

FORUM

Linguistically privileged and cursed? American university students and the global hegemony of English

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes written discourse generated in response to an open-ended questionnaire administered to 136 students at two different universities in the southwestern United States and to 15 non-American students at a large Danish university. The questionnaire aimed to inspire reflection about the impact of the global rise of English on American mother-tongue speakers of English as well as on those who do not have English as a mother tongue, especially with respect to the question of mono vs. multilingual practice. Most American and non-American respondents represented the learning of a foreign language as something American mother-tongue speakers should do but as something which is not necessary. There was widespread, though not unanimous, agreement that English is necessary for non-mother-tongue speakers. Responses are also grouped, discussed, and analyzed in terms of the instrumental, multicultural, or mix of multicultural and instrumental logic used. The author is especially concerned with the intersections between the global hegemony of English and the learning of foreign languages. The study and analysis conducted here offer insight into these intersections. Given that so much is at stake in terms of the relationship between the global expansion of English and foreign language learning, the author concludes that further research into this relationship is needed.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have devoted considerable attention to how people in national settings in which English is not a dominant language view the global spread of English (e.g. Truchot 1994; Grigg 1997; Adler 2004; Hilmarsson-Dunn 2006; Park 2006). However, comparatively little attention has been paid to how those living in countries in which English is a dominant language perceive the global expansion of “their” language. Similarly, little work has looked at how those in non-English speaking national contexts view the question of whether English speakers need to acquire fluency in another language, or how they view the question of multilingual reciprocity. This paper begins to address this rather surprising gap in the literature on the global spread of English. It does so by critically examining written discourse generated by university students in response to a short, open-ended questionnaire administered to 136 students at two different universities in the southwestern United States and to 15 non-American students at a large Danish university. The aim of the questionnaire was simple: To inspire reflection among some American as well as some non-American university students about the possible implications of the spread of English for those with English as a mother tongue *and* for those with other languages as a mother tongue.

While there have been relatively frequent clarion calls of “English is not enough” for English speakers (e.g. Simon 1980; Nuffield Languages Inquiry 2000; Securing America’s Future 2003), no one has looked closely at what *individual* English speakers themselves

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have had to say about the seemingly obvious relationship between global domination of one's first language on the one hand and a comparative lack of meaningful multilingual proficiency¹ among a large percentage of people who have that language as their mother-tongue on the other. This paper does precisely this. The paper begins by establishing the basic aims of the study. It then discusses the theoretical foundations of the author's conceptualization of the global spread of English. Next, the development and administration of the questionnaire and the methods used in organizing and analyzing responses to the questionnaire are discussed. A brief review of the comparatively sparse literature which has looked at how Americans view various dimensions of the global spread of English follows. The rest of the paper is devoted to a discussion and analysis of responses to the questionnaire, with a conclusion section at the end.

SPECIFIC AIMS OF THIS STUDY

This paper aims to do a number of things. First, it seeks to begin to fill a gap in the scholarly literature on views of the global hegemony from core English-speaking countries, in this case, the United States. Second, it aims to illustrate the different ways in which privileged and powerfully situated social actors conceive of the global expansion of English generally *and*, more specifically, how they view this social phenomenon as impacting upon themselves and linguistic "others", especially in terms of the question of multilingualism vs. monolingualism. Third, in illustrating the different ways in which English mother-tongue elites represent the global rise of English and their perceived and real relationship to this social phenomenon, this paper aims to inspire critical – and fresh – ways of thinking and theorizing the global hegemony of English,² with a particular eye toward considering the potential impact of this *social* phenomenon on differently situated linguistic actors around the world. Fourth, part of the goal of this paper is to challenge, by way of concrete study, claims (Atal 2003; House 2003) that English's spread is having little direct negative impact on other languages. In fact, as many of the English speakers whose comments are examined below are quite aware, at the very least, the global spread of English *is* having an impact on other languages in terms of the learning, or really, the *not*-learning, of these other languages. Indeed, while some scholars have apparently concluded that English's global rise is having no direct, negative impact on other languages, others are concerned with the link between the global expansion of English and foreign language teaching and learning. The publication of *Globalization and the future of German* (Gardt and Hüppauf 2004), an edited volume which includes several chapters that discuss the potential impact of English's spread on German, attests to this concern. In fact, Ammon (2007), has more recently reflected on the relation between English's global spread and the teaching and learning of German and Japanese.

One of the fundamental premises of this paper is that linguistic diversity is more than the sum total of languages that exist in the world. It is *also* a matter of how many different languages specific individuals and societies can and do regularly use, and, more specifically, a matter of how many languages different societies learn and teach to their citizens. Much of the world is investing heavily in multilingualism (Graddol 1997; Pennycook 2001; Phillipson 2003), or, increasingly, in what might be termed an English-centric bilingualism – a form of "multilingualism" in which people for whom English is not a first language possess a high-level of proficiency in English but do not profess similar proficiency³ in another foreign language. However, as we shall see below, it would

appear that at least some of those with English as a mother tongue are not returning the favor, meaning they are not learning other languages. Furthermore, it would appear that at least *some* of the elites with languages *other* than English as their first language:

