

The Lingua Franca of Globalisation: “filius nullius in terra nullius”, as we say in English.

Martin A. Kayman, Cardiff University

English as a lingua franca is a child of the postmodern world: it observes no national boundaries and it has no definite centres. In many ways, it is part of a transcultural flow, with its speakers using it in their own ways, constructing their own identities and forming their own groupings.

(Mauranen and Metsä-Ketelä 2006: 2)

Introduction

In a key early text, Roland Robertson defined globalisation at two levels: as “both [...] the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (Robertson 1992: 8). In other words, globalisation has as much to do with how we conceive the world as it has with engineering its social and economic compression. Consequently, theories of globalisation have an important performative dimension: how we talk about globalisation contributes to the shaping of consciousness of “the world as a whole”. It would be a commonplace (though not an insignificant one) to observe that nowadays discussion of globalisation is conducted to a large extent in English; this article addresses the fact that, because of the role of communication in globalisation discourse, and of English in global communication, globalisation discourse is also, to an extent unrivalled by any other language, a discourse spoken *about* English.

It follows then that how we talk, and what we say, about “English as a global language” (Crystal 1997), “English as an International Language” (Jenkins 2000), “World English” (Brutt-Griffler 2002), “World Englishes” (Kachru and Smith 2008), or simply “Global” (Toolan 1997) goes beyond defending positions in linguistic debates and becomes an intervention in the formation of our consciousness of the globalised world, contributing in particular to the sorts of subjects and

cultures we envision as inhabiting it. This is not least the case for the masses of those involved worldwide in the learning and teaching of English at all levels and ages. The very salience of English within globalisation means that the way it is presented—in theoretical texts as in language teaching materials—has an important role in developing understandings of language as such, particularly its relations to culture and, through this therefore, to attitudes to the cultural politics of globalisation itself. It is in this context that the present article will examine the theoretical discourse of “English as a Lingua Franca” (ELF)—a discourse that supports what David Graddol (2006: 87) has described as “probably the most radical and controversial approach to emerge in recent years” to thinking about English under globalisation. Rather than providing a further linguistic critique of ELF, this article will focus on the *cultural* claims for English within globalisation that ELF weaves into and builds out of its linguistic arguments.¹ I shall also aim to suggest how those cultural claims contribute to the resilience of ELF despite the critiques raised against it by many specialists in linguistics and language teaching.

Talking about globalisation; talking about language

How, then, do we talk about language? Or, put another way, what *else* do we talk about when we talk about language? Although linguists have various technical discourses for talking about their subject, it is difficult for non-specialists at least (and often for specialists too) to avoid the slip from talking about “the language itself” to talking about something else, something to do with culture.

Take, for example, an article promoting English as “A Language for Europe” that the travel writer Michael Jenner contributed in 1996 to the British Airways in-flight magazine *Business Life*—a genre of publication of evident importance for the way the global is constructed (cf. Thurlow and Jaworski 2003). “On top of the 370 million native speakers of

¹ For a range of critical approaches, see Berns 2008; MacKenzie 2009, forthcoming; Mollin 2006; Prodromou 2007.

English,” Jenner began in a strain that has become familiar, “another 1 billion people use it as a lingua franca” (Jenner 1996: 19). Jenner acknowledges (as effectively all writers on the subject do) that “the economic power of the USA has been the prime promoter of the language in recent times.” But he goes on immediately to point out that this is not the ultimate reason for its present position: rather, he argues, “there is a *linguistic* reason for the triumph of English” (my italics). The “linguistic” reason is that, owing to its hybrid nature, English is “user-friendly”: as “the mother of mongrels”, it has a “formidable adaptability”, and is “by instinct an acutely cosmopolitan creature” (Jenner 1996: 20). As Jenner goes on to explain: “The Germanic engineering of Anglo-Saxon combined with the elegance and clarity of French in a resonant mix that has served literary talents as diverse as Samuel Johnson and James Joyce. What English lacked in classical beauty, it made up for in pragmatism and humour” (ibid.).

Although his article reads as something of a caricature of such discourse, Jenner’s cultural associations are of course entirely traditional. In his project to establish the national language, Dr Johnson, bereft of classical models on which to base his *Dictionary*, evoked deeply embedded attitudes to rival European powers and contemporary domestic political cultures as he situated the historical bounds of his corpus between the early “rudeness” of the “original *Teutonic* character” of English and the recent “false refinement” provoked by its deviation “towards a *Gallick* structure and phraseology” (Johnson 1755: 8). A century later, as the study of language was establishing itself as a historical science, Richard Chenevix Trench, the pioneering English philologist and the promoter of the great sequel to Johnson’s pioneering work, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, spoke of English in language that invoked the excellence of the national Church and an imperial vision of both the language and the nation. Trench linked the fact that, in founding the modern national language (as with the Anglican Church), the translators of the English Reformation “gave to the Latin side of the language its rights, though they would not suffer it to encroach upon and usurp those of the Teutonic part of the language” with the “great things in store for the one language of Europe which thus serves as connecting link between the North and the South ... [and] which is as a middle term between them” (1855: 37). Trench cites Jakob Grimm in support of the “surprisingly intimate alliance of [...] the Teutonic and the Romance” in

English (Grimm 1851: 135; cited in Trench 1855: 38). “In truth,” Grimm continues:

the English language, which by no mere accident has produced and upborne the greatest and most predominant poet of modern times (I can, of course, only mean Shakespeare), may with all right be called a world-language; and like the English people appears destined hereafter to prevail with a sway even more extensive than its present over all parts of the globe. For in wealth, good reason, and closeness of structure no other of the languages at this day spoken deserves to be compared with it. (ibid.)

