English Language as Hydra

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English Language as Hydra

Its Impacts on Non-English Language Cultures

Edited by

Vaughan Rapatahana and Pauline Bunce

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Contributors

Lalaine F. Yanilla Aquino

Associate Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature, College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

I am Lalaine F. Yanilla Aquino, a Filipino and a Professor of English Studies. I have lived in the Philippines all my life, and I am a product of the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP), in which English is one of the two media of instruction. My first language is Tagalog – the language of my father, who is from Tayabas, Quezon. I can comprehend a little Aklanon – the language of my mother, who is from Aklan and a little Kapampangan – the language of my husband, who is from Pampanga. At home, my husband and I use Filipino in conversing with our children, who are all studying now still under the BEP. My very own linguistic history and experience is a good example of the multilingual country that is the Philippines. Though I have nothing against English being used as a medium of instruction in Philippine schools, I strongly believe that Filipino children have the right to learn the basic concepts and skills (and literacy, as well) *initially* in their mother tongue. The Philippine government owes it to the Filipino people to give its support, in terms of providing instructional materials, teacher training and other necessary infrastructures, as a recognition of this right.

Xavier Barker

Member of the Nauru Language Committee, ex-Director (Acting), University of the South Pacific campus, Republic of Nauru.

My name is Xavier Barker. I am both an Australian and a Nauruan, who has been educated in Australia and the Pacific. I am currently studying Language Endangerment at Monash University in Melbourne. The shift to English began with my English-teaching father and it has been completed in my children's generation, who do not know any Nauruan. As both a member of the most recent manifestation of the Nauru Language Committee and as a Campus Coordinator of the University of the South Pacific in Nauru, I have not advocated removing English from Nauruan schools, but I have strongly encouraged the maintenance of Nauruan, alongside the learning of English as a second language. It is important, whilst forging a unique identity for Nauru, which recognizes our past, that we remain pragmatic enough to recognize that English is the most widely spoken Pacific language.

Jeanie Bell

Lecturer, Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics, Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory, Australia.

My first language is English, and I identify as a member of the Jagera and Dulingbara clan groups of south-east Queensland, Australia. I use words from a range of Aboriginal languages mixed in with English on a daily basis. I also regularly speak a variety of Aboriginal English. As an adult, I have studied and learnt, from recorded documentation, my heritage language Badjala from Gari (Fraser Island), and while I technically know this language and its grammar, I only use it in limited situations.

Pauline Bunce

English Teacher, Perth, Western Australia; Former teacher-in-charge, secondary classes, Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

My name is Pauline, and I am an out-of-touch Australian with British roots. While Australia is undoubtedly my home, there are often times when I do not necessarily feel 'at home' in the country. I have lived more than half of my life outside mainstream Australian society, in various parts of Asia and in Asian parts of Australia. As a Malay speaker, there are times when I feel almost Asian, and there are other times when I struggle to be fully Australian. I'm now teaching English to adolescent new arrivals and refugees in an Australian school. It isn't always easy to live in intersecting worlds, but I wouldn't want it any other way.

Tamati Cairns

Kaumatua, Te iwi o Tuhoe, Aotearoa-New Zealand

My parents, Erina Rotarangi nee Cairns (Tuhoe) and Karaihe Rotarangi (Ngati Raukawa), gave birth to their fourth of 15 siblings (that's me) in Mokai, known as Te Pae o Raukawa, on the floor of my grandmother Teiria and grandfather Rotarangi Hamilton's lounge. Mokai is approximately 30 kilometres north-west of Taupo. By virtue of a decision made by my Grandmother Teiria, I was given to my *Koroua* and *Kuia* and raised in the small Māori community of Ruatahuna, in the heart of the Te Urewera homeland. Ruatahuna is surrounded by an aged native forest, known today as the Urewera National Park, and is a valley that supports a small farming and hunting community. Ruatahuna is referred to as the heartland of the Tuhoe people, *te Kohanga o Tuhoe*.

The adoption had been via Māori custom and tradition, *Matua Whangai*, and also what appears to be a pragmatic solution to a *whanau* birth explosion. There must have been other reasons that only the *Kuia* and the *Koroua* and the wisdom of 'Old' would know, and the foresight of such a decision, for whatever the reason. I shall be forever in their debt, having been blessed

with the fluency of *te Reo Māori me oona tikanga* and the privilege of growing up in such a special place, Ruatahuna.