1. are not especially concerned by this lack of linguistic reciprocity;
2. do not view learning a language other than English as especially necessary; and
3. even view multilingualism for English mother-tongue speakers as a waste of time.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION: GRAMSCIAN HEGEMONY

A Gramscian notion of hegemony serves as the primary theoretical lens through which this paper conceives of the global expansion of English, a social phenomenon most pronounced in global domains of power such as business, science and technology, international politics, and higher education (Graddol 1997; Pennycook 2001; Phillipson 1992). Gramsci was not specifically concerned with the rise of English globally and it is unclear how he would assess this social phenomenon. However, Gramsci saw language as central to establishing, and to understanding, the “organization of consent” (Ives 2004). Indeed, ‘The spontaneous consent given by the great masses to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group’ (Gramsci 1971: 12) effectively captures the ways in which the global expansion of English has become largely a matter of heavily *directed* choice – on both a social and individual level. Sonntag has noted the utility of Gramsci for analyzing the linguistic dimensions of globalization. She writes, ‘The usefulness of the concept of hegemony is perhaps even greater for language scholars who are interested in global English than for sociolinguists who focus on social interactions between individuals, because in global English hegemony the international relations meaning of the term is conjoined with the Gramscian sense’ (2003: 6). In fact, this paper focuses on micro-instances of discourse about the hegemony of English, specifically as these relate to the complex inter-play between English, “other” languages, and the question of foreign-language learning, especially among English mother-tongue speakers. However, these micro-instances – and the language ideologies they (re)produce and sometimes challenge – are always understood as being set against a larger, global socio-historical and macro-level hegemony of English. Cox, an international relations scholar, proposes that, ‘A world hegemony is . . . in its beginnings an outward expansion of the internal (national) hegemony established by a dominant social class’ (1996: 137). In drawing from Augelli and Murphy (1993), one might say that this paper primarily examines the discursive means whereby a dominant national social group seeks to articulate its global ‘hegemonic [linguistic] aspiration,’ to itself and to global “others.”

METHODS

In an attempt to begin to get at links that some of America’s up-and-coming elite might make between the global hegemony of English and comparative monolingualism among Americans, the author designed a short open-ended questionnaire. Generally, the questionnaire sought to inspire reflection about the impact of the global rise of English on both American mother-tongue speakers of English and foreign social actors who do not have English as a mother tongue. The questionnaire consisted of six questions. The first

four were demographic questions. Two general questions having to do with English and multilingualism were posed:

1. What do you think about Americans (and Brits, Irish, etc.) and whether they should know/need to know a foreign language? (Why do you think this?)
2. What do you think about people from non-English speaking countries and whether they should know/need to know English? (Why do you think this?)

In devising this short questionnaire, the author wrestled with the key wording of “should” know vs “need to” know. In the end, although it was somewhat awkward, both “should” and “need to” were included in the questionnaire. In fact, students decided for themselves whether they felt a second language was a necessity or not. The questions were deliberately open-ended and sometimes generated fairly lengthy replies of up to 300 words or more. Broad and problematic national categories such as “American” and “British,” which mask the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of America, Great Britain, Ireland, and so on, were intentionally employed. This offered students an opportunity to problematize the elision of “American,” etc., with English-speaking. However, none of the 151 students who completed the questionnaire chose to do this.

This study was not only interested in the basic answers students gave in terms of the question of multilingual necessity. It was also very interested in *how* students *described* the issue of mono/multilingualism. As the 151 responses were read and re-read, the author went about establishing a set of inductively created discourse categories. The primary categories devised are: (1) triumphalism; (2) instrumentalism; (3) multiculturalism; and (4) instrumentalism *and* multiculturalism. The **discourse of triumphalism** *explicitly* casts the global rise of English as an affirmation of general American and/or core English-language speaking countries’ superiority and/or represents the past, current and future global hegemony of English as an expression of a number of different naturalized social processes. The **discourse of instrumentalism** frames the learning of a (foreign) language primarily as a means of bettering one’s socio-economic position. The **discourse of multiculturalism** emphasizes the apparent cultural, liberal arts educational, intellectual and/or cognitive benefits of learning a foreign language. Many responses *mixed the discourses of instrumentalism and multiculturalism*, appealing to *both* practical and cultural reasons for (not) learning a language.

At a broad level of analysis, the rationales students cited for learning a foreign language can be divided into instrumental and cultural. These rationales align roughly with Gardner’s and Lambert’s (1959; 1972) framework of instrumental and integrative orientations towards foreign language learning. An instrumental orientation refers to the desire to learn a second language for some practical goal, such as landing a job. An integrative orientation refers to the desire to learn a foreign language to have contact with, and perhaps identify with, members of a given foreign language community. Gardner’s and Lambert’s instrumental motivation orientation corresponds well with my category of instrumental discourse. However, the category of integrative orientation does not correspond neatly with the category of multicultural discourse. This category describes not only the largely singular goal of learning a language to have contact with, and to identify with a particular language and cultural group, it refers as well to the desire to learn language to broaden one’s cultural, educational, intellectual and/or cognitive horizons *in general*. Gardner and Lambert are cited here largely to provide depth and perspective to this study. While the

study is clearly interested in motivations for learning a foreign language, its primary focus is on not on individual motivation. It is on: (1) larger global social forces – especially the global hegemony of English – as these might be understood as influencing individuals' ideas about foreign language learning; (2) the different ways in which individuals describe their own real and/or perceived relation to these larger global social forces which affect individuals' mono/multilingual language practices.

