**ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SPREAD TO CONTEMPORARY TAIWAN:**

**AN EXAMPLE OF AMERICAN 'LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM’?**

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For the

**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR CHINESE STUDIES**

**53rd Annual Conference**

**University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA**

**October 14–16, 2011**

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Although linguists have been willing to study from the perspectives of other fields (*e.g.,* sociology as in *sociolinguistics* and psychology as in *psycholinguistics*), the opposite has not been true. Schlossman (1983) points out that experts in economic, political, and social history have rarely dealt with linguistics. However, one language expert made a major foray into history and political science in 1992. His name is Robert Phillipson. With degrees from Cambridge and Leeds universities, as well as a doctorate from the University of Amsterdam, he worked for a time with the British Council (which sets English language policy) and is now professor emeritus at the Copenhagen Business School. His name became widely known in his field when he published his most famous book, *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992). In it, he makes the case that the dominance of the English language worldwide is by design. International forces, from nation-state governments, transnational organizations concerned with economic policy (*e.g.,* the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), and global corporations, play a role in maintaining the language’s global importance to preserve their dominance.

His perspective has been controversial, to say the least, and is still argued today. In fact, in 2009, Phillipson published *Linguistic Imperialism Continued*, an anthology of articles he had written since 1992, defending his thesis.

Phillipson (1992) defines linguistic imperialism as “*the dominance of English . . . asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages* [Phillipson’s italics]” (p. 47), suggesting an imposition of inequality is created by the spread. His work is groundbreaking because it is a first attempt to provide a comprehensive, theoretical analysis of the spread of English and its status as a world language. Overall, his outlook is based on a 19th century understanding of empire building. His book attempts to prove the existence of linguistic imperialism primarily through a discussion of language policy in India when it was a colony of the British Empire and of the Philippines when it was a colony of America. His description of linguistic imperialism appears to be less accurate when applied to political situations in East Asia after the Second World War, specifically to the way in which English came to contemporary Taiwan

**Linguistic Imperialism: Background**

The English language developed in the second century ad from a mix of Lower Saxon and Anglo-Frisian dialects spoken by peoples who lived in what is now southern Denmark and northwestern Germany. By the turn of the 20th century, estimates were that approximately 1.7 billion people throughout the world spoke English as a first or second language (Crystal, 1997). Perhaps more amazing is that this expansion of the language occurred predominantly over the past 150 years. Initiated primarily by the strength of the British Empire, this expansion continues today, propelled by the economic power of the United States of America and advances in communication technology during the latter half of the 20th century.

As articulated by Braj B. Kachru, director of the Division of English as an International

**Inner Circle**

(*e.g.,* Australia, United Kingdom, United States)

**Outer Circle**

(*e.g.,* India, Nigeria, South Africa, *etc.*)

**Expanding Circle**

(*e.g.,* Japan, **Taiwan**)

***Figure 1***. **Kachru (1984) envisioned the spread of English as a series of concentric circles .**

Language at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in 1984, English has spread from the “Inner Circle” lands of the native speakers (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to an “Outer Circle” where England is the second language primarily for business and education (*e.g.,* India, Nigeria, Singapore, and South Africa) to an

“Expanding Circle” where English has only recently played any role for purposes of business and technology (*e.g.,* Japan and Taiwan) (***Figure 1***). “World English” has come to refer to the use of the English language once it spread beyond the Inner Circle. Subsequently, Phillipson (1992), with the Kachruvian paradigm as background, posed the following question: Should language be forced on people who do not speak it through the creation of situations in which these people must learn it as a second language to continue to function in society?