In short, the slide from “linguistic” arguments to national stereotypes and their narratives, from speaking of language to speaking of culture, has characterised discourse on language for as long as language has been regarded as bound up with national culture. Moreover, at an important moment in the development of linguistics as a discipline, it served to convey the prophetic sense of a world-destiny for English.

This historical alignment of language with nation has furnished a tradition of talking about language that revolves around notions of property. “E’NGLISH. adj. [*engles*, Saxon]. Belonging to England”—as Dr Johnson (1755) defined it in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). At the other end of the narrative, the turn of the century lingua franca project derived considerable impetus from Henry Widdowson’s much-cited assertion to an audience of English language teachers in the early nineties that: “[English] is not a possession which [native speakers] lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it” (Widdowson 1994: 385).² More radically, Jacques Derrida, writing from a postcolonial point of view, stretches the metaphor to breaking-point: “I only have one language; it is not mine” (Derrida 1998: 3). As these three very different historical and/or theoretical contexts suggest, our discourse regarding what “belongs to” a language links the defining characteristics inherent to a language to the question of what culture or community that language “belongs to”: in describing a language we ask not only what *properties* does the language possess? but *whose* language is it?

² I shall have occasion to return later to the peculiar Englishness of the notion of property employed here.

The relationship between statements about the properties and the proprietorship of the language was essential to the construction of nation and of empire, as English was theorised for implementation in educational systems at home and abroad in the nineteenth century.³ However, we are supposed to have got past this conflation today in the language we use about language. It is, presumably, not because of any “English” virtues that English occupies its current place in the world. The acceptance of its global status relies on this: that the world no longer believes that English is “owned” by the British or the Americans, or that it embodies, transmits or inculcates qualities and values associated with those cultures. But Jenner’s recidivism, slipping into promoting English as a lingua franca on the basis of qualities easily identified with a certain vision of Englishness, illustrates the unconscious persistence (at least in the native-speaker psyche) of a language of linguistic property that imbues language with qualities associated with particular cultures. As such it points to the question as to whether, even when modelling English as a lingua franca emancipated from particularly “English” cultural ownership or properties, one can avoid speaking of it in a way that imbues that language with cultural properties of *some* sort—properties, moreover, that cannot help but have implications for English culture itself. In looking at the discourse of “English as a Lingua Franca”, I will, then, be seeking to identify the cultural properties attributed to “English” in a context that, in contrast to our eighteenth- and nineteenth-century examples, is conceived as postnational. I shall likewise explore their implications for the broader contexts of what Philip Seargeant has sought to render as neutrally as possible with the expression “English within a globalized context” (Seargeant 2008: 220). This will return us to the question of the issue of the “ownership” of the lingua franca.

³ See, for example, Bacon 1998; Bailey 1992; Michael 1987; Viswanathan 1989.

From international communication to a global lingua franca

Given the tradition of discourse on language just referred to, a fundamental element in the appeal of ELF is the way in which it allows English to play a global role by definitively releasing it from the ownership and properties of its imperialist predecessors. Hitherto, in explaining how English came to occupy its present position under globalisation, all accounts recognise as a matter of course the role of British imperialism and American economic and military power up to the mid- to late twentieth century; but they tend to stumble at the next stage—as illustrated by David Crystal’s almost throwaway comment that English occupies the place it currently does because it has “repeatedly ‘found itself in the right place at the right time’” (Crystal 1997: 110).⁴ In accounting for the accelerated spread of English in the last part of the twentieth century and beyond, a stronger narrative than this was required if one was to break with the earlier history and rebut arguments that understand globalisation as the unbroken pursuit of Empire under another name, in which English is complicit. In a word, English had to be released from the inheritance of its imperialist parents. For this to happen, it would be necessary to separate the way English as a language was talked about from the earlier account of English as a complex of cultural values associated with particular nation-states and their historical narratives, the paradigm that had provided the founding rationale for departments of English or Germanic philology across Continental Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (cf. Engler and Haas 2000; Haas and Engler 2008).

The communicative revolution of the 1970s and 1980s was a crucial but incomplete step in the process of disembedding English from the old narrative and its associated paradigm. The development of the communicative approach to English Language Teaching (cf. Brumfit and Johnson 1979) is precisely contemporaneous with that of the modern technologies of global communication: the internet, e-mail, messaging,

⁴ The accusation of complacency provoked by this phrase brought about a retrospective clarification as to its ironic (and Welsh) nature in the second edition: see Crystal (2003: 78), fn. 10.

the World Wide Web.⁵ While English became popularly identified as the language for communication par excellence through its evolving association with these revolutionary technologies, it was, at the same time, discussed in theoretical, policy, and pedagogical texts and materials primarily in terms of communicational function, rather than linguistic structure or cultural content (cf. Van Ek 1975). In privileging a functional model of communication in language teaching, this approach turned cultural understanding into no more than a matter of appropriateness and effectiveness in the realisation of universal transactional goals in international contexts (Kayman 2004). In short, culture became a supplementary skill theoretically open to all, rather than an essential content possessed by some.