The primary aim is to examine and to reflect critically upon what are interesting instances of different types of reflection on the global hegemony of English by university elites, the vast majority of these American English monolinguals. In organizing and analyzing the questionnaire responses, the paper draws from the traditions of critical discourse analysis (Fowler 1991; Fairclough 1995; Wodak, de Cillia and Reisigl 1999) and textual analysis (Hall 1975). Drawing in particular from Fairclough, the study seeks to ferret out 'common-sense assumptions and presuppositions' (1995: 46) embedded in discourse, describe and organize these assumptions in a systematic way, and relate these to the larger macro-sociological context(s) in which they are located.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the central role of the United States vis-à-vis the global hegemony of English (Phillipson 1992; Crystal 1997; Graddol 1997; Holborow 1999), and the tremendous volume of work across disciplines on American views toward English *in the U.S.* (e.g. Schiffman 1996; Wiley 1996; Cliett 2000; Crawford 2000; Schmidt 2000), there is a general lack of research devoted to how everyday Americans view the hegemony of English beyond U.S. borders. To be sure, scholars as diverse in their views of the global spread of English as Crystal (1997) and Phillipson (1992) have examined the historical role of the United States in the global spread of English. However, these accounts have typically focused on larger political and economic questions and issues. They do not address how everyday Americans understand, make sense of, and represent the historical and contemporary global rise of English, or how they view themselves as having a/effected, and having been affected by, the global expansion of "their" language.

In fact, systematic engagement of questions of Americans' (re)presentation and understanding of their historic and contemporary role with respect to the global expansion of English comprises an essentially brand new undertaking. Some examples of studies which have sought to address this issue include Karstadt's (2002) "What do American undergraduates think?," Kubota's (2001) "Teaching world Englishes to native speakers of English in the USA" and Demont-Heinrich's (2006) "English by popular demand: American prestige press discourses on language and globalization in a post Cold War world." Karstadt investigates American undergraduates' ideas about what form of English a Swedish student of English should learn and use. She finds that, on the whole, the American undergraduates she queries (N = 32) 'had open views about which variety of English the Swede should strive to learn' (2002: 42). Kubota (2001) researches how American high school students respond to, and understand, the notion of multiple global varieties of English. She finds that while many of these American students were comparatively open to the concept of world Englishes, some were not. Demont-Heinrich (2006) examines how select American prestige press newspapers covered the global hegemony of English during the 1990s and early 2000s. He concludes that the five American newspapers whose coverage he analyzes

present an overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, positive and optimistic story of the global rise of English.

QUESTIONNAIRE DATA: AN OVERVIEW

The questionnaire was first administered in the Summer of 2003 via e-mail to university students studying at a large Danish university. Students were selected using a snowball method in which the author – who studied at this particular Danish university in the Summer of 2003 – sent the e-mail questionnaire to a handful of students he knew. These students were asked to e-mail the questionnaire to friends and to fill out the questionnaire and e-mail it back to the author. Overall, 15 questionnaires were completed and returned. All of the students who completed the questionnaire via e-mail were non-American students and non-Danish students. They ranged in age from 19 to 25. Fourteen of the 15 had a language other than English as their mother tongue. They came from nine different countries (Argentina, Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Spain, and The Netherlands) and all were multilingual.

In the Fall of 2003, the author administered the questionnaire to university students at a large university in the Southwestern United States. All 115 of the university students who completed the questionnaire at this time were enrolled in the same large lecture class. They ranged in age from 19 to 23. One of the students was a Canadian citizen and one an American/British dual citizen. The rest of the students (N = 113) were American citizens. Seventy per cent of the students self-identified as English-language monolinguals with 30 per cent claiming some fluency in another language (languages represented were Armenian, French, German, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese).

The questionnaire was administered again in the spring of 2006⁴ to 21 university students at another university in the southwestern United States. All of the students were enrolled in the same class. A total of 17 of the 21 students in this class were U.S. citizens, with one of these 17 a dual American/Russian citizen. Thirteen of the students self-identified as English monolinguals with eight listing themselves as multilingual. However, five of these eight multilingual students came from outside of the United States. In other words, of the 16 students who held only American citizenship, 13 – or 81 per cent – were English-language monolinguals.

When all of the students from the two American universities are combined, 94 of 136 students – or 69 per cent self-identified as English monolinguals. That percentage creeps higher – to 72 per cent – when non-Americans are taken out of the equation and even higher – to 74 per cent – when non-Americans are excluded *and* the one Canadian and one British/American citizen, both English monolinguals, are included in the English monolingual total. These numbers are not generalizable. They are nonetheless interesting, perhaps unsurprising, and, if meaningful multilingualism for all is one's goal, disappointing. They also provide anecdotal evidence that the myth of the monolingual American might have a basis in reality.

