

## 'A world empire by other means'?

The above, without the question mark, was the title of an article on world English published not long ago (in a section titled 'Christmas special: The triumph of English' in *The Economist* of 22 Dec 01). This article has been in the back of my mind for some time, and my review in this issue of *ET* of the recently published *Appropriating English* brought it into the foreground. I haven't mentioned it in the review, although *AE* forcefully raises the issue of neo-imperialism. The discussion of a new empire of English rising out of the older British and more recent American 'hegemony' seems to go in cycles, and may be growing stronger again. But is it enough in 2002, or is it maybe past its sell-by date?

Says the *Economist* piece: '[English] is the language of globalisation – of international business, politics and diplomacy. It is the language of computers and the Internet. You'll see it on posters in Côte d'Ivoire, you'll hear it in pop songs in Tokyo, you'll read it in official documents from Phnom Penh. Deutsche Welle broadcasts in it. Bjork, an Icelander, sings in it. French business schools teach in it.... It is now the global language.'

Yes. All true. But does the empire-by-other-means perspective really still apply, in the Côte d'Ivoire and with Bjork? Might it not be all-too-easy a peg to hang present-day issues on?

Of course English bestrides the world like a colossus because of the British Empire, because of the projection of quasi-imperial American power, and because of the current global triumph of Westernism through its science, industry, its business schools, and some of its languages, most notably English. Yet, as Braj B. Kachru and others have pointed out, the empire struck back. There is indeed a linguistically Anglocentric tide in the world and a pre-eminence of Western-inspired science, technology, and trading style, but what we have now, it seems to me, is a *post-post-imperial* state of affairs. It might even be said that English is less a tool of the neo-imperialists than a key element in the creation of a unified world in which swords (by and large) can be beaten into ploughshares and the meek have-nots may even get enough decent treatment from the rich to inherit some of the better things on earth. It might be good to discuss this in *ET*.

Tom McArthur

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## Bigotry

From Bryan A. Garner  
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On the descriptive-prescriptive debate, there is no easy out for Richard W. Bailey. The linguist Andrew Dalby had it right when he said that "Bailey is shot down, trapped by his own unpleasant anti-Texan innuendo" (Apr 01). Whether my piece answering Bailey (Oct 00) is a "diatribe" (as Bailey asserts) or a closely reasoned refutation is for *ETs* readers to decide.

Now Bailey has written anew (July 01) in a way that cannot be ignored. He extends his polemical *ad hominem*s with this: "He is a Texan, and he ought to be proud of using English like a Texan." As if I'm not, and as if I don't. What does he think it is to "use English like a Texan"? Texas is a big state and not everyone here writes or speaks in the same way. Isn't this an absurd piece of stereotyping after what he has already said? Remember Bailey's words):

"Garner is a Texan y'all-speaker . . . [He was] an undergraduate at the University of Texas at Austin .... Curiously, for an undergraduate at the University of Texas, Garner seems not to have discovered James Sledd .... Garner has tried to make Fowler modern, but ... [a] Texan shouldn't ... have tried.... Garner might return, in his imagination, to those thrilling days of yesteryear at the University of Texas"

He wasn't accusing me of mimicking Fowler. He was displaying invidious bigotry.

You don't have to be a lawyer to know that wrongdoers, when caught, deny whatever it is they were doing.

Now Bailey says that I made "essentially two points": (1) he is a snob, and (2) he is a prescriptivist. I'm sorry to have to explain in

greater detail, but those were not my points at all.

My main points about Bailey were as follows (pretty much in this order): (1) like many descriptive linguists, he is so prejudiced against prescriptivism that he cannot acknowledge any value in it – even when there are demonstrable lexicographic contributions; (2) he has dogmatically assumed that language is immune to ignorant or careless handling; (3) his tendentious approach led him into many irresponsible assertions that were easily refuted; and (4) he appealed to regional bigotry to support his otherwise insupportable arguments. This from the president of the Dictionary Society of North America.

Let it not be forgotten that he essentially tried to shame Oxford University Press for having published my *Dictionary of Modern American Usage*, in his review in *Dictionaries* in 1999). That's low beyond description. In any event, he certainly didn't squelch the second edition, which will be out in 2003.

I renew my call for a truce between descriptivists and prescriptivists, but it can't work without civility and integrity on both sides.

## Worldviews: East and West

From John Algeo  
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Several responses to Zuo Biao's article "Lines and Circles, West and East" (*ET* 17:3, Jul 01) have focused on Professor Zuo's comments on language. Those comments, however, made up only about one-twelfth of the article, most of which dealt with differences in such cultural factors as worldview, values, temporal concepts, logical orientation, and general sensibilities. Admittedly, linguistic observations, insofar as

they are analytical and empirical, are easier to assess objectively than worldviews, values, and other such generalizations. But even language is not limited to its analytical structure and empirical facts, and the worldviews and values of cultures are not unimportant matters. Indeed, the problems that have dominated international affairs since September 11th are arguably the result of a conflict, not so much of foreign policy or economics, as of cultural values. At the present time, English is the dominant language in commerce, finance, technology, communication, science, transportation, and other aspects of modern culture; with that linguistic dominance has come the spread of the popular culture of the largest body of native English speakers, namely Americans. The result is, for some cultures, a dilemma: to participate in the modern world requires the use of English and thus exposure to Anglo-American culture; but both of those represent a serious threat to the integrity of cultures that are resistant to adapting to the modernist values underlying Anglo-American culture and spread by the English language. The resulting frustration is expressed in assaults like those of September 11th.

I believe that the unrest and dangers that beset the world today are rooted less in political and economic competition than in cultural conflicts of worldviews and values. Zuo Biao's article addresses contrasting worldviews in a symbolic way by positing two very general approaches to life, which he identifies as linear Western and circular Eastern. No generalization can be pushed to an extreme, but Professor Zuo does not push. On the contrary, his symbolic contrast between Western Anglo-American and Eastern Sinitic worldviews is insightful, stimulating, challenging, and potentially useful in fostering intercultural understanding. For

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those reasons, we are reprinting most of it in the July-August issue of the *Quest* magazine, which is devoted, in part, to encouraging the comparative study of cultures.

## A historical perspective

From Peter K. W. Tan  
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I just wanted to say that I appreciated Paul Rastall's article on English in a historical perspective in *English Today* 70 (Vol 18, No. 2) because I too am teaching a module on the history of English, but to Singaporean students. It rightly

belongs to the curriculum of undergraduate students specialising in English Language. It would be unthinkable for these students to graduate and not have any notion of where the English language comes from.

However, in the context of Singapore where the history syllabus in schools is very parochial and very Asia-focussed and therefore students are hazy about who the Romans – more so the Celts and the Normans – are, it would sometimes seem an uphill battle just introducing the basics and challenging the charge of irrelevance.

Part of the way I approach it is roughly the way Rastall has indicated – in that history is relevant in explaining how English is used today. Much of English spelling seems much less haphazard if we

have some sense of earlier pronunciations. At the risk of oversimplification of the vocabulary and grammatical system, I also present much of informal, spoken English as being more Germanic in character; whereas literary English has undergone Frenchification (is 'Gallicisation' more PC?) and academic, scientific English has undergone Latinisation.

Finally, a little aside. I noticed that in recent issues of *English Today*, the photographs of contributors were no longer included. I know that in journals, nobody includes the photos of contributors but it seemed a nice touch when I first saw them and I always enjoyed being able to put a face to a name. Any chance of having them re-instated? ■