

The Role of English in the Globalizing World

Bořivoj Hnízdo: The Role of English in the Globalizing World, Prague, Metropolitan University Prague, o.p.s. First Edition, 233 pages., ISBN 978-80-86855-82-0

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This interesting publication examines a phenomenon which inspires a range of political and cultural debates all over the world—namely the role of English in the contemporary world. In his introduction the author presents a fundamental hypothesis based on the assumption that *“the role of English in the contemporary globalizing world is the most important among all other world languages and constantly growing, but it is not principally superimposed to the other international languages,”* and that *“assertions about an exceptional position of English have definite limits”*. One of them is that in the modern world, English is not the only language of broader international communication. Other languages play that role as well. Some of them may be less influential than in the past (German, Russian or Japanese), but the role of other languages is growing more important (Chinese, Arabic or Spanish). The author asks if the present technological progress makes English more important or if other languages also benefit from it.

The development of English today relies chiefly on the increase of

speakers using the language as their second tongue. In contrast to the conventional wisdom about this group consisting of inhabitants of America and Africa, where English is the official language (Graddol, 1997), the author builds the theory that in certain conditions associated with the globalization processes today, *“it is possible to include in this group also some countries of Asia and mainly Europe, where English is not an official language”*.

In the opening chapters the author examines terminological and methodological problems and analyses reference literature and sources. In order to cover the given topic as broadly as possible, the publication is divided to three parts.

The first part is mostly informative and presents a survey of English-speaking countries of the world. It ensues from the work of D. Crystal, the most widely recognized expert in this field, but includes the author's inputs. The division of Anglophone countries to those with a prevalence of speakers using English as their first language (States L1) and states with a larger community of speakers using English as their second tongue (L2) can be found e.g. in D. Graddol's thesis, although his division is not so pronounced. The author includes in the L2 group also certain states where English is not an official language but always properly justifies his classification and uses individual cases to document the role of English in the globalizing world. By pointing out atypical countries (South Africa, Belize or Singapore) he also em-

phasizes a trend of potential transition between both groups of Anglophone countries, i.e. between L1 and L2.

The second part of the publication addresses problems of English as an international language. It is also based on outcomes published in the world specialized literature but most of its content is the result of the author's research. Thus the chapter on the role of English in international relations actually ensues from his previous theses. The same applies to the chapter on the teaching of English as a foreign language, where the primary sources employ statistics of European Union institutions (Eurydice) or the Czech Institute for Information in Education). Also other chapters on English as the international language of the media, culture, and entertainment, and information communication are based on sources available mainly on the internet. The same source also provides information about the use of English websites on the net in comparison with the use of websites in other languages (internet-worldstats.com).

The third part of the publication examines if the contemporary standing and role of English is really completely exceptional and it is really the only global language, and whether English will retain its position within a foreseeable future. This part is at the same time a contribution to the discourse about the role of English in what is referred to as linguistic imperialism. The author endeavoured to clarify and typologically differentiate the language policies of all Anglophone countries and thus

also analyse their relations with other languages used in those countries. He geared thus far not often discussed topic of language policies on English in countries where it is not an official language towards the Czech Republic.

The author based the issue of future of English on four main topical areas. The first is demographic growth in Anglophone countries. He used especially the latest EU statistical data within the second area concerning the numbers of students learning English as a foreign language—the issue which hints a lot about the future role of English as an international language. As his third topic concerning the future role of English he selected its relationships with other international languages. The fourth and last area concerning the future is the so-called Anglosphere—i.e. interaction of the English-speaking countries within the system of international relations. This last topic is in complete harmony with the concept and structure of the publication, since the author examines the role of English in the various countries and in the global context in its political connotations as a political issue and a matter of understanding the development of international relations.

Overall the publication can be described as an original attempt to fill the gap in scientific literature written in Czech. It is a nearly flawless efforts in terms of language used linguistics and contents—with only minor transgressions against the accepted Czech name of the official language of Tonga (p. 69) and the incorrect statement that

there are four official languages in Tuvalu (p. 71, actually there are two), which imperfections are easily pardonable. It should be noted that besides English and French, Bislama is another official language in Vanuatu (p. 68), being essentially a creolized form of the widespread Pidgin English; the author omitted the islands of Curaçao and St. Maarten from the Netherlands Antilles, mentioned in connection with the Netherlands (p. 74)—these are now separate territories associated to the Netherlands. With the Anglophone countries the author should have divided the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau (p. 71) into individual territories; moreover, we miss data on the use of English there. Critical comments are basically concerned only with the typology of Anglophone countries and cartographic supplements. They were borrowed from various online sources, identified below the maps, but names of the maps are missing and it is often difficult to decipher what actually they depict. The typology lacks a uniform structure—countries with a prevalence of English-speaking populations are ordered by the size of population, which is less than easy to survey but certainly quite original and interesting, while the second category is geographically divided with states sometimes ordered by the size of population, although this does not seem to be the rule. The very geographic division seems to be disputable, although the author's regionalization is easy to understand in view of the frequency of incidence of Anglophone countries: on one hand there is Asia with only four items as a

whole, but on the other hand Africa with many items is divided into regions. However, these minor inconsistencies do not hijack the book's appeal and its content is sure to please both experts and the lay element.