It might well be that the myth of the monolingual American is largely true – if one focuses on a specific type of American: the socio-economically privileged, white American with English as a mother tongue, or precisely the group of Americans queried. One German respondent to the questionnaire speaks directly to the tongue-tied American stereotype,

I don't have the statistics to back up my opinion, but generally speaking – and having been to Ireland, Canada, the U.S. and Great Britain, I would state that hardly any English native speaker has a "rich

faculty of expression at their command” when it comes to foreign languages. I think the majority of native English speakers that speak a foreign language fluently usually come from immigrant families.

– *Jasmine, German student at a Danish university (2003)*

In fact, as Jasmine’s response indirectly notes, there is a clear disjuncture between claims of American monolingualism and the empirical reality of a multilingual America. The 2000 U.S. Census found that of the 262.4 million people in the U.S.A. aged five and over, 47 million (18%) spoke a language other than English at home, 28.1 million of them Spanish. This tension reflects the complexities and paradoxes of an American linguistic culture in which linguistic diversity and multilingual capability are simultaneously cast as assets *and* as threats. It reflects as well a particular socio-linguistic hierarchy characterized by pronounced multilingual *incapability* among large percentages of the American population. Speaking to the question of multilingualism among America’s elite, Lambert has noted that, ‘One of the most striking features of foreign language instruction at the undergraduate level is the relatively low percentage of students who take any language classes at all, and of those who do take college-level courses, the low proportion who proceed beyond the elementary or intermediate level’ (1993: 14).

No survey that the author knows of has sought to establish what type of American – demographically speaking – is monolingual as opposed to multilingual. However, in a telephone survey of 1,006 Americans 18-and-older commissioned by the American Council on Education (ACE) and conducted in September 2000, 42 per cent of respondents said they spoke a foreign language (Hayward and Siaya 2001). Of course, of the 42 per cent who said that they spoke a foreign language, just 8 per cent claimed to speak it fluently. Revealingly, 32 per cent said they spoke a foreign language “somewhat well,” and 35 per cent said they “did not speak it well at all.” In short, these data seem to support the belief that a significant percentage of Americans are essentially monolingual. Indeed, if the questionnaire results are indicative of the larger picture, there is reason to believe that the privileged American college student with English as a first language is also essentially monolingual.⁵

Question 1: Americans/Brits, etc. and a foreign language? An overview

Among both American and non-American respondents there was an overwhelming tendency toward framing the learning of a foreign language as something American mother-tongue speakers *should* do, and something from which they almost inevitably would benefit, but also something which, in the final analysis, was not necessary – or at least not necessary in the same terms as it was considered necessary for those without English as a mother tongue to learn English. Many students began their response by noting the value of learning a language other than English, but then added a qualification such as that offered by Amy,⁶ an American English monolingual:

They don’t need to know a foreign language, but the benefits one will gain are immense . . .

Reiner, an Austrian student studying at a large Danish university, offers a similar response:

For Americans, Canadians and other English speaking people I think it would be nice for them to speak a foreign language, but not necessary.

Only 12 of the 136 students who filled out the questionnaire at the two American universities at which it was administered stated in clear, unequivocal terms that they believed those with English as a mother-tongue *absolutely must* learn another language. Somewhat paradoxically few students wrote in unequivocal terms that Americans should *not* learn another language. Jeff, an American English monolingual was one of these. Writing in blatantly triumphalist language – something which was quite rare – he states,

No [Americans do not need to know a foreign language]. If we are going to be one world, we need one language. Since English is the most common in business and politics, we should stick with it. Pretty soon all other languages will be as dead as Latin. Ha, ha.

Interestingly, and, again, rather troublesome if one's goal is multilingualism for all, a majority of the *non-American* students in the United States (N = 6) and in Denmark (N = 15) did *not* see the learning of a language other than English as necessary for English mother-tongue speakers. Indeed, a good number of these non-American students seemed generally less inclined to see the importance of Americans learning a foreign language than many of the Americans themselves. It is interesting to note that 40 of the 136 written responses (29%) by students at the two American universities at which the questionnaire was administered made a direct connection between mono/multilingualism among English mother-tongue speakers and the global spread of English. Ten of the 15 non-American students (66%) studying at a major university in Denmark drew this direct connection.

Question 2: Non-English speakers learn English? An overview

There was widespread agreement that English *is* necessary for non-mother-tongue speakers. A response by Tracy, an American student “with 4 years of high school Spanish and some college Spanish,” is illustrative of the more direct appeals to this “necessity”:

I definitely think people from non-English speaking countries NEED to know English. English is the universal language and the language you need to know if you want to communicate internationally.

Although the view that non-mother-tongue speakers of English must learn English was unanimous among the non-American students (N = 21) (who comprised a very small percentage of the total respondents), it was *not* unanimous among the American students. Indeed, some of the American respondents were clearly uncomfortable with the fact that English has basically become essential for much of the rest of the world, while a foreign language is seemingly not essential to the same degree for most Americans. Alternatively, some American respondents suggested that non-native speakers could “choose” not to learn English. However, many of these students contradictorily indicated that those who made this “choice” would fall behind. Indeed, American and non-American respondents frequently cast English as “the” language of global socio-economic mobility. For instance, one American student, an English monolingual, wrote:

Increasingly, people from other countries have little choice. English has grown synonymous with wealth and economic prosperity.

Finally, a large number of American students took the question about whether those from non-English speaking countries should know/need to know English as an opportunity to offer negative commentary on immigration to the U.S.