**The Case for Phillipson’s Linguistic Imperialism**

In *Nation of Nations*, the 1,400-page tome of American history, Davidson *et al.* (1991) writes:

It is an unusual culture indeed that does not fancy its own ways superior to those of foreign peoples. The Cheyenne called themselves “the human beings,” implying that no one else had ever reached that rank. The Greeks and Romans, and, later, other civilizations of Middle Ages Europe believed their culture to be superior. But the Industrial Revolution gave Western expansion in the 19th century a worldwide aggressiveness that had seen no equal in Western history. Added to this expansion was Darwin’s notion that the fittest animal species survived through a process of natural selection. Social Darwinists, such as England’s Herbert Spencer and America’s William Graham Sumner, had taken Darwin’s ideas and stated the social order developed the same way; that is, the fittest people—in this case, Anglo-Saxon and Teutons, could assert themselves over inferior people. This brought along an obligation to impose order and teach the inferior peoples of Western ideas (*e.g.,* Christianity, law, and government), which could raise the people from their inferior status. (pp. 799–800)

By the 19th century, industrialization was well under way. Countryside dwellers were attracted to opportunities for employment in the hubs of industrial networks. These hubs became growing cities, which needed access to raw material and markets for the finished products. The result was a move by the Western nations to gain this access. The European powers were motivated to acquire and dominate new territories. By the end of the century, America joined Europe, having first been able to expand its access domestically to a Reconstructed South and the previously untapped territories of its West. The needs of the dominant nations trumped those of the indigenous peoples in the newly controlled lands. Davidson *et al.*(1991) write: “Through imperialism . . . the modern industrial states spread their political dominion across the world, as migrants traveled in search of jobs and land, merchants sought new markets, industries explored and extracted raw materials, and nations established colonial regimes” (p. 644). The authorssuggest that the term “imperialism” developed negative connotations because of its “racist undercurrent” largely ignored by the whites of Europe and America (p. 644).

Romaine (1997) claims the role of language policy during colonialism has long been recognized. At the Third International Conference on World Englishes, held at the East-West Center in Honolulu (December 19–21, 1996), she stated that “Europeans dismissed as primitive and barbaric the languages spoken by those whom they regarded as uncivilized. At the same time, they saw the spread of their own languages as instruments of both civilization and political control” (pp. x–xi).

Phillipson (1992) likely based his concepts on those articulated by Calvet (1987), who believes language spread was analogous to a conquering army during war, and Wardhaugh (1987), who states that language spread worked like the free market. Phillipson himself claims the starting point for his attitudes regarding World English is Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel, *Robinson Crusoe.* Phillipson cites one part of the story in which Crusoe expresses the belief that his companion and servant, Man Friday, would be of no use until he had learned to speak and understand Crusoe’s language. (Because of Crusoe’s dominant position, even on an isolated, tropical island, the main character never considered learning his servant’s native language.) Yet, at the beginning of *Linguistic Imperialism,* Phillipson sounds more like he subscribes to the “war” metaphor of Calvet. “ . . . Whereas once Britannia ruled the waves, now it is English which rules them,” Phillipson writes (p. 1).

Furthermore, he may also have drawn from Quirk’s “imperial model” (1988). Quirk maintains that language spread occurs due to the political control over colonized people. He gave three models of spread:

1. *Demographic.* Language spreads with the migration of people who speak it.
2. *Econocultural.* Language spreads based on the necessity of its use for economic and commercial reasons and conveyance of culture worldwide.
3. *Imperial.* Language spreads because of political control over colonized peoples.

Conrad (1996) believes Phillipson’s analysis (1992) is based on “conflict theory,” as described by Cooper (1989). Consequently, Conrad breaks down Phillipson’s thesis as follows:

1. English is spread by linguistic imperialism and only by imperialism.
2. Linguistic imperialism means that English needs to maintain its dominance.
3. English is spread to the detriment of other languages.

Numerous examples exist of English being forced on dominated people. Phillipson (1992) mentions the Maccauley Doctrine, a series of language-policy decisions that imposed English on the people of India through education in the 1830s. During the last decade of the 1800s, the colonial British government in Papua New Guinea announced it would establish English as a common language (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, p. 31). During American rule in the Philippines, the colonial government forced English on the population. The publicly announced reason was to enhance “national solidarity” (*Annual Report of the Governor General of the Philippine Islands*, 1926, p. 5).

