who were studying outside their own countries (Huxur, Mansfeld, Nnazor, Schuetze, & Segawa, 1996). This figure increases every year as international students comprise an expanding component of student enrollments in Western universities. In Australia, for example, in postgraduate coursework programs in 2010, 47% of total equivalent full-time student load were international students (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011). The number of students studying outside their home country is predicted to grow to seven million by 2025 (Ruby, 2008), the majority from non-English-speaking backgrounds and studying in the English speaking nexus of Britain, Australasia, and North America (BANA). This movement of international students to Western countries to consume higher education has fueled demand for an additional trade in provision of the commodity of English and, in particular, the variety of English mandated by Western higher education institutions for enrollment in academic programs. Consequently, in recent years there has been an ongoing worldwide increase in demand for EAP courses varying in length and the mode of instruction (Jordan, 1997) to prepare students to study in English-speaking academia.

We see the EAP paradigm as a perspective that diminishes and devalues the socio-educational resources possessed by students who are frequently accomplished users of varieties of English that are considered educated in their local contexts of origin. Many students from nations outside the

English-speaking BANA nations, for example, Vietnamese postgraduates in a study conducted by Phan Le Ha (2011), have graduated, often with distinction, from academic programs in which their local variety of English was the medium of instruction. In this paradigm, existing resources and practices involving other ways of knowing and organizing knowledge require transmutation into Western ways of working and thinking. So our argument is that this marginalizes or diminishes other varieties of English or other languages as inadequate or unsuitable for the purposes of academic study. Essentially, this is an instance of linguicism, a practice “used to legitimize, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988, p. 13). What appears to be a benign, international variety of English, portrayed as a key to be presented to the gatekeepers of Western educational institutions, is, we argue, not a neutral and value-free product. What is being enthusiastically embraced as an opportunity to develop human capital, to facilitate independent development, could in fact be a Trojan horse bearing the advance forces of linguistic domination. In the following section we explore the role of EAP in the global education market through this metaphor of the “Trojan horse.” We begin with a discussion of the place of EAP in the global education market and the role of this variety of English in determining admission to or exclusion from the Western academic sphere.

EAP AND THE GLOBAL EDUCATION MARKET

In these circumstances, exporting higher education is an immensely profitable enterprise. In 2005, an estimated US$30 billion generated by export of higher education flowed into the English-speaking nations of the United States, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (Tilak, 2008) and the total value of global higher education exports is predicted to reach US$640 billion in 2025 (Ruby, 2008). The enormous numbers of students and the vast sums of money involved indicate the significance of both the export of education and the associated income to the institutions involved and of the power invested in those who take up opportunities for provision of English-language teaching. There is a mutual dependence between providers of higher education and providers of the commodity of academic English-language proficiency. It is convenient and advantageous for universities to adopt the standards designated by independent teaching and testing systems, whereas the financial viability of these same teaching and testing systems depends upon sustained or growing demand for places in Western universities. Even more importantly for the teaching and testing systems is the continued adherence to the variety of academic English that they offer as a product and, thus, an associated devaluing of other languages and varieties of English.
It is not surprising that international provision of what is essentially a gatekeeping service, the teaching and testing of academic English proficiency, is controlled and dominated by a small number of Western-based organizations, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The enormous growth of IELTS, both in its global reach and in the numbers of candidates tested, illustrates first the level of demand for EAP: in 1995 43,000 candidates were tested in 210 locations (IELTS, 2012); in 2010 “the world’s most popular high-stakes English language test” (IELTS, 2010, p. 4) was undertaken by 1.5 million candidates in 800 locations in 130 countries (IELTS, 2010). The extent and size of the EAP industry indicates also the magnitude of the resources involved globally in organizing and administering recognized teaching and testing systems and the revenue streams that ensue. For example, integral to the expansion of the EAP industry is the preparation, publication, and sale of English-language teaching materials, estimated a decade ago to be worth more than G$5.4 billion (Mahboob, 2011) to the publishing industry. The EAP industry is a well-established, streamlined system that serves its own needs: the training of language teachers and language assessors is conducted and regulated by the industry; teaching and testing are prepared and produced by the industry; and administration of tests is regulated and quality controlled by the industry. Thus, the language requirements demanded by Western universities has added a layer of Western intrusion that demands the subservience of local participants to an externally imposed filter that determines opportunities to participate in the global education market.

Although a significant hallmark of the spread of English outside BANA nations has been its appropriation by users in other contexts (Canagarajah, 1999), in the EAP context, varieties of English other than that demanded by the conventions of Western academia “are used to exclude many of its users, to construct an inferior” (Phan Le Ha, 2007, p. 48). EAP presents as the target variety of academic English, one that is considered by Westerners, by virtue of a perceived epistemological universality, to be culturally neutral but in reality presenting a preferred variety of English that has embedded in it Western ways of learning and Western ways of organizing and generating knowledge.