TRIUMPHALISM

The questionnaire gave American students an opportunity to trumpet the global triumph of “their” language. However, very few took the opportunity to do so in baldly arrogant terms, though a few more plugged into a less arrogant triumphalism which heralds the inevitable global triumph of English without overtly gloating about this triumph. Tony, an American student who described himself as an English speaker who was “half-fluent” in Spanish, was among those who represented the question about whether Americans should know/need to know a foreign language through the prism of inevitable triumph. He writes:

I don't see people converting to Spanish, German, or Japanese as a major means of global communication. English has become a dominant language for whatever reason, but trying to make it less dominant now is pointless.

The referencing of the inevitable global victory of English was also apparent in some of the responses by non-American students. For example, Jasmine, a German student studying in Denmark, writes,

I think people from non-English speaking countries should know English. Why? Let's face it: English has become the global language.

Xavier, a French national studying in Denmark, expresses similar sentiments, appealing, like Jasmine, to the inevitable, even apparently already secured, triumph of English:

The idea of a universal language is obviously a sensitive issue. Still, it makes it handy when people from many countries can communicate thanks to a common language . . . You just need to be flexible and adapt, though having English is a huge advantage for Anglo-Saxon countries. The world is unfair, but you have to deal with it.

Xavier's response in particular can be usefully understood in terms of hegemonic consent. He initially frames the linguistic inequality inherent in a global language system premised upon an international language that is a mother-tongue for some and not for others within the ideology of linguistic universalism. However, his consent also indicates a clear recognition of domination – he has no choice other than to “deal” with an unfair global language system which privileges Anglo-Saxon countries. In sum, while his direct reference to domination would seem to belie that he is in any way under the spell of ideology, his attempt to recast this domination through another ideology indicates that a dominant ideology – one Xavier might not consciously view as ideology – is in fact affecting his reading of the hegemony of English. In short, Xavier's awareness of inequality is an ideologically mitigated awareness – and thus can be usefully understood through the lens of a Gramscian notion of hegemony. Additionally, Xavier's response provides concrete, though anecdotal, evidence that English's hegemonic rise is indeed having an impact on how members of various non-English language communities view the necessity – or apparent lack

thereof – of learning each other's languages in a world characterized by the growing hegemony of English.

INSTRUMENTALISM

A considerable number of responses were grounded in basic instrumentalism, meaning they approached the question of the acquisition of a foreign language purely in terms of whether doing so might help one's socio-economic position. A response by Judy, an American English monolingual, to the question of whether people from non-English speaking countries should know/need to know English reflects the most straightforward sort of instrumentalism found:

I think because English is the second most spoken language in the world, and the fact that it is the most *practical*, it is important for foreigners to know English.[emphasis added]

In terms of the question of whether people from non-English speaking countries should know/need to know a foreign language, two general – and rather different – instrumental frameworks were apparent in responses by American students: the framework of domination and the framework of choice. The framework of domination basically holds that in a world in which English dominates international domains of power, non-English speakers have no choice – *practically* speaking – other than to learn English. Jenny, an American English monolingual, expresses this view:

It isn't a choice anymore. The English language is a requirement if one wants to successfully develop in business and whatnot.

Although Jenny does not, some American students who baldly stated that non-Americans have no choice but to learn English also offered critical commentary on the inequitable nature of this state of affairs. Jake, an American English monolingual, was one of these:

They do [need to know English], but because of the market. It is necessary for foreigners to speak English (*even though that sucks*) so they can have a chance to succeed in business.

Of course, as does Jenny's response, Jake's indicates a rather reductive reading of English and its role and power in non-English speaking countries outside of the U.S. While it is clear that in some instances and contexts a command of English is "necessary" to "succeed in business" (see Grin 2005), this is not necessarily always the case.

Other American students wove instrumental logic together with the language of choice. Amanda, an American English monolingual, concludes that,

People shouldn't have to know English if they don't want to – they'll just get left behind.

Rather contradictorily, Amanda acknowledges that essentially no one would actually make the "choice" not to learn English – because it would hurt them to do so, but still insists that a true choice can be made. In fact, quite a few American students grounded their responses to the question of whether those from non-English speaking countries

should know/need to know English in the language of individual choice. That the language of choice was a prevalent ideological lens through which American student respondents considered questions of mono/multilingualism in relation to the global hegemony of English is not surprising given the deeply entrenched position of the ideology of individual choice in the United States (Shain 1996; Hill 2007; Becker and Maracek 2008).

Although both questionnaire questions were intended to elicit responses focused on the global, rather than domestic dimensions of the hegemony of English, some American students responded to the question about whether people from non-English speaking countries should know/need to know English as if it was primarily querying them on their views about immigrants in the U.S. Many of their responses were fraught with internal tension, such as that evident in the following response by Tom, an American English language monolingual:

If they are living here, then it is necessary to learn the language. The only way they can fully engage in our culture and understand it is by at least learning our language. Our culture should not be forced on them, however.

Here, Tom advocates for the “necessity” of learning English, but also maintains English should not be forced on “them.” This seeming contradiction might be said to reflect a number of different factors, most notably, the influence of the competing American ideologies of freedom and individual choice on the one hand, and of the ideology of assimilation on the other.