Yet subordinating the cultural properties of English to the intercultural functional properties of communication did not entirely release it from its “English” inheritance. As the teaching and learning of English expanded throughout the world, the discourse of English, and particularly of the English Language Teaching profession, was still very much “owned” by Anglophone nationals. The new theory of English of the late twentieth century was largely elaborated by British, Australian and American scholars (with crucial contributions from South Asia; e.g. Kachru 1985); the new materials were published by the multinational

⁵ In 1972, for example, while Ray Tomlinson was writing the first e-mail programmes and FTP protocols were being developed, Dell Hymes and D. A. Wilkins, in their seminal papers “On Communicative Competence” and on “Grammatical, situational and notional syllabuses” respectively, were reconstituting language as the means of realisation of a set of communicative functions (Hymes 1972; Wilkins 1979). Brumfit and Johnson’s (1979) influential anthology, which reprinted both essays, was published in the same year that the first IBM PC came on the market. Likewise, Jan Van Ek published the first “Threshold Level” syllabus for the Council of Europe a year before the first Apple computer was launched (1975). The Threshold Level set the stage for the revolution in teaching methods and materials in the 1980s, during which period the demand for teaching and learning of English became increasingly the centre of foreign language instruction in European school systems. BBS technologies began in the USA in 1978 and expanded during the 1980s. In another register, CNN was launched in 1980 and MTV in 1981. The HTTP system and the Web arrived at the beginning of the 1990s.

Anglophone publishing houses; the new methodologies were promoted in large part through the British Council's reinforced network of schools and through the seminars, symposia and lectures it sponsored; and international assessment was controlled largely by British- or American-based institutions.⁶

This, rather than the crude Whorfianism of which it is sometimes accused (e.g. Mair 2002: 166), is the central argument of Robert Phillipson's (1992) critique of the spread of English as "linguistic imperialism". Phillipson's work seeks to trace out the agents, discourses, and practices responsible for the spread of English and to analyse their effects, the values they promote, and the cultural and economic asymmetries they perpetuate within the globalising context of late capitalism (cf. also Pennycook 1994). At the bottom of Phillipson's position is the case that the adoption of English as a global language is fundamentally incompatible with an emancipatory project for globalisation, and that there are alternatives, based in support for multilingualism. Although published over 15 years ago, Phillipson's text still seems to haunt the debate; against the background of the accelerating "triumph" of English, the recurrent need to rebut these arguments has testified to the persistent spectre of the imperial inheritance (in addition to Mair, see, for example, Brutt-Griffler 2002: 26 et seq).

⁶ For a brief account of the early history of communicative language teaching, see Howatt and Widdowson 2004: 326-340. As is well known, the main players in assessment remain Cambridge ESOL, IELTS, international TESOL (founded 1964) and the Michigan University testing service in the USA (founded in the 1950s). The Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English was established by the Cambridge Board in 1913 (see the catalogue of the Cambridge ESOL 150th anniversary exhibition at http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/digitalAssets/166664_114603_Complete_150th_Anniversary_Exhibition.pdf; accessed 13 December 2009). The English Language Testing Service (ELTS) was established in 1980 to respond to "the growth in 'communicative' language learning and 'English for specific purposes'" (see the IELTS website at http://www.ielts.org/researchers/history_of_ielts.aspx; accessed on 13 December 2009). Major expansion took place following the revision of the test, which became the International ELTS in 1989. IELTS was established by a consortium involving Cambridge ESOL, the British Council, and an Australian organisation.

On the other hand, the twenty-first-century discourse of English as a Lingua Franca totally inverts the situation described by Phillipson. Indeed, as I shall demonstrate, it responds to this critique of English as an instrument of neo-imperialism in terms that would make ELF the very image and vehicle of an emancipatory vision of globalisation.

English and the emancipatory project of globalisation

Building on the idea of English as the world language of communication established during the last decades of the twentieth century, the discourse of English as a Lingua Franca represents a theoretical and cultural rupture with previous theories of English in the globalised context by virtue of two fundamental and related moves. On the one hand, the model of language shifts away from the cultural paradigm based on the (inter-)national (English as a *Foreign Language*) and the intra-national (English as a *Second Language*) and aligns it with the postmodernist visions of globalisation developed in the 1990s by the likes of Arjun Appadurai (1990; “flows”), Jan Pieterse (1995; hybridisation; “third spaces”), and with the sort of notions of “reflexive modernity”, disembedding, and identity developed by Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) and Anthony Giddens (1990; 1999). This move is complemented by the dislodging of the English language from its previous location in Anglophone sources, models, and users. In other words, ELF intertwines an argument about the cultural contours of globalisation with a revision of the subjects and sites of English as a language.

I should indicate at once that I feel that the move has much to recommend it; however, the way in which it is articulated ends up making considerable cultural claims for the role of English in globalisation. By drawing its language from sociocultural theories of globalisation, the discourse of ELF effectively transfers the cultural values it ascribes to the global vision onto the language, in the same way as national values were fused with linguistic arguments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While this does deterritorialise English, it is far from releasing the idea of the language, as the pure medium that the phrase “lingua franca” appears to intimate, from *a priori* cultural values which attach to it. In other words, while modelled as a culturally neutral lingua franca, English in fact appears to embody or instantiate the values

of a particular version of globalisation and thereby become inseparable from it. As a result, it renders any attempt to consider alternatives to the universal adoption of English as global language redundant. By the same token, it obscures a fundamental question: in what way does support for an emancipatory vision of globalisation necessarily in fact imply a positive understanding of the role of English in realising this vision? I want to consider first, then, how the interweaving of discourses on globalisation and discourses on language locates English as *the* language of progressive globalisation, before turning to the shift in its subjects and its sites.