**The Case against Phillipson’s Linguistic Imperialism**

Conrad (1996) cites Gates (1992), who criticizes use of the term “cultural imperialism,” “an animal from which linguistic imperialism is perhaps derived” (Conrad, p. 27). Based on this term, Gates asks: “Should the global circulation of American culture always be identified as imperialism . . .?” (p. 190). He writes that imperialism, as described by Phillipson (1992), does not “acknowledge the specificity of cultural interactions” (Gates, p. 191). Conrad states that those individuals who support Phillipson’s notion of imperialism subsequently believe “America to be center-stage when in fact America may not be center-stage at all, either as villain or hero” (p. 27).

Fishman (1996) also identifies problems with the concept of linguistic imperialism. First, he writes that “imperialism” is a “slippery term” (p. 5). Then, he turns his attention to the supposed agents of World English:

. . . It is not enough, of course, merely to ask whether Great Britain and/or the United States—the world’s demographically largest and economically mightiest predominantly English mother-tongue countries—consciously pursue policies of spreading English abroad . . . . The industrial, commercial, cultural, and even political endeavors of their firms and of their citizens may have very definite English-language status consequences and may go far beyond formal governmental policy; indeed, they may even elicit governmental support without literally mentioning English either in legislation, in policy formulations, or in conventions of daily practice. Thus, if “the business of America is business,” and if American business is generally conducted in English and almost exclusively so, throughout the world, then the power of the American economy may itself become a spearhead and an ongoing support system for the worldwide diffusion of English. (p. 4)

Eventually, Fishman (1996) states the idea that if experts perceive that the “self-seeking capitalist economies of the metropolitan (*i.e.,* the colonizing) centers” are directing the imposition of English, then these experts should consider the reverse, namely, that English is being imposed upon by the “colonized” who use the language for their own purposes (p. 8). Brutt-Griffler (1998) subsequently argues against linguistic imperialism because it implies the influence of English is unidirectional, when it appears to be bidrectional. There are many examples of this two-way influence. Wiley (2000) tells how Native Americans “recognized their necessity for English literacy given their disadvantaged position in treaty and legal transactions without it. At stake was the negotiation and retention of their rights to continue to occupy their ancestral lands” (pp. 79–80). Gonzalez (1987) explains that the writing of Philippine literature in English is “elitist” and “confined to the segment of Philippine society most at home in English—those in Philippine academia and business” (p. 154). Yet the Filipino writers are still able to show “innovation within the traditions of American and British literary creation” (p. 154). Additionally, Bamgbose (1982) claims a Nigerian variety of English is used with the indigenous languages to express Nigerian culture.

The unidirectional change suggested by linguistic imperialism assumes that language is monolithic and unchanging. This is explained by Widdowson (1997): “One might accept the conspiracy theory that there was an *intention* [Widdowson’s italics] to use English to dominate, but assumption that the intention was successful, which is often taken as a necessary corollary, is based on a belief in the invariability of the language” (p. 136). Alatis and Straehle (1997) state, however, that “English has proved quite malleable, adapting itself more to the needs and cultures of those who use it, rather than the other way around” (p. 8).

In fact, it is not even a given that a language that spreads due to an imperial takeover will ultimately survive. Brosnahan (1973) notes the language of Attila the Hun has vanished from Europe, and the domination of the Turkish language was sharply diminished with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Brosnahan lists four features that must be present to establish and impose a language:

1. The language is spread through military conquest and is the language of the

imperial administration.

2. The military authority is maintained for centuries.

3. A unified administration promotes language spread in multilingual areas by

supporting commercial, political, and religious interaction among linguistically diverse peoples.

4. Language spreads because it is accompanied by material advantages associated

with learning the language.

The language of Attila and the language of the Turkish people did not have all four of these features.