Finally, a considerable number of American students who grounded their responses in instrumentalist discourse drew a direct connection between English’s global hegemony and mono/multilingualism. Dawn, makes this link in the following response, which like so many others, is formulated around a “don’t need to,” but “ought to” learn a foreign language construction:

They don’t need to know a foreign language, but the benefits one will gain are immense. With so many countries requiring that their students learn English, this gives English speakers an advantage and an advantage to English-speaking countries. English-speaking countries got lucky.

For Dawn, a primary reason Americans do not need to know a foreign language is because so many countries are investing so heavily in teaching their citizens English. One might contend Dawn’s conclusion is at least the implicit conclusion reached by the United States. According to numbers cited by Phillipson (2008) and originally generated by Grin (2005), the U.S. saves \$19 billion per year due the fact that: (1) other countries are investing so much in teaching their citizens English that the U.S. need not invest much in teaching its citizens these languages; and (2) as a core English speaking country it is able to reap large amounts of money from the teaching of English around the world.

MULTICULTURALISM

In contrast to purely instrumentalist responses, which were not especially critical, self-critique – of American arrogance, ignorance, and hypocrisy – was much more apparent in

responses that embraced a multicultural discourse. Many American students viewed the question of whether or not English mother-tongue speakers should know/need to know a foreign language through a multicultural prism inflected by the ethic of reciprocity. Their standard logic went like this: If so many linguistic “others” are investing considerable time and effort into learning English, English mother-tongue speakers ought to show some respect and make some effort to learn other languages. Matt, an American English monolingual, grounds his response in this logic. He writes,

Yes, I think it's great to know a second language, but it is becoming less and less crucial because wherever you are someone speaks English. However, it's rude to always expect someone to speak English and not attempt to learn their language.

Matt directly references the ways in which English's global hegemony reduces mother-tongue English speakers' motivation to become multilingual. At the same time, as Matt also notes, this situation simultaneously – and paradoxically – increases the need for multilingual reciprocity on the part of English mother-tongue speakers precisely because so many others the world over are learning English.

Here, it is productive to ponder if, for example, a Russian university student bilingual in Russian and English but with no capacity in any additional language would feel it is rude for her to travel to France and “always expect someone to speak English.” A reasonable assumption would be that this Russian university student would probably not feel she was putting upon French speakers in France if she expected them to speak English. This is because in deploying “the” global language she – in contrast to Matt – would not be imposing her mother-tongue on others. Furthermore, it seems likely it would be apparent to the French speakers that this Russian university student was bilingual. They therefore might feel less put upon than if an American university student expected them to speak English. They might presume an American university student to be monolingual, even though he or she *might* in fact be bilingual in English and Spanish, etc.

Interestingly, a questionnaire response from one non-American student studying in the United States provides direct evidence that at least some non-English speakers do react negatively to some English speakers' expectation that they can use only English in a given non-English-speaking context. Responding to the question of whether Americans (Brits, etc.) should know/need to know a foreign language, she writes,

I think technically [Americans] don't need to [know another language] because English is their mother tongue and widely spread all over the world . . . However, I believe that they should learn about other countries' culture and must not expect people from other countries to speak English. I think that'll be just arrogant as a native English speaker.

Jennifer's insistence that English mother-tongue speakers not use English but the local language puts them in a potentially vexing position. For example, might English mother-tongue speakers be the *only* ones expected *not* to use English in language context A, B, or C? Or, looking at this issue from a diametrically opposed angle: With so many people learning English and so many of these people eager to speak English, especially to native speakers, what real opportunity might the mother-tongue speaker of English have to actually use and develop local language A, B, or C in language context A, B, or C?

MULTICULTURALISM AND INSTRUMENTALISM

Similar to those responses more distinctly grounded in multicultural discourse, responses that mixed instrumentalism and multiculturalism frequently attacked American arrogance, ignorance and what was perceived as linguistic hypocrisy, or the “whole” world learning “our” language, but Americans not bothering to learn the world’s languages. Eli, an American English monolingual, offers an especially interesting mix of instrumentalism and multiculturalism. He begins with an instrumentalist perspective. Then, perhaps recognizing that this view might be problematized, he taps a multicultural discourse in establishing a rationale for why a foreign language is desirable, though, in a world dominated by English, not necessary for mother-tongue speakers of English. He writes,

Because it is the de facto (international) language, I do not find it absolutely necessary to know a language other than English. However, it certainly accentuates a person, making them more marketable . . . This is strictly a corporate view, though. In terms of globalization and a tendency toward sensitivity toward others, learning another language is a great idea.

Lyle, an American English monolingual, highlights and then criticizes a lack of linguistic reciprocity on the part of Americans. He, like Eli, attributes this lack largely to English’s global hegemony:

I think that Americans tend to assume that everyone in the world should accommodate to them by learning the English language. In fact, most countries do teach their young students enough English that they are fairly fluent. However, it isn’t mandatory for students in the U.S. to learn a second language. Therefore, fewer Americans are fluent in a foreign language than in any other country in the world.