Take, for example, the way Christian Mair (2002) responds to the need for an alternative narrative for English at what I identified above as its stumbling point, the end of the British Empire and of the Cold War. In his review of explanations for “the continuing spread of English in the world today”, Mair uses a language drawn from theories of globalisation to gather explanations for this spread of English into two camps, “the exploitation theory” and “the grassroots theory” (Mair 2002: 160). For the former set of views, Mair claims, globalisation is an “Anglo-American conspiracy” (p. 159) and English an “imperialist language”, “a language that conveys an Anglo-Saxon/ Western point of view” (p. 165). For the latter, on the other hand, the motor is a “global grassroots movement” with English as a “post-imperial” language (pp. 163-164), “an ideologically neutral lingua franca” (p. 165). Unsurprisingly, Mair favours the latter view, since it maps onto “the—in my view—very real possibility of social modernization that is not directly promoted by United States interests” (Mair 2002: 164). Attractive as such an aspiration undoubtedly is, the conflation of discourses provides a circular argument that is more advocacy for such a view of globalisation than an analysis of its actual dynamics. Furthermore, it constructs an image of English within a globalised context as a language of popular choice and one that is actively resistant to the very “Americanisation” of which it is accused by the defenders of “the exploitation theory”.

Martin Dewey (2007) builds on this sort of approach, employing an explicitly “interconnected perspective” between the discourses of globalisation and of linguistics to situate the Lingua Franca project. Borrowing explicitly from contemporary sociology (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton 1999), Dewey presents three positions in relation to globalisation—the hyperglobalist, the sceptical, and the

transformationalist—and maps them onto what he presents as three theoretical positions on contemporary English in the world. Interpretations of globalisation as a form of imperialism promoting “the hegemony of English” are classified as “hyperglobalist” and allied to a belief in a global market controlled by the West “leading ultimately to greater overall homogeneity” (Dewey 2007: 334). The sceptical position is, apparently, less anxious about globalisation, seeing it not as a moment of rupture, but as a long historical process in which national governments continue to retain a large measure of power. These two negative positions frame the transformationalist view of globalisation which, invoking Giddens and UNESCO, maintains that “[f]ears of homogeneity and cultural uniformity are ... largely unfounded, and human cultural diversity (although clearly met with significant challenges) remains in good health” (Dewey 2007: 336). In sum:

From a transformationalist perspective, globalization represents something other than straightforward Americanization or Westernization. While it is essential to acknowledge the obvious imbalance of power and inequality in the share of world resources, it is also possible to overstate the extent of the economic, political and cultural influence of Western powers. (Dewey 2007: 335)

The key corollary for Dewey is that, in the realm of English, “the significance of the native speaker can be similarly overstated” (Dewey 2007: 335). A “transformationalist take on globalization” demonstrates that traditional definitions of standard English based on the figure of the native speaker “are no longer suitable” (p. 347).

It is in the speaker of global English, then, that we see the connection between a theory of English imbued with the values of a given vision of globalisation, and the shift in the subjects and sites of English in a globalised context. According to Dewey the mainstream English Language Teaching profession aligns with the “sceptical” position in relation to globalisation inasmuch as their commitment to native-speaker models allegedly demonstrates their “neo-conservativ[e]” (p. 346) view that global English remains ultimately the property of the nation. Furthermore, on this basis, anti-imperialist and nationalist are cast as two sides of the same reactionary coin, inasmuch as the hyperglobalist critique, Dewey argues, effectively promotes the uniformity that, for him, characterises the position of those who advocate retaining native-speaker or national ownership (p. 348).

In other words, the “native speaker” comes to embody the imperial spectre. As a consequence, the “transformationalist” theory of globalisation offers the possibility of liberating both globalisation and English from the imperial inheritance represented by the Western powers on the one hand and the native speaker on the other. At the same time, by both invoking data concerning the variability of English in “lingua franca” interactions between non-native speakers “as evidence in support of the transformationalist hypothesis” (p. 337) and modelling English “in light of a transformationalist take on globalization” (p. 347), Dewey ensures that English as a language becomes characterised by the values that inform the transformationalist project, and that English as a Lingua Franca thereby becomes, in his word, an “integral” part of that postimperial cultural project (p. 334).

The new global subject of English

Dewey’s “transformationalist take” relies then on the important change in the terms of debate that was noted by Janina Brutt-Griffler in her book on *World English*: “From the fundamental question that inaugurated the field—the relation of the acquisition of English language and ‘English’ culture—scholars have increasingly turned to questions of standard and variety” (Brutt-Griffler 2002: 8-9). In other words, while, in analytic terms, the integration of English into an emancipatory project for globalisation hinges on the decentring of the native speaker model that had underwritten previous understandings, in discursive terms, the subject of cultural value and knowledge has been translated into the subject of stylistics.

