Epilogue: Ways Forward for Global English

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1. Similarities and Disjunctures

In closing this special issue, I seek to pull out some similarities and disjunctures that have emerged in the contributions to this special issue in order to consider how the study of global English might fruitfully be moved forward. I want to begin, however, by emphasizing, as Mufwene also finds himself needing to do, that my position "is not a denial of social injustice", in fact, quite the contrary. Clearly, injustice is everywhere: in grotesque levels of inequality in the distribution of wealth, resources and privilege at global, national and community level. People across the world have their life and livelihood torn apart by war, poverty, famine, exploitation, violence, discrimination, many without the prospect of ever bettering their life. The global climate emergency and pandemics also strike unequally, exacerbating existing inequalities. Like so many others, I am not blind to such injustices and inequalities. Rather, what I have sought to convey, is an uncertainty over the power of linguistics in accounting for and addressing this injustice.

Taken in their entirety, I read the responses as being in overall agreement with the idea that language has to be co-thought with the social, political, economic world in order to understand and tackle these injustices and their tendency to hit differentially according to race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual preference, etc. As Pecorari puts it: "Hultgren is right, then, to warn against the danger of scapegoating English if doing so blinds us to the root causes of the disparity in access to the world's lingua franca." Block too, in his contribution, emphatically sums up this position:

> […] a focus on language is not what is required to make the world a better place. In short, it is not going to have much effect on the ongoing march of capitalism and the increasing inequality and the damage to the environment that it engenders. Something far more revolutionary is in order: indeed, a real revolution is in order. And here the kinds of things that have tended to concern applied linguists, such as the different takes on English in the world that Hultgren highlights, are not likely to make a big contribution to the cause. (Block, this special issue)

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Notwithstanding this overall agreement, I also detect some variance among contributors over how central language should be in our analyses. Canagarajah, Soler and Lønsmann question the primacy of either the linguistic and the non-linguistic world whereas Block, Mufwene, Saarinen and Ennser-Kananen's seem to more readily accept the primacy of the social, material world. Such variance, I believe, is more likely to stem from differences in interpretation of the central question than any underlying disagreement. In other words, what do we actually *mean* when we say that language and non-language need to be co-thought? It seems that in thinking about this, we often end up tying ourselves into a knot. Nonetheless, for the sake of an accurate diagnosis of any given "problem", it would be helpful to try to tease out more precisely what this relationship might consistent of. There is more meticulous, painstaking, rigorous research to be done that aims at disentangling the relationship between the linguistic and the non-linguistic sphere (Martín Rojo and Del Percio 2019; Cameron 2012). Saarinen and Ennser-Kananen's invitation to try to "take our eye away from the language" is a powerful and useful exercise for all linguists. We could ask ourselves: Could a non-linguist research the same thing as we do? Would their understanding of the problem in question be better, poorer or the same? Might it be complementary? What specific insights does an applied linguistics perspective add to our understanding of a given problem?

Aside from the challenges involved in operationalising the relationship between the linguistic and the non-linguistic sphere, another question to ask is what do we mean by "language"? Certainly, the ontological status of "language" has been seriously problematized in recent years. In her contribution, Fabricius challenges the entire idea of "global English", which she sees as a "myth, a reified construct, an enregisterment". "Translanguaging" and related concepts have been helpful in forcing us to de-reify and de-essentialise "language". However, whilst translanguaging can be useful in tackling normative ideologies about "correct English", such as those Jenkins, Crystal and Brutt-Griffler highlight in their contributions, it is doubtful that it is sufficient on its own to get to grips with and challenge unequal power structures (Jaspers 2017). This is because it too is primarily a language-based construct that does not accord sufficient attention to non-linguistic inequalities (Jaspers 2017).

Some authors in this special issue view applied linguistics as making a valuable contribution to our understanding of the world by serving as a sort of litmus test for the social world. As Lønsmann puts it: "As a scholar interested in both language and social justice, it is clear to me that a critical applied linguistic perspective affords us a way to use language as a lens to investigate underlying social inequalities." Pecorari, similarly, argues that, "English indexes the problem; it doesn't create the problem". This seems clear when we consider the case of the use of English as a medium of instruction in post-colonial contexts. Often this will impact particularly severely on those linguistic groups that are already marginalized for other reasons, economically, politically, socially. English as a medium of instruction not only exposes those existing inequalities but may even exacerbate them. However, where language-related phenomena can serve as indicators of inequalities and point us to where they exist, they should not lure us into thinking that focusing on language is enough.

Having said this, contributors to this special issue have sharpened my understanding by pointing to cases in which language "on its own" *can* be discriminatory. This seems to be the case when language is interpreted as "language ideologies"—that is the beliefs people have about language and their value. As Jenkins, Crystal, Brutt-Griffler and Soler all show, using English in "non-native-like ways" (I hope it is clear that I use this term advisedly) may lead to actual (real-world) exclusions, discrimination and unfairness, whether this is manifested in "non-native-speaking" teachers of English being paid less, "non-native-speaking" students not gaining a place at university because they deviate from Anglocentric IELTS-norms or "non-native-speaking" scholars not being published. So clearly, even if language itself is not a cause for inequality, the ways in which people think about language and particular varieties, and the values they attach to them, can have real world consequences. What I also notice, however, in Brutt-Griffler's contribution is that factors other than language may contribute to this disadvantage. Brutt-Griffler reveals how multilingualism appears to be valued more highly by the educational system in the context of affluent parents deliberately choosing to send their children to bilingual schools. In other words, bilingualism may be valued more positively when it is associated with affluence, privilege and prestige. There appear to be other things, then,

such as wealth, status and pre-existing privilege, that are imbrued in the values associated with particular linguistic ideologies.