Lyle, Eli and other university students whose comments that have examined are not the only Americans who see English’s global hegemony as increasing the American propensity toward monolingualism. Some American intellectuals have also drawn this connection. Ariel Dorfman, a professor of literature and Latin American studies at Duke University and the author of *Heading south, looking north: A bilingual journey*, is among those who have made similar observations. In a column published in the *International Herald Tribune*, Dorfman suggests that the global hegemony of English reduces the likelihood of the sort of linguistic reciprocity for which he advocates in his column. Although the column focuses primarily on the domestic controversy that swirls around bilingual education for immigrants rather than foreign-language learning among elite mother-tongue speakers of English, Dorfman does tie into the discourse of English as a globally dominant language in order to make a key point about foreign language learning:

Most Americans would respond by asking why it is necessary at all to learn another language, given that the rest of the planet is rapidly turning English into the lingua franca of our time. Is it not easier, most Americans would say, to have others speak to us in our words and with our grammar? Let them make the mistakes and miss the nuances and subtleties while we occupy the more powerful and secure linguistic ground in any exchange. (1998: 9)

And Geoffrey Nunberg, an American intellectual whose writings on language have been published in mainstream American publications such as *The Atlantic*, *Forbes* and the *Los Angeles Times* suggests in a *Washington Post* column that, ‘To many Americans, the

worldwide dominance of English makes foreign-language skills seem a luxury rather than a necessity' (2001: B2).

WISTFUL REGRET

Some American students pushed beyond the criticism of American arrogance and ignorance to expressions of regret at a global linguistic system with English at its center and pointed to what they viewed as the extremely detrimental effect this has on American mother-tongue speakers of English. A response written by Molly, an American who self-identifies as an English-French bilingual "not quite fluent in French but who could get along in France," expresses considerable disenchantment with the current global linguistic situation. She writes,

Just because they had the dumb luck to be born in a country that speaks the world's dominant language doesn't exempt Americans from learning about and communicating with other cultures. It's unfortunate that English has become so globalized, because it seems to have made Americans lazy and allowed them to take their privilege for granted.

Molly and the other students who expressed regret that the global hegemony of English has seemingly reduced motivation for Americans to be multilingual are not the first to draw critical attention to the complex ways in which the global rise of English relates to linguistic practices of American social actors. For example, in a book published almost 30 years ago – *The tongue-tied American: Confronting the foreign language crisis*, the late U.S. Senator Paul Simon connects the global dominance of English to Americans' general lack of facility in languages other than English in a seminal book. He writes,

We unconsciously assume that it is 'natural' for people to speak English, and that those who don't are in some way inferior. They – whoever 'they' happens to be – ought to learn English; it is not equally obvious to us that we ought to be learning 'their' language (1980: 65).

Writing nearly 25 years later, Brett, an American English-Spanish bilingual, constructs an argument strikingly similar to Simon's in his response. He writes,

The rest of the world seems to be fluent in 2 to 4 languages at least. It is as if to say, 'We don't care about other cultures, nor do we need to know about them or how to communicate with them.' I wish I knew more languages fluently, but it seems that there is little value placed on this kind of knowledge.

Finally, Nancy, an American English monolingual, melds an expression of regret that there is not more of a clear instrumental reason for more Americans to learn a foreign language with a critique of what she perceives as an increasing tendency toward linguistic global homogenization. She writes,

Sadly, there isn't a reason to learn a second language because English is becoming the global language because of our strong influence on the world. Americans are lazy and taking effort to learn another language for no real reason seems pointless to us. As we continue to believe this, the world will become less and less diverse and so much more boring.

The refrain of wistful regret in student responses is also present in some American media accounts of the global rise of English. For example, there is an expression of regret in a travel column – “A language fan loves to get lost in translations” – published in the January 28, 2001 *New York Times*. In it, the author acknowledges the ways in which the global hegemony of English cuts against her own ability to achieve high-level multilingualism: ‘Being born into the global lingua franca has made me, paradoxically, even more obsessed with learning foreign languages’ (McLane 2001: 6). She also invokes the stereotype of the “tongue-tied American” who simply does not (and cannot?) measure up to the rest of the world when it comes to foreign language capabilities. She writes,

I spent 15 years studying Spanish until I could feel comfortable around it as a second language. Thanks to the serendipity of Romance languages, I can fake my way through a basic conversation, a newspaper and a menu in Italian, Portuguese and French [...] By global standards, I am a rank linguistic novice compared with just about any high school graduate from, say, Belgium. (2001: 6)

The sense that Americans’ foreign language abilities are comparatively lacking and that this state of affairs is partly an outgrowth of the global hegemony of English is apparent as well in another American newspaper column, this one published in the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, a North Carolina daily. In a piece ironically re-published on the web site of U.S. English⁷ after first appearing in the paper, *Citizen-Times* writer and editor Joy Franklin responds to U.S. English Chair Mauro E. Mujica’s assertion that English’s status as the global language further bolsters the case for English as official language of the U.S. In direct contrast to Mujica, who trumpets the wonders of English’s global domination, Franklin (2003) writes that she is ‘less thrilled with the extent to which English has become the lingua franca, for completely selfish reasons. It’s a very great disincentive for those of us who are native English speakers to learn another language. And I think that handicaps us.’ Franklin’s observations are similar to those offered by Trimmell (2003) in the book *Why you need a foreign language – and how to learn one: English-speaking professionals and the global challenge*. In it, Trimmell tries to persuade the American business class that learning a foreign language is worthwhile in a world characterized by the global hegemony of English. Early in the book he observes that, ‘The global popularity of English is a mixed blessing and curse for those of us who claim it as our native tongue’ (2003: vii).