In this context, it is certainly the case that, as Anna Mauranen and Maria Metsä-Ketelä point out, “The strong presence of the native speaker in linguistic theory has cast a long shadow on many fields of research as well as applications” (Mauranen and Metsä-Ketelä 2006: 3). Hitherto, the discourse of English as a world language for communication had been centred on the native-speaker—the human subject seen fundamentally as the subject of a nation or an ethnicity, and hence caught up in the asymmetries of relations between nations and communities. Thus, even if English as a Second Language had made room for members of postcolonial nation states or communities to speak a variety

of the metropolitan standard, a “new English” (Platt, Weber, and Mian Lian 1984), the imaginary British subject who speaks Standard English had remained persistently at the centre of what, since Braj Kachru’s (1985) pioneering description, has been conceived of as a set of “inner”, “outer” and “expanding” circles of English. Now, in place of these concentric subjects, theorists of ELF seek to de-centre English onto a new subject, constituted not by a single “pure” native-speaking individual, but by a plurality of heterogeneous non-native speakers. This new figure represents the postnational subject of globalisation since, although each individual may be a member of a nation-state, collectively they speak English primarily as a means of engaging in “globalised”—i.e. transnational and “transformational”—interactions.

As Jennifer Jenkins points out in her combative defence of *English as a Lingua Franca* (2007), previous “auxiliary languages”, like BASIC English (Ogden 1935), have all been simplified, cut-down versions of a native English standard.⁷ But ELF is so much *not* the English of the national subject that the latter is, in theory at least, effectively *excluded* from its conversations. As Jenkins explains:

ELF is the preferred term for a relatively new manifestation of English which is very different in concept from both English as a Second Language (ESL)—the label frequently given to outer circle Englishes—and English as a Foreign Language (EFL)—the traditional [...] label for English in the expanding circle. Unlike ESL varieties, it is not primarily a local or contact language *within* national groups but *between* them. And unlike EFL, whose goal is in reality ENL (English as a Native Language), it is not primarily a language of communication between its native speakers and non-native speakers, but among its non-native speakers. (Jenkins 2007: 4).

Put more simply by Barbara Seidlhofer, ELF is “a language which has no native speakers” (Seidlhofer 2001: 146). Conceiving ELF in this way brackets out, as it were, the whole problem of the dominance of national or imperial Anglophone cultures by excluding them from the theoretical and cultural context (if not entirely from the actual corpus).⁸

⁷ For relations between ELF and BASIC, see Seidlhofer 2002.

⁸ As Barbara Seidlhofer explains on the site of the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English, lingua franca interactions do in practice also include L1

This explicit shift in subject fulfils the communicative project of the 70s and 80s. By cancelling in this way the threat of contamination of the properties of English by its historical proprietors, ELF, it can be argued, does not bring with it any intrinsic cultural weight at all. As Juliane House maintains, it is because “ELF is not a national language” but “a mere tool bereft of collective cultural capital” (House 2003: 560), that it can serve as “language for communication” (p. 559). This does not necessarily mean that ELF has no relation at all to cultural identity. Christiane Meierkord argues that, as a *lingua franca*, English can certainly operate as “a ‘language stripped bare’ of its cultural roots”, a pure instrument; but it can also be what she calls “a ‘linguistic massala’”, a hybrid blend of codes in which speakers perform linguistic identities of their own choice (Meierkord 2002: 128-9). ELF, in other words, can be either language free from culture, or, inasmuch as it is able to transmit cultural values, it is a language whose cultural content is not a function of its “English”-ness, but of its users’ choice, according to “what culture a speaker wants to construct in a particular conversation” (Meierkord 2002: 128-9). In a word, far from being the language of Western (neo-)imperialism, English becomes the pure plastic medium of global multiculturalism.

“Lingua franca”

frank, a.

1. = FREE in various applications of the word; often *frank and free*.

a. Free in condition; not in serfdom or slavery.

Oxford English Dictionary

The discourse of ELF has clearly performed an important service that reflects in a number of ways the developing universe of English language

speakers of English: “Nevertheless, so-called non-native speakers of English commonly outnumber English native speakers in ELF interactions, a fact also represented in VOICE. Currently, speakers who have English as a first language make up less than 10 per cent of all speakers recorded in VOICE.” See VOICE at <http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/page/faq>, accessed 13 December 2009.

use and the questions it might pose. Not least of these is its role in promoting the visibility of non-native speakers of English and insisting that they be viewed as independent subjects of English, not as subjected to it. However, as the rest of this paper will argue, notwithstanding the name that has been attributed to it, in making the larger claims it appears to, “English as a Lingua Franca” may not be as “frank and free”, that is to say, as independent of English culture, nor, therefore, as candid and transparent, as it seeks or appears to be.

We have already observed how the conflation of ELF and that of a progressive project for globalisation ends up making the properties of each appear to inhere essentially in the other, so that, in advancing a particular and undoubtedly alluring view of globalisation, the terms in which ELF is described implicitly intensifies the privileged role of English in that project. This conflation is amplified by the term “lingua franca” itself. On the one hand, terminologically it denotes particular contexts of language use, the technical appropriateness of which in the case of English in the globalised context is open to debate within linguistics. Indeed, Yamuna Kachru and Larry E. Smith argue that “the current profile of [English] in the world” fails to qualify it as a lingua franca, according to any previous category so designated (Kachru and Smith 2008: 11). Be that as it may, the expression connotes cultural values well beyond its technical meaning within linguistics which may help account for its currency regardless of the various positions on the specific issue of standards and varieties taken by individual linguists. If we now look at the properties that, it is argued, make “Lingua Franca” a more appropriate designation than “English as an International Language”, “World English”, “World Englishes”, “Global English”, or any other possible nomenclature, we shall find ourselves returning to the issue of ownership and from thence to a conclusion.