Moreover, Brutt-Griffler (1998) states that an explanation of English spread as linguistic imperialism must be based on the following presuppositions:

1. Linguistic imperialism results from an overt language policy by an imperial power to impose its language.
2. This policy emanates from Kachru’s Inner Circle.
3. The spread of English is based on some ideology.
4. English is imposed on those who do not speak the language natively.

She explains that, in contrast to these presuppositions, the globalization of business and economic relations may preferentially use English simply because it constitutes a ready-made worldwide communication channel. Thus, she believes World English is now expanding according primarily to Quirk’s econocultural model, not due to colonialism-style coercion. In addition, Brutt-Griffler (2002) does not believe that with political control comes linguistic control, an idea reflected most notably in the works of Said (1978, 1993). Once non-Western peoples are freed from imperialism, they are not still controlled ideologically by their past masters through continued use of the masters’ language. Thus, World English cannot be characterized as the medium that makes a type of post-colonial colonialism possible.

Phillipson’s work has been criticized further for his research design. Canagarajah (1999), in particular, complains that Phillipson’s database is too small and is drawn from the wrong subjects. He asks: “How can one find out about linguistic imperialism in the periphery [Kachru’s Outer and Expanding circles] from the very personnel and agencies from the center [Kachru’s Inner Circle] who implement this domination?” (p. 43). He concludes that Phillipson’s methodology is one of “indirection” (p. 43).

**A Middle Ground**

Mair (2002) tried to find a middle ground. He re-articulates concepts first detailed in a number of essays put together by Fishman *et al*. (1996), showing that the introduction and spread of English have been described according to one of two general models (***Table***). The Exploitation Model is based on three positions:

1. Powerful British and American interests through systematic policies have engineered the introduction and spread of English even after the discontinuation of direct imperial control.
2. The use of English in developing countries is harmful because it interferes with efforts to maintain local languages, and it limits popular participation in public affairs.
3. The use of English works against the development of individual self-esteem and a group-based cultural identity because it supports an Anglo-Saxon worldview, which was previously unknown in the societies to which English is introduced.

The Grassroots Model posits that English comes to a region because of demand for it. Speakers and writers determine the value of English, and there is no connection to an Anglo-Saxon–derived worldview. The Grassroots Model shows that social modernization is not necessarily related to American interests (Mair, 2002), and language planning is not necessarily an exploitative undertaking nor always a well-organized and well-funded success (Hirataka, 1992; Kleineidam, 1992). Mair insists that “there are social constellations in which English has done more good than harm, and where people have adopted English freely because they were aware of the advantages” (p. 166). Gopinathan (1980) is more direct, stating that the spread of language promotes interethnic communication, multiculturalism, and a sense of identity for individuals and ethnic groups.

Undoubtedly, the English language has periodically enabled the powerful to segregate, marginalize, or otherwise diminish the weak. Brutt-Griffler, in her book, *World English: A Study of Its Development* (2002), devotes a chapter to how English-language education was reserved for the colonial elite and denied to the vast majority of those living in British-occupied territory. But after World War II, imperialist ardor cooled. The mighty British Empire was permanently

weakened after the war. Although America eventually assumed the mantle of “world leader,” its imperialistic tendencies were blunted by its belief “that the United States was democratic and free and, therefore, was above the selfish interests that had driven the expansion of the Old Europe powers” (Davies, 1996). As a result, America’s worldwide influence was re-articulated

***Table.*** Two Models of English Spread



*Exploitation Model Grassroots Model*



|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| *Political Value of English* | Imperial language | Post-imperial language |
| *Chief Cause for Post-WWII Spread* | Organized/centralized language planning following an Anglo-American master plan | Demand-driven, decentralized rational choices by individuals and groups |
| *English Is the Language of . . .* | Anglo-American capitalist interests | Modernization and globalization |
| *English Is . . .* | A language that conveys an Anglo-Saxon/Western worldview | An ideologically neutral *lingua franca* |
| *English . . .* | Transforms recipient societies usually for the worst | Is transformed by recipient societies leading to the rise of new English variations |
| *Chief Beneficiary of Global English* | British and American capitalist interests | Some segments of local users |
| *Evidence for View* | Historical analyses pointing out open and hidden continuities, evaluation of official statements of policy, and expert opinion (*e.g*., ESL professionals) | Synchronic and descriptive sociometric analysis |