A final thing that seems important to pull out from the contributions are the voices that express more positive views of English. Often, and importantly, these voices come from marginalised, less powerful groups. Philipson is therefore right to point out that his own critical writings conceptualising English as an act of "linguistic imperialism" have always also highlighted the appeal of English to people across the world (the "pull factors" of English) (Philipson 1992). Nonetheless, I hope it is not a misrepresention to say that, collectively, the field of global English has tended to focus more on the threats than on the opportunities, as reflected in terms to describe English: "Tyrannosaurus Rex", "Hydra", "Trojan Horse", "Cuckoo", "Killer Language", "Lingua Frankensteinia" (Rapatahana and Bunce 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas 2003; Swales 1997; Cooke 1988; Phillipson 2006, 2008). Crystal was not blind to the hypocrisy he felt when engaging in "a monologue about language diversity, identity, [and] the importance of maintaining such wonderful languages" in Southern Africa when all his local driver wanted was for his children to learn English so that they could become doctors or teachers. As Crystal writes: "How dare I, with my nice computer and my nice TV and my nice garden, lecture someone who has none of these things, who is struggling to keep a family alive with a reasonable quality of life, about the importance of language diversity!" Canagarajah echoes this important point:

> Many underprivileged communities treat English as empowering for them. When I talk to communities who are labeled lower caste in South Asia, and I encourage them to maintain their heritage languages, they accuse me and other scholars of hypocrisy. They were denied a knowledge of English in the past. They argue that scholars can engage in the luxury of debating the politics of English and its power, when we already know the language. For people who have been historically denied the language, the need to learn it is urgent. It appears as if all of us scholars are assuming English as an evil. But not everyone agrees. (Canagarajah, personal communication)

So as Crystal reminds us in his contibution, it is important for applied linguists to "listen", even if what we hear may not always further our own agenda of linguistic diversity.

Perhaps the more we are able to disentangle language from underlying structures of inequality, we can come to recognise the more

positive views of English held by so many people in the world. English is not only ideological, it is also often a pragmatic choice. Perhaps the more we manage to reorient our attention to the underlying non-linguistic factors that produce injustice, and tackle these separately, we will come to see English more in line with how many of its users and learners see it: not only as a threat but also as a force for good that offers opportunity and enables communication and understanding between speakers who would not otherwise have been able to interact. The work already done by English as a lingua franca scholars to promote an ideological shift towards greater tolerance of "non-native" ways of speaking has been hugely important and will no doubt continue to be so. Of course, as Lønsmann shows, we should not forget those whose English proficiency is so limited that they are excluded from certain aspects of professional, personal and civic life. Work needs to be done, therefore, for instance through translation and other means, to ensure that everyone has equal access to essential societal resources.

It is also useful to be mindful of Haberland's suggestion to lower our expectations when it comes to eradicating linguistic and other types of injustice. In any multilingual context, there is always a risk of inequality and exlusion, regardless of which languages are promoted at policy level. Haberland points out that the process of achieving equality on one front is likely to produce other inequalities. Given that English has the world's greatest number of speakers, it will, however, in many linguistically diverse situations be the language that excludes fewest interactants. Calqued on the old saying about democracy, and echoing my reading of Van Parijs's contribution, it might be apt to sum up the debate so far as such: *English is the most unequal medium for international communication, except all other languages*.

2. Where Do We Go From Here?

There is no doubt that the expansion of English and its rise to become the world's most widely spoken language is linked to power and politics. As described in my position statement (Hultgren), it is not by chance that the historical junctures at which the English language has spread coincide with the imperialist expansion of English-speaking peoples and nations. Following this, I would therefore surmise that if we want to understand the spread of English, we will need to get to the bottom of the underlying

power dynamics that help propagate it. I would echo Soler's contribution and suggest that this cannot happen without attention to recent decades' shift to neoliberalism which causes increasing areas of social life to be governed according to "market logics" (Martín Rojo and Del Percio 2019). As Barakos argues, if we want to truly understand linguistic injustices, we must try to tease out the notion of power in the formation of inequalities. Barakos joins Harvey in questioning whether it is at all possible to talk about injustice without attending more specifically to the power dynamics operating in specific places at specific times (Barakos 2019; Harvey 1996). As Haberland says: we need to "mak[e] clear who owns and who controls what".

To do this, I would suggest that linguists need to engage to a greater extent in interdisciplinary research. It has been argued that incorporation of political theory is crucial for applied linguists to gain a better understanding of the political, economic and social conditions that produce (linguistic) inequality and injustice (Aronin et al. 2018; Block 2018; Block et al. 2013; Ricento 2015; Morales-Gálvez and Stojanovic 2017; Léger and Lewis 2017; Flores 2013; Flores and Chaparro 2018). Methodologies and theories need to be expanded in order to allow us to understand the political, economic, social and cultural systems and processes that undergird the current world order and cause English—or any language—to expand.

> Going forward, scholars may have to shift the centrality of language as a scholarly entry point towards looking at which agents, institutions, affects, discourses, and ideologies shape the way language is vested in (re)producing justice. So […] the major concern with linguistic over social justice matters runs the risk of centralizing language without paying enough attention to power issues, stratification, race, gender, class, and ethnicity—in short, the social life surrounding language. (Barakos 2019: 12)

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