The first reason Jennifer Jenkins gives for preferring “ELF” is precisely the idea the expression conveys of a language of a community made up of speakers of diverse national cultures. In this way, Jenkins points out, the appellation “ELF” is in marked contrast to its dominant predecessor, “EFL” (English as a Foreign Language). By characterising interactions between speakers of different languages as “lingua franca” communication, she argues, this term “suggests the idea of community as opposed to alienness; it emphasizes that people have something in common rather than their differences” (Jenkins 2007: 3). In this sense,

whereas English as a Foreign Language can be connoted with a culture of imperialist imposition and exclusion (“foreign”, “alien”), ELF is enhanced by association with the values of transnational communities.⁹

In the second place, the term “lingua franca” links contemporary international English to earlier instances of lingua francas. By attaching itself to the contexts for lingua francas in the past, Jenkins claims, ELF draws attention to the mixing of languages, to different voicing, to linguistic hybridity—all values associated with positive multicultural approaches to globalisation. Jenkins points out, furthermore, that because of the dynamic nature of lingua francas, the term also implies that non-native speakers are “at the forefront of innovation and change” in English as a global language (Jenkins 2007: 4).¹⁰ While national English remains connoted with a monocultural and conservative standard, ELF becomes intrinsically associated with the creative capacity of globalisation within hybrid third spaces.

Curiously, in responding to the expression “English as a Lingua Franca” we are in fact by now so used to thinking of English in the role of world language that we probably miss the irony implicit in the adoption of an apparently *Latin* term for global English. After all, although “Vulgar Latin” did develop in a variety of hybrid vernacular forms, later to evolve into the Romance languages, the status of the classical languages as the lingua francas of learning and the models of literary decorum in the Medieval and Early Modern periods cast a major shadow over the development of English as a national language (for a pertinent comparative historical discussion, see Meierkord 2006). In this sense, the original “triumph of English” (to recall again the phrase from

⁹ English as a Foreign Language need not, however, designate a reactionary attitude to the other: “But it is perhaps on the basis of that contemporary individualism’s subversion, beginning with the moment when the citizen-individual ceases to consider himself as unitary and glorious but discovers his incoherences and abysses, in short his ‘strangenesses’—that the question arises again: no longer that of welcoming the foreigner within a system that obliterates him but of promoting the togetherness of those foreigners that we all recognize ourselves to be” (Kristeva 1991: 2).

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the role of “exoteric” communication in the evolution of languages, see Wray and Grace 2007.

Jenner 19) was in fact the victory in Early Modern England of vernacular English over the classical languages, as recounted in Richard Foster Jones's 1953 study of *The Triumph of the English Language*. So too, part of Lord Macaulay's justification for the imperial role of English in the notorious 1834 Minute to Parliament on Indian Education was that "What the Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham our tongue is to the people of India" (Macaulay 1952: 724). In the twenty-first century, however, aligning English with Latin as a world language now has a thoroughly different purpose to such earlier national and imperial instances. Jenkins most of all favours the appellation, she tells us, because "the Latin name symbolically removes the ownership of English from the Anglos both to no one and, in effect, to everyone" (Jenkins 2000: 11).

"filius nullius"

If we remember the way in which, as I have maintained, discussions of language and culture revolve around notions of property, and, at the same time, how English in globalisation revolves around the importance of liberating it from the imperialist inheritance, Jenkins's "symbolic" move from "Anglos" to no one and thus everyone is, I would suggest, key. To make her point more forcefully, Jenkins reaches out here to Salikoko Mufwene's (1997) discussion of "legitimate and illegitimate offspring of English" in support of creole languages, in order to present ELF as a bastard offspring of English and non-native Englishes, of equal dignity with the native, "legitimate", language (Jenkins 2007: 16). Bearing in mind the importance Jenkins gives to the Latin name and the inheritance of Latin as a lingua franca in Britain, we should note that, in English law, the legal term for a bastard is "filius nullius", the child of no one. Crucially, under the Common Law, the "filius nullius" was not permitted to inherit from the father (Blackstone 1979 [1765-69]: I. 459).¹¹ Because of this, he or she relied on the community for

¹¹ Although the illegitimate child of a mother who died intestate became able to inherit in Britain under the Legitimacy Act of 1926 (but only if there were no

sustenance, and hence, by being the offspring of no one was, at the same time, considered to be “*filius populi*”, the child of everyone. Within the language of property, then, as a “*filius nullius*” ELF leaps free of any kinship with its patriarchal progenitor and simply *cannot* inherit the cultural values of English as a native, national or imperial language. Conceived as the illegitimate offspring of English with a variety of other L1s, it is a hybrid that defies the Order of the Father and breaks the relationship between language and nation. As a child of the people, a “*filius populi*”, it disturbs propriety, upsets hierarchy, and celebrates popular community.

In this way, the representation of English as a “*filius nullius*” not only finally dispels the spectre of neo-imperialism; it actually turns English into its opposite. English ceases to be the means for imposing a homogenous set of cultural values. Instead, it becomes associated with a polycentric and democratic dynamic that promotes heterogeneity and innovation in a process of globalisation theorised as a progressive movement. It is not the language that reflects and imposes globalised monocultures, but the deterritorialised, transnational language of “flows” and innovative, hybrid “third spaces”.¹² Conceived as a bastard language, a “love-child”, if you will, English is released from its historical association with nation and empire and transformed into an instrument for a multicultural vision of globalisation.