*Note:* From “The Continuing Spread of English: Anglo-American Conspiracy or Global Grassroots Movement?” (p. 165) by C. Mair in D. J. Allerton, P. Skandera, & C. Tschichold (Eds.), *Perspectives in English as a World Language* (pp. 159–169), Basel: Schwable & Co.

as a need to spread the benefits of Christianity, the capitalist system, and the fruits of democracy. A forced spread of English was never a stated goal of postwar American leaders.

Many scholars who frame the study of languages in a historical context (e.g., Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006) acknowledge the use of English as an imperialist tool in the past but describe the post-World War II spread of English in functional terms. More specifically, economic globalization appears to play the most important role in the contemporary spread of English. Further, Gimenez (2001) believes the use of English worldwide promotes cooperation and world peace, and it does not always threaten local languages, as suggested by Skutnabb-Kangas (1998).

Perhaps the mixed view of linguistic imperialism by many scholars is succinctly clarified by Alatis and Straehle (1997):

Critics claim, among other things, that there has been a conspiracy of sorts by Britain and the United States actively to promote English, “their English,” at the expense of other languages and cultures around the world. There is no denying that some of the seeds for the spread of English were planted by colonial powers, including the United States. However it strikes me as naïve, indeed somewhat paranoid, to invoke the image of a well-coordinated, explicit U.S. government-driven scheme—one that involved various private organizations and agencies as well—to promote the spread of English globally. (p. 3)

The concept of linguistic imperialism is predicated to a large extent on the belief that, in international relations, every nation or ethnic group aims exclusively to gain the greatest advantage with the least amount of sacrifice when dealing with others. Yet Yen (1982) believes such a view is shortsighted. Yen writes:

The truth is that although the genuine relations between two nations may not be entirely based upon altruism or certain ideals, they can never be sustained by mere selfish interest. Otherwise, man would have been extinguished long ago by killing each other. Man continues to live simply because not only extensive friendship exists, but ideals often coalesce with national interests in the dealing between two nations. It is in a diplomacy of this kind that national interests are guided by ideals to meet the interests of others, to sustain peace, and to promote mutual friendship. (pp. xxi–xxii)

This is the type of diplomacy that appears to characterize mid-20th century American-Taiwan relations.

**The Taiwan Example**

So what do we make of the English-language presence in contemporary Taiwan? Is it a sign of American exploitation or an example of Taiwanese grassroots demand?

In the 19th century, America’s involvement in Chinese affairs, along with the European countries, seemed predatory. Nevertheless, despite reports of coal reserves on the island, American interest in Taiwan waned. This was largely due to the 1867 *Rover* incident. The American merchant ship *Rover* was shipwrecked near Kenting in southern Taiwan. Aborigines murdered the crew in revenge for an earlier incident during which foreigners had killed aborigines. Once it became clear to Americans that aborigines in southern Taiwan had massacred the shipwrecked crew, U.S. Amoy Consul Charles LeGendre followed a two-pronged gunboat and pacification policy. Although he was successful, he did not provide a strong foundation for smooth American-Taiwanese relations and soured many Americans on the possibility of carrying out trade on that island, especially when the mainland appeared to offer safer, more profitable opportunities.