Wistful regret stands as perhaps the most radical reading of the potential impact of the global hegemony of English upon Americans. Rather than framing the global expansion of English as an overwhelmingly positive development that allows Americans to hop the globe without ever having to utter a word in a foreign language, wistful regret casts this social phenomenon in ambivalent terms vis-à-vis its impact upon American mother-tongue speakers of English. Expressions of wistful regret show that the global language order’s lack of equality cuts in multiple directions. That is, even as it obligates non-English speakers to learn English in order to gain entry to global domains of power such as international business, international politics, and, perhaps most significantly, international higher education, it appears to generally push against mother-tongue speakers of English learning languages situated below English in the global language hierarchy. In a certain sense, it could be said to force “multilingual opportunity” on some and to deny it to others.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the first question posed regarding whether Americans (and Brits, etc.) should know/need to know a foreign language, most American and non-American respondents cast the learning of a foreign language as something American mother-tongue speakers *should* do but as something which is not necessary. In terms of the second question, which asked students whether those from non-English speaking countries should know/need to know English, there was widespread, though not complete, agreement that English *is* necessary for non-mother-tongue speakers.

Student responses could also be usefully grouped according to the instrumental, multicultural or both multicultural and instrumental logic in which they were grounded. However, instrumentalism was typically positioned as the ultimate arbiter of decision-making. That is, learning a language to develop one's cultural self and broaden one's horizons and views was *not* seen as necessary, while learning a language to advance one's socio-economic position *was* seen as necessary.

If instrumentalism is indeed the overarching lens through which differently situated social actors view and live their relation to the global hegemony of English, this means that despite admonitions to the contrary (Simon 1980; The Nuffield Languages Inquiry 2000; Trimmell 2003, etc.), comparatively few mother-tongue speakers of English will acquire meaningful, long-term proficiency in another language. It also means – and there is already evidence that this is happening (Pilgram 2004) – more and more people in non-English countries will likely concentrate heavily on learning English to the detriment of the learning of “other” languages. In short, a world in which English-centric bilingualism increasingly constitutes “multilingualism” for more and more people seems a very real possibility.

It is hoped that this paper might serve as a springboard into further research into how linguistic actors, in particular privileged ones with English as a mother-tongue, view the global hegemony of “their” language. Certainly, a generalizable survey based in part on the questionnaire administered here would potentially reveal much of interest to scholars concerned with the intersections between the global hegemony of English and the question of mono/multilingualism for various peoples around the world. As this study indicates, these intersections are real. They are real in the sense that many of the American students queried both saw these intersections as in fact existing *and* saw these intersections as directly affecting them. They are also real in the sense that the vast majority of the American students queried had little to no knowledge of a foreign language. This state of affairs is simply unimaginable for virtually any other group of university students in the world. Because these intersections between the global hegemony of English and mono/multilingualism are real, they demand further investigation. First, so that we might better map them and understand them. Second, so that those interested in the ideal of *multilingualism* for *all* might productively address these intersections – before an English-centric bilingual world which pushes the learning of all “other” languages to the margins establishes itself so thoroughly that there is no going back.

NOTES

1. Meaningful multilingual proficiency means that an individual can fairly easily construct coherent verbal and written sentences in at least one language beyond his or her first language, that he or she is able to consistently put together

- several coherent, understandable sentences in a row in both verbal and written form with a minimum of errors in that language, and that he or she can do so across a breadth of life topics and subject areas in that language.
2. The hegemony of English is defined as the *social* creation of a particular, hierarchical global linguistic order by actually existing human actors. In other words, language does not create a hegemonic linguistic order, the people who socially produce language do.
 3. High-level proficiency is determined by an individual's ability to successfully meet the hegemonic standards imposed on a privileged *written* form of a language. So for example, a scholar from Italy in cultural studies for whom English is not her first language and who is able to meet the hegemonic linguistic standards in Italian *and* in English language cultural studies journals, but who cannot speak or write at a similarly high level of proficiency in a language other than Italian or English, would be defined as an English-centric bilingual.
 4. There was a 2^{1/2} year gap between the first and second time the questionnaire was administered. However, there was no evidence of any shift in how students responded. Although English's global position is always in flux, no tectonic shifts in terms of English's global presence have occurred between 2003 and 2006, or between 2003 or 2009. Thus, there is no reason to believe that the responses would be substantially different if the questionnaire were to be administered in 2009.
 5. Clearly, mono and multilingual can be, and are, defined in different ways. One might claim that the ability to say a few words in, and perhaps carry out a disjointed conversation in a single foreign language constitutes 'multilingualism'. However, clearly a majority of students who filled out the questionnaire had a higher benchmark for multilingual – as do I.
 6. All of the American students who filled out the questionnaires did so anonymously. However, because it makes for easier reading, I use fictitious first names for each of the students whose responses I include.
 7. U.S. English is a group dedicated to promoting English in the U.S. and to establishing English as the official language of the United States.

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(Received 29 May 2009.)