
Re(locating) TESOL in an Age of Empire

Review by Neil McBeath

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RE(LOCATING) TESOL IN AN AGE OF EMPIRE. Julian Edge (ed.), 2006, Palgrave Macmillan, \$80.00 (Hardcover), ISBN 1 4039-8530-8, 256 pages

This is a book from the Palgrave Macmillan Language and Globalization series, and consists of 12 papers, some of which were delivered at a symposium at the Centre for the Study of Professional Discourse and Development at Aston University in December 2003. Other papers were added after the idea of a collection became public.

So much for the background. As it stands, this is a very important collection of papers because it is concerned with what we, as teachers in a globalized economy, and in a political system dominated by a single superpower, actually do to maintain or challenge the status quo.

To this end, the first two papers counterpoise one another. Kumaravadivelu's "Dangerous Liaison: Globalization, Empire and TESOL" (pp. 1-26) examines political and cultural globalization before turning to "The American Empire" (pp. 9-12) and the philosophical conundrum posed by the fact that "English as a language of global communication also doubles as an effective tool of global propaganda in times of war and peace" (p. 13). He believes, however, that attitudinal and pedagogic investment can create a method that is content-specific, and which will resist appropriation by the voices of the politically dominant.

By contrast, the late Brumfit's "What, Then, Must We Do? Or Who Gets Hurt When We Speak, Write and Teach?" (pp. 27-48) explores both old and new tensions in language policy and planning. His analysis leads to a model where educated speakers of English could become the only monolinguals in the world, a scenario he describes as "a pessimistic prediction" (p. 46). He concludes with a series of practical, but ethical, imperatives, recognizing that "the question is not how to remove English, but how to use something for which there is a demand, and use it as honestly and justly as possible" (p. 47).

Other papers in the collection take up this theme. Benesch's "Critical Media Awareness; Teaching Resistance to Interpellation" (pp. 49-64) explores a linguistic phenomenon not unique to English. Put simply, interpellation is the construction of a "reality" based on the way in which specific groups or nationalities are portrayed, often

in the media. As a British child of the 1950's, I grew up in a world where "German" and "Japanese" were automatically terms of opprobrium. Working in Saudi Arabia, I live in a world where the term "Muslim" is the highest praise.

Benesch takes up Lippi-Green's (1997) exploration of the Disney corporation's use of native (good) and nonnative (bad) accents in cartoon films, and suggests that "critical media awareness joins many skills that are useful to English language learners (p. 63). On the evidence that she presents, it is hard to fault her analysis.

Kutoba's "Teaching second languages for national security purposes: A case of post-9/11 USA" (pp. 119-138) argues that, within America, there is a contradiction between the English-only lobby's belief that English is superior to other languages, and the dawning realization that heritage languages may be an asset. The difficulty here is that this interpellation rests on unspoken features like race and class. As Lo Bianco (2002) has indicated, bilingualism in a wealthy (probably white) native-speaker of English is a social accomplishment, while bilingualism in a poor non-white immigrant is a social evil.

Similarly, Katunich's "Equity and English in South African Higher Education: Ambiguity and Colonial Language Legacy" (pp. 139-157) points to the paradox that, for speakers of African languages, English is regarded as a benign influence, "a vital tool for transcending persistent racial and ethnic divisions" (p. 154). In this instance, interpellation suggests that Afrikaans is bad and that English is therefore still the language of liberation.

Sellami's "Slaves of Sex, Alcohol and Money: (Re)locating the Target Culture of English" (pp. 171-194) remains in Africa, but examines the results of a survey conducted with Moroccan students. It also raised questions in this reviewer's mind. The research revealed "stigmatized perceptions and stereotypical views of Americans and British" (p. 177), but Sellami makes no attempt to explore the extent to which Franco-Spanish influences are conflated with the concept of "the West." Yes, EFL textbooks sometimes display female flesh, bottles of alcohol and suggest a hedonistic lifestyle where attractive young people appear to spend money without thought of tomorrow. Is it not possible, however, that nightly exposure to French and/or Spanish television will have a greater influence on attitudes than any series of school textbooks?

And, ultimately, this book is about attitudes. Edge suggests that "whatever else we represent and unwittingly teach along with English, it may be that how we are as teachers and as people remains crucial to the way we are perceived by others" (p. 116). This, however, assumes that we are seen as individuals, and not perceived as representatives of some interpellated "other."

References

- Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language ideology and discrimination in the United States*. London: Routledge.
- Lo Bianco, J. (2002). Uncle Sam & Mister Unz. *Australian Language Matters* 10, 8-10.

About the Reviewer

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Conference Announcements

English Language Teachers Association of India. February 8-10, 2008. Third International and 39th Annual ELTAI Conferene, "Learning to Teach: A Life-long Journey," Satyabhama University, Chennai, India. E-mail eltai_india@yahoo.co.in. Web site <http://www.eltai.org>.

Reading Recovery Council of North American, Inc. February 9-12, 2008. National K6 Literacy Conference, Greater Columbus Convention Center, 400 North High Street, Columbus, Ohio, USA. E-mail jwhite@readingrecovery.org. Web site <http://www.readingrecovery.org/conferences>.

4th CamTESOL Conference on English Language Teaching. February 23-24, 2008. "Building Bridges to the World," National Institute of Education, Norodom Blvd corner Suramarit Street, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Telephone 855-23-212113, Fax: 855-23-426608, E-mail info@camtesol.org. Web site <http://www.camtesol.org>.

FEELTA/NATE. June 26-28, 2008. "Building Bridges with Languages and Cultures," Far Eastern National University, Vladivostok, Russia. E-mail feeltacon@dvgu.ru. Web site <http://www.feelta.wl.dvgu.ru/upcoming.htm>.