The dominant communication style and world view of the (Western) university, variously known as “academic writing,” “analytical writing,” “critical thinking,” or just plain “good writing,” is based on assumptions and habits of mind that are derived from Western culture; ... this way of thinking and communicating is considered the most sophisticated, intelligent, and efficient by only a tiny fraction of the world’s people. (Fox, 1994, p. xxii)

At the level of target variety of English, EAP encompasses not just the mechanics of language and accurate use. Many candidates for English-

language testing to gain entry to Western universities “have studied English grammar and vocabulary longer than they’d like to remember” (Fox, 1994, p. 115). What is involved includes aspects of language use that Western academics themselves sometimes find difficult to articulate clearly (Dunworth & Kirkpatrick, 2003; Lea & Street, 1998). Notions such as relevance, clarity, argument development, voice, style, organization, analysis, critical thinking, and concepts such as plagiarism are bound up not with English proficiency, but with cultural communication styles (Fox, 1994; Phan Le Ha, 2011). Although we can accept representation of the linguistic resources and discursive practices presented through EAP and associated materials as tools for mediation of content knowledge, they serve to achieve much more, as powerful tools for the reproduction of ideologies and of a particular way of constructing reality (Gray, 2010).

Why, then, do the peoples of non-BANA nations willingly accept this situation and effectively reject their own ways of learning and knowing? The answer rests in an unquestioning belief that the road to modernization and development can be secured through education, more specifically, a Western education that holds out the promise of access to the research and literature that has brought about and sustains the economic and political dominance of the West. In this belief system, Western academic practices in the form of EAP are not just accepted, they are welcomed, as was the “Trojan horse” by the people of ancient Troy, and as the Trojans discovered to their ultimate misfortune, it bears the advance forces of their domination.

The EAP Trojan horse threatens linguistic domination of those who welcome it in a number of ways. The effects might not be immediate, but, concealed within the “Trojan horse,” is the germ of a slow withering away and perhaps ultimate disappearance of Indigenous practices embedded in the local variety or language. Socially, graduates are endowed with a higher status and prestige on the basis of a language variety that actively and by implication devalues local varieties and languages. Educationally it perpetuates the idealization of the academic language, practices, and epistemologies embedded in the target EAP variety, and professionally it robs teachers of their volition to exercise agency. In the remainder of this chapter we explore the implications of these.

EAP, SOCIETY, AND POLITICS

The availability of EAP and the pathways to Western education have encouraged in non-Western nations structural and policy changes in education, such as English-medium instruction. Historically, in order to gain access to international politico-economic affairs, English needed to be integrated into the education systems of non-English-speaking countries, and this was the case even in officially designated monolingual nation-states like some Middle Eastern and European countries. Whereas these policies are initiated locally,
and apparently independently, in order to facilitate development, in reality there are external pressures that leave these nations with little choice but to pursue such responses to global imperatives. The international status and functions of English exert pressure on governments for further spread via educational policies (Phillipson, 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), especially through the World Bank (Brock-Utne, 2000). Policy outcomes are frequently far removed from the original intent and highlight the role of English as a source of division. In Pakistan, for example, educational policies favoring English-language-medium education, intended to facilitate access to the benefits of development, have effectively created conditions that exclude all but a minority from higher education and associated employment opportunities (Shamim, 2011). The policy outcome is similar in other subcontinental nations. An imperative for English-medium instruction in India has exacerbated divisions between what Meganathan (2011) terms English-language-rich children and English-language-poor children. In Sri Lanka, a similar situation has created “a divide between those who are and who are not proficient in English” (Liyanage, 2010, p. 206), and in Indonesia, access to English-medium instruction in the international school systems is restricted to middle-class families (Coleman, 2011), effectively magnifying discrepancies in social, economic, and cultural capital that already exist between this group and poorer families (Lamb, 2011). This is a key aspect of the divisions that can ensue from acceptance of the value of Western education and thus by inference of the need for EAP. Access to English-language education and English-medium education are the preserve of the sections of society least in need of opportunities for economic and social advancement, those with the financial capacity to take advantage of nonstate educational opportunities with the promise of language proficiency that cannot be matched by state schooling. The initial division between those who have the opportunity to participate in EAP and those who don’t is magnified when those who succeed in obtaining a Western education subsequently fill positions of influence, power, and authority, at the expense of those who may possess equivalent but local qualification (Liyanage, 2004).