There is however a paradox here. Just like Widdowson’s metaphorical use of a peculiarly English mode of property (freehold/leasehold) in his influential statement on the ownership of language (Widdowson 1994: 385, cited above), the doctrine of non-inheritance regarding the “*filius nullius*” is native to *English* law. In Roman law, for example, the illegitimate child does inherit from the parents. So this is the key question: in what sense does removing English from its “belonging to England” (Johnson 1755) or from the possession of the

legitimate children), the general legal position of non-inheritance lasted until the Family Law Reform Act of 1969 (Morris 1970).

¹² In this respect, Allan James (2008) goes so far as to call English as a lingua franca a “post-geographical” language, pointing to the fact that the individuals who use English in a lingua franca function are not co-located in a particular *geographical* space.

“Anglos” (Jenkins 2000: 11) and conceiving it as a hybrid truly make it a “filius nullius”, a child that does not inherit the properties of its patriarchal parent? Or does this rather indicate that the cultural history and location of meaning is not quite so easy to escape? Although language is always subject to hybridisation and can always be used to make new meanings, it does not do so *ex nihilo* (to coin another lingua franca phrase); new and hybrid meanings are possible precisely because language does carry meanings *in potentia* that are culturally dependent and locatable and realisable in specific contexts – and not always under the subject’s ownership and control.

“... *in terra nullius*”

In other words, English as a lingua franca can be a “filius nullius” in the way Jenkins wishes it to be only in an “English” sense. Put another way, in terms of site rather than subject, English as a “lingua franca” can be free from the cultural locations of the language only to the extent that John Locke was right when he observed in 1698 that “In the beginning, all the World was America” (Locke 1988 [1698]: 301). By this I do not intend a glib assertion that globalisation is no more than Americanisation. Indeed, Locke meant a number of things by this striking statement; most importantly, from the perspective of narratives of Anglophone globalisation, by invoking America at this moment in the history of colonisation, he was making the continent stand as the instantiation of the legal doctrine of “terra nullius” (see Kayman 2006). The notion that the New World was “empty land”, land owned by no one, was central to the imperialist project. As Locke’s concept of the “tabula rasa” in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Locke 1979 [1690]) denied any pre-inscribed content to the human mind, the “terra nullius” wiped out previous possession from the New World; America was a blank space, ready for inscription by British values. Jenkins’s “filius nullius” is, I would venture, an idealised postmodern inversion of this imperialist concept—a language without owner or inheritance that operates in a context unscripted by earlier local meanings. Furthermore, the third spaces where the lingua franca is spoken are, in their turn, an idealisation of another, postmodern, sort of “terra nullius”: spaces across and between those of sovereign nations,

owned by none of them.¹³ If Locke's concept was a authority for colonisation, Jenkins's aims, most properly, to be an instrument for emancipation from it. Opposed as they are, what the imperialist and postimperialist arguments have in common however is that they are both, literally, "u-topian"; they exist in spaces where things have properties in the sense of having qualities or virtues, without already being the property of anyone in particular.¹⁴ But, if globalisation is driven by anything, it is by the commodification of everything—not least of all language, not least of all the "lingua franca" of global communication.

Within what is both an ideological and a commercial market for "English", then, the commodity "English as a Lingua Franca" is branded with values associated with an emancipatory vision of globalisation, associated with hybridity, innovation, and the creation of new communal contexts, third spaces crossing the boundaries of national frontiers. It is the language of the authentic global citizen: whatever their national language, this is the language that enables subjects as global citizens to communicate and thereby be part of the global community.

Conclusion

In sum, then, the very large cultural claims ELF makes for the English language have a number of potential effects. In the first place, the discourse of ELF obscures the other, arguably more dominant, role of English as the language of neo-liberal global capitalism, and thereby disarms any cultural threat posed by the role of English in globalisation. As I have been arguing, by associating the values of progressive postmodernist globalisation with "English" as a language, however qualified in terms of its standard forms, ELF positively enhances the image of English overall. In the same way as it is problematic to separate interactions between non-native speakers from interactions involving

¹³ For discussion of the relevance of the doctrine of *terra nullius* in the absence of sovereignty, see Ederington 1998.

¹⁴ One is, perhaps, reminded of Sebastian's comment on Gonzalo's rhapsodic imagining of a commonwealth with 'No Sovereignty' in *The Tempest*: 'Yet he would be King on't' (Shakespeare 1623: II, i).

both non-native and native speakers (see Berns 2008: 329), so too one cannot control the washback of values associated with the discourse of “English as a Lingua Franca” to English *tout court*. Even if by no means everyone subscribes to the proposals regarding standards in the formal project of “English as a Lingua Franca” being advanced by Barbara Seidlhofer, Jennifer Jenkins, Martin Dewey and others, the renaming of the object from “English as a foreign language” to “English as a lingua franca” has a serious appeal, as does the association of this discourse with that of a postmodernist vision of globalisation. In consequence, without attention to the technicalities of the debate, English becomes popularly associated with this positive vision of globalisation, and becomes globally branded as such—as can be seen, for example, in the British Council’s emphasis on English as the language of intercultural dialogue and its highly effective slogan for its role in globalisation: “making a world of difference” (British Council 2008).