After World War II, American policy was no longer powered by the American belief that the United States had a “manifest destiny” to continually expand its borders, which had effectively displaced the Native Americans and led to confrontations with older European powers over Western Hemisphere territory. Yet the military seemed to have imperialist designs for Taiwan, especially during the Korean conflict when General Douglas MacArthur described the island as America’s “unsinkable aircraft carrier and submarine tender” (Roy, 2003, p. 108). Meanwhile, Chiang Kai-shek, although outwardly welcoming U.S. support, questioned America’s intentions. He feared losing Taiwan not only to a communist Chinese-led military invasion but also to an American-led geopolitical agenda (Roy, 2003)

Nevertheless, America’s sudden befriending of Taiwan at the outbreak of the Korean conflict cannot be seen as a purely imperialistic move. The threat of communism motivated the United States government to use Taiwan in an effort to contain communism in East Asia, despite misgivings regarding the way Chiang ruled the island. The United States needed a base of operation, in addition to Japan and the Philippines, to lead the United Nation’s “police action” in Korea. The American people had real fears about communism, no doubt stoked by the rampant McCarthyism of that time, and were, in general, willing to support their government’s warning of a “domino” scenario in which communism spread unchecked from one country to the next until the American homeland was threatened directly. Hence the notion that Taiwan was part of a defensive Pacific Rim fence to contain communism was a readily accepted view by many Americans. Evans and Pang (1989) explain further:

. . . U.S. interests in Taiwan were geopolitical in an exceptionally pure sense. There were no U.S. “settlers” whose interests the U.S. had to look out for, and no private economic elite that the U.S. might have a vested interest in protecting. The U.S. had no need or use for Taiwan’s meager natural resources . . . . The U.S. did, however, have a tremendous interest in the regime’s survival. It was on the frontline in the battle against communism.

Further, the role of the American advisors must be understood in the context of Taiwan’s extreme dependence on the United States. The Seventh Fleet was the KMT regime’s main guarantee of sovereignty. Economically, the resources that the Americans were providing were, of course, essential to the success of the developmental program, as well as to maintaining the island’s military apparatus . . . . The Americans were like an unofficial extra branch of the KMT state apparatus . . . . Yet, given this dependence, the position of these American advisors did not fit the colonial, or even the conventional, neo-colonial mold. (p. 12)

In fact, Evans and Pang (1989) insist that the United States did not have the wherewithal to carry out imperialistic designs on Taiwan:

Ideologically, the U.S. advisors were more thoroughly committed to the free market and private enterprise than the KMT technocrafts, but they were not in a position to implement their ideology directly. Most did not even speak Chinese. They were not participants in the processes of political decision making within the party, and they had no implementing bureaucracy under their control. They had not only needed the support of [the] KMT state apparatus, but they were not necessarily forced to help strengthen the capacity of the state apparatus in order to have a chance of implementing their free-enterprise ideas. (p. 13)

When the political winds changed, and Taiwan’s strategic geopolitical importance became less significant in the face of an economically strengthening China, the American government distanced itself from Taiwan. This is not the action of a colonizing power.

So if America was not overtly imperialistic toward Taiwan, can the American-influenced spread of English on the island be considered an example of linguistic imperialism? Phillipson’s definition of English linguistic imperialism does not seem to fit the Taiwan example.

*Figure 2*. This warning sign, in Chinese and translated into English, is found in Taiwan's Yangmingshan National Park, north of Taipei.

First, English is hardly the dominant language in Taiwan. Outside of the large cities, such as Taipei and Kaohsiung, English language use is infrequent and limited. It appears most consistently on public signs describing potential danger (***Figure 2***). In fact, outside areas of international tourism, English translation of Mandarin is not provided, for example, on restaurant menus, hotel charges, or museum exhibits. Neither is English the language of government.

Second, English was not and is not being maintained by an overarching establishment, such as the American government. It is this part of his definition that has opened Phillipson up to criticisms that he is some sort of a conspiracy theorist, who believes a covert group purposely controls the linguistic machinations that force English down the collective throats of nonnative speakers.

As this paper suggests, English came to Taiwan because of an ideologically based military alliance with the United States and rooted itself in Taiwan because of economic globalization, which created a motivation among the island’s populace to learn the language. This implies English spread according to the Grassroots Model.