The structural and policy changes in education are complemented by the aspirations of locals to participate in any benefits that participation in Western education might bring about. In postcolonial contexts in particular, advantages experienced by speakers of English has created a climate in which the perpetuation of the domination of standard British or American varieties of educated English is advocated perhaps even more fervently by local Indigenous speakers of English than by the expectations of outsiders (Patil, 2007). Thus, in terms of access to the benefits associated with the English language “many Asian employers still look at their own varieties through the glasses of British or American English and think of them as substandard, deficient, and inferior varieties” (Patil, 2007, p. 30), perpetuating the divide between the English-rich and the English-poor.

EAP, EDUCATION, AND AGENCY

The linguistic domination we are talking about does not just comprise the language itself, but the devaluation of ways of thinking and doing and acting that are embedded in the uses to which language is put. What is insinuated in the promise of socioeconomic prosperity is a surreptitious danger that paves the way for a slow but definite destruction of Indigenous epistemologies (Kirkpatrick, 2009). It is at the entry point of the path to Western educational qualifications, the EAP course, that it becomes clear that local or alternative practices are not acceptable and in some way inferior (for a detailed discussion of this aspect see Liyanage & Walker, Forthcoming). From the perspective of students, to embrace Western academic conventions and practices is to be equipped with the resources needed for academic success, yet at the same time this constitutes an implicit judgment of the local education system and ways of knowing as deficient. When this perspective is embedded in educational administrative structures by the dominance of graduates of Western-education systems, Indigenous ways of thinking and acting by users of local languages are marginalized.

The greatest danger is that, in welcoming the opportunities associated with EAP programs, local peoples become the greatest proponents of a divide between those with English or a particular variety of it, and those without. Teachers, for example, frequently promote and expect a variety of English that they themselves do not possess and in doing so devalue and demean their own capacities and skills (Patil, 2007). Teachers from overseas are preferred by institutions offering EAP programs thus emphasizing further and reinforcing the lesser worth attributed to the knowledge and skills of local teachers of English. Locally produced materials are regarded as inferior to materials produced in BANA countries and that are imported and subsequently endowed with the authority of officially sanctioned knowledge (Luke, de Castell, & Luke, 1989) that encourages teachers to relinquish agency and accept its claims unconditionally (Harwood, 2005). In sum, the EAP Trojan horse is a gift that encourages the recipients to become the agents of their own demise.

Resources are an important factor contributing to language teachers’ success. It has been this way from the beginnings of ELT (Richards, 1994, 2001), especially in EFL contexts where students’ contact with the target language is limited. Even in ESL contexts where contact with the target language is more readily available, “the right” resources are highly sought after by ESL teachers. However, it is important to note that these resources, which usually manifest themselves as prepackaged commodities for a global audience of learners, offer little freedom for teachers to exercise any professional agency in the implementation of these in the language classroom (Liyanage, 2003a, 2003b).
It is equally important to observe that the use of prepackaged textbooks, with or without digital media, as classroom resources is mandatory or the common practice in many parts of the world due to curriculum guidelines, sociopolitical reasons (Canagarajah, 1999), assessment structures, and availability of resources (Liyanage & Bartlett, 2008). Although it is not mandated that test preparation materials produced by the testing organizations be used in classrooms, and it is conceivable that candidates can succeed on tests without these materials, it would be naive of teachers and students not to use them. This situation contributes to the penetration of other ways of thinking and knowing and organizing knowledge and also challenges the legitimacy of alternative locally produced materials that could be used. It discourages teachers from preparing their own materials and encourages investment of authority and more value in the externally produced materials.

CONCLUSION

The big picture is that the opportunities offered by EAP are only accessible by those who are prepared to put at risk the linguistic and cultural integrity of the community involved. Processes involved in EAP provide a means to the end of gaining entry to Western academic education and simultaneously serve to protect and idealize the language practices and conventions of Western institutions. We argue that the way forward that has potential to avoid English becoming the source of division within non-BANA nations is first to reject dichotomous responses that, on one hand, view the spread of English in the world as a necessary tool with which non-English-speaking countries can connect with the global economy, and, on the other, view the spread of English as hegemonic and as carefully orchestrated by the UK and United States through their economic, political, and social institutions at the expense of languages, cultures, and values of non-English-speaking countries. The challenge is to achieve a prosperity that can be enjoyed by all without a new regime based on linguistic and cultural discrimination. The risks posed by accepting the Trojan horse cannot override the right of non-BANA nations to economic prosperity through education. To welcome the EAP Trojan horse may achieve no more than shifting the divide between those who do and those who do not have English as a resource from one that is international to one that is intra-national. We can’t change what is happening, nor are we saying that the Western way of thinking is bad or should be rejected, but we advocate a more critical approach to the EAP Trojan horse so that the implications are clearly understood.

REFERENCES