By their nature, discourses on globalisation tempt one to offer “globalising” theories—theories that apply uniformly “to the world as a whole”. In the same way, then, the concept of English as a lingua franca subsumes into itself the range of specific cultural and institutional contexts in which English is actually used (see Phillipson 2008). Englobing interactions between non-native speakers as “lingua franca” in itself tends to smooth out all cultural specificity and associated power relations and suggests participation in one global community, united by that language—a “world language”, in short.¹⁵ Furthermore, by naturalising the role of English in globalisation, the language of the lingua franca contributes to the shutting off of the sort of alternatives for

¹⁵ One might recall in this context Jenkins’s point about lingua franca and “community”, based on the “something in common” of the interaction. If the Greek waiter’s use of English in satisfying the requirements of the German or American tourist, the Danish factory owner’s interactions with the Romanian or Cape Verdian worker, or exchanges between the security services of Poland and Morocco are signs of “community”, they are signs of communities of very particular kinds, and not all akin either to negotiations between the managers of multinational corporations, the intellectual exchange of scientists, or the amorous conversation of travelling youngsters (not that any of those are culturally symmetrical, either).

globalisation that are not based on English as a single (however varied) global language.

In one sense, English as a lingua franca might be conceived as a creature of the people, a *filius populi*, if what we mean by this is the wide variety of expressions in English and of communicative attitudes used spontaneously in “fleeting relationships” (Jaworski, Thurlow, Yläne, and Lawson 2009 (in press)) as millions of non-native speakers negotiate their exchanges with each other in the notoriously ad hoc and forgiving and accommodating spirit that conversation analysts tell us informs this language use (see, for example, Knapp and Meierkord 2002: 16-17). But, however much they may draw on this ethos, this does not appear to be what Seidlhofer, Jenkins or Dewey mean by “English as a Lingua Franca”. What is at issue here are the properties of ELF in a most fundamental sense; it is an issue of ontology—the very being of ELF as a language, rather than a repertoire of communicative strategies.

Seidlhofer is clear that “ELF has taken on a life of its own [...] and that warrants recognition” (2004: 212). For this autonomous existence to be recognised, she argues, English not only needs new theoretical properties; it also needs a body of its own. In order to establish “the real English of ELF speakers” according to the canons of “what [since the 1990s] constitutes legitimate descriptions of any language”, a massive “corpus” is needed which can then provide the empirical material for the codification and description that nowadays gives scientific being to language (Seidlhofer 2001: 150; 139).

There is however a hesitation here. As announced in 2001, the original purpose of the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE), directed by Seidlhofer, was “to explore the possibility of a codification of ELF with a conceivable ultimate objective of making it a feasible, acceptable and respected alternative to E[nglish as a]N[ative]L[anguage] in appropriate contexts of use” (Seidlhofer 2001: 150). Although in the area of phonology, the corpus constructed earlier by Jenkins had resulted in the specification of a “lingua franca core” for ELF pronunciation (as explained in Jenkins 2000), the precise ambitions for lexicogrammatical description to be undertaken by the VOICE team have become less clear with time. Seidlhofer had declared that “The overall objective will be to find out what salient common features of ELF use (if any, notwithstanding all the diversity) emerge” (Seidlhofer 2004: 219). But, as the release of the corpus drew nearer, the team became

more reticent, arguing that it is still “premature to ask questions about the degree to which ELF in Europe can be regarded as an actual variety (Euro-English) in any meaningful sense [...] As more descriptive findings become available, it will be interesting to see how they relate to issues of standardization versus self-regulation” (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, and Pitzl 2006: 21).¹⁶

Deferred or not, the “life of its own”, this “real English”, needs to come into being, if ELF is to be recognised. Be it through standardisation or self-regulation, the thrust of the corpus-based description would appear to be towards stabilisation. There is an evident tension between the transformative cultural claims being made for English as a dynamic, pluricentric lingua franca use, and the inevitably selective, relatively static consequences of codification. Why then seek to catch that particular wind? As Kachru and Smith (2008: 1) point out, “Codification is not a prerequisite for legitimizing a language.” Codification is juridical in nature. It legitimises options and establishes a standard, and a standard serves, amongst other things, to assess and validate competence; in the commodified world of English, validation is clearly essential in commercial and professional contexts. In other words, while ELF could compromise the traditional ownership exercised by native speakers, it does not throw English upon the public highway, as the (English) common lawyers might say. Or, in the words of Margie Berns (2008: 333), “identification of core features of non-native speech in an effort to control language performance and guarantee the success of this performance—even if the result is the overthrow of the tyrannical native speaker—is simply meeting the new boss who’s same [*sic*] as the old boss, or the hegemony of the old with the hegemony of the new.”

The term “lingua franca” means the language of the Franks, derived from the Arabic, “*lisan al-firanj*”, the “language of the Western/ Latin speaking Europeans” (Barotchi 2001: 503-4). “Frank and free” is the expression used by the common law to describe one who is not a “villeyne” or slave. The *OED* tells us that “francus” was “originally identical with the ethnic name *Francus* [...] which acquired the sense of

¹⁶ The release of VOICE was originally announced for the autumn of 2008, and it finally became available in May 2009.

“free” because in Frankish Gaul full freedom was possessed only by those belonging to, or adopted into, the dominant people.” The need to shift from Anglocentric and nation-based maps of English and to recognise non-native uses or approaches to using English should not obscure us to the larger issues of cultural politics raised by the various roles English plays within the globalised context.

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