Of course, a foreign language cannot spread unless community members want to use it. Ostler (2005) writes that individuals are more likely to use a foreign language due to the language’s *prestige*—its association with enjoyment, practical wisdom, spiritual enlightenment, and wealth (p. 550). Many Taiwan people saw knowledge of the English language as a key to success.

It is true that from the end of World War II to the 1960s, the American government made attempts to propagate English worldwide through the United States Information Agency (USIA), the Center for Applied Linguistics, and the Peace Corps, as well as through organizations such as the Ford and Rockefeller foundations. But, according to Alatis and Straehle (1997), such efforts drastically declined by the end of the 1960s. Although some Americans championed a U.S. government agency similar to the British Council, long-term interest was “unsustainable. Yet despite this general apathy in the United States, the use of English worldwide has continued to increase at an astronomical rate” (p. 15). For that reason, Alatis and Straehle believe English-language spread was not being driven solely by 20th century America.

It should be noted, however, the influence of American culture on other societies has been called a “colonization of the mind” (Tsuda, 1997, pp. 24–25). The Americanization of culture can be termed a type of “capitalist imperialism” because it is the desire of American-based companies to make a profit by tapping markets overseas that drives Americanization. The English language enables such Americanization, and, as such, is part of the structure that imposes, for example, an option to drink Coca-Cola instead of Taiwanese green tea. But capitalist imperialism is not linguistic imperialism.

In addition, the relatively recent rise of Taiwanese nationalism, as described by Wu (2004), undercuts Tsuda’s argument (1997) that Americanization engenders an inferiority complex toward one’s non-American native culture, including one’s native language. In the case of Taiwan, Wu suggests that any negative view of Taiwan’s economic and political achievements by the Taiwan population is due to “their lack of international recognition” (pp. 624–625). The continued dominance of Mandarin in Taiwan despite Americanization also makes Tsuda’s claims problematic.

Taiwan’s contemporary history has been one of a multi-lingual society being controlled by external forces. Specifically, the KMT’s Mandarin-only policy existed to the detriment of the indigenous languages. Within this framework, the KMT, until the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987, can be more appropriately characterized as a force for Chinese linguistic imperialism. The introduction of the English language by American influences has not led to the extinction of Taiwanese languages or the diminishment of Mandarin, thus English-language spread in Taiwan does not meet the requirements of linguistic imperialism based on Phillipson’s definition.

Instead, English came to Taiwan in three identifiable steps:

1. Military cooperation that required English proficiency among military officers;
2. A subsequent “trickle-down” use of English by the adjacent society, which embraced American culture; followed by
3. The permanent establishment of the language in the society due to Taiwan’s initial participation in a globalized marketplace.

Although this pattern was never replicated *in toto* outside Taiwan, aspects of the pattern are evident during the immediate postwar years in American-occupied Japan (1945–1952), the Korean conflict (1950–1953), and the Vietnam War (1955–1975).

**Conclusion**

Whether we believe the English language came to Taiwan through American exploitation or was established by a Taiwan-based grassroots need, one fact is inescapable: The English language is currently a permanent part of Taiwan society. It is not likely to fade away any time soon.

From an educator’s viewpoint, the political–historical events that cause a foreign language to become a part of a society where it has not been used previously informs instructors and resource designers relative to the appropriateness of framing English as an American product or as a language that has become unique through its influence by a local culture. From the political perspective, the way in which a nonnative community characterizes a foreign language could give insights into the collective attitudes and mindset of that community. In other words, if Taiwanese view the English language as taking on Taiwanese characteristics and becoming their own (and not an American language imposed by Americans), this may be another reflection of a Taiwanese tendency to view their culture as having a Taiwanese identity, separate from that of not only the United States but also Mainland China. Obviously, further research needs to be carried out in this area, ideally as part of a collaboration between applied linguists, historians, and political scientists.

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