Eugene Chen Eoyang

Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature and of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Indiana University, USA; Chair Professor Emeritus of English, Humanities and Translation and former Director of General Education, Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

My name is Eugene Chen Eoyang, and I learned English at an English Grammar School as a Chinese refugee in Karachi (India, as it was then) under the Raj. At the age of seven, my mother brought us to America, where I quickly converted my English-accented English to something like Brooklynese. Appalled by this decline in the 'quality' of my English, my father put me in another school, where the teaching (and the accent) was better. I graduated from Harvard with a degree in English and earned an MA in English Literature at Columbia University. After a six-year stint in publishing (Doubleday), I pursued a PhD in comparative literature at Indiana University, where I taught, on and off, for 33 years. In 1996, I moved to Hong Kong, where I taught in the English Department at Lingnam University for 12 years (serving as head from 2006–2007) – with the exception of three semesters' leave, when I returned to teach at Indiana University. From 2000–2008, I also directed the General Education Programme at Lingnan. I think my Dad (who died in 1987) might have been pleased that I was admitted in 2001 as a fellow of the British Royal Society for the encouragement of the arts, merchandise and commerce.

Noor Azam Haji-Othman

Director of the Language Centre, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam.

My name is Noor Azam from Brunei, a former British protectorate on the north-east coast of Borneo Island. I am of mixed heritage, with a Dusun father and Tutong mother, whose traditional languages I speak, in addition to Malay and English. I was born and bred in Tutong District, a harmonious blend of ethnic cultures, faiths and languages, all of which can be heard overlapping each other around a coffee table in town. I have always spoken English as far as I can remember, it being a widespread language in Brunei both outside and in the schools. At 17, I left for studies in the UK, returning for good only after about 14 years. Ironically, it took a British university, French language courses and an inspiring German professor to make me realise the immense significance of going back to my roots and conducting research on the traditional languages and cultures of Brunei.

Sandra Land

Lecturer, Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa.

My name is Sandra, and I am a white South African. I am confident that I am South African, but beyond that I fall into doubt – am I an African? I think I might be, but my black African compatriots tend to laugh at me if I say so, even though I can make the statement fluently in isiZulu. Although three of my grandparents were British, I do not think I am British, and British officials assure me emphatically that my ancestry gives me no claim to British nationality. Rejected then by both Africa and Europe, I am, continentally speaking, an outcast, a vagrant relic of colonialism, but, as someone who undoubtedly benefited by being born on the privileged side of apartheid, perhaps a worthy heir to the rejection inflicted on so many by successive governments of my twisted, torn, beloved country.

Anne-Marie de Mejía

Associate Professor, Centre for Research and Teacher Education, Universidad de los Andes, Bogota, Colombia.

I was born and grew up in London. However, I always suspected that I would one day live 'abroad'. Since I was young, I had always heard about the importance of our French ancestors, and although I had a very English upbringing, I increasingly wanted to explore other parts of the world, very different to the UK. Through a series of circumstances, I ended up in Colombia, where I live and work and feel very much at home, having now spent more of my adult life here than in the UK. My children, on the other hand, though largely brought up in Colombia, have travelled in the other direction – to the UK.

Muhammad Haji Salleh

Malaysia's National Laureate, Professor School of Humanities and Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research and International Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penanag.

Though I was born in Malaysia and began to speak Malay early, the progress of my schooling was a gradual emptying of the Malay and replacing it with the colonial language. For a long time, I was alienated from the tongue of Malaysia and functioned reasonably well in English. However, after being culturally and linguistically lost in Europe, the US and Asia for more than three decades, I have returned to my mother tongue, to write in it, and I made a conscious decision to stop writing poetry (my main and most intimate genre) in English. Now I am in the process of digging into the epistemology of the language and culture. Recently, I have written on the poetics of Malay literature. Otherwise, I teach, write essays and translate. I

now have some 50 books of poems, essays, theoretical explorations, translation, etc.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

Distinguished Professor, Comparative Literature and English, University of California, Irvine, USA.

Call me Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (pronounced 'Googey wa Theeongo'), in short, Ngũgĩ. In my recent memoir of childhood, *Dreams in a Time of War*, I have talked about growing up in Limuru Kenya, where I was born in 1938. I went to school during the years of the Mau Mau armed struggle against British colonial settler rule. Kenya's independence was in 1963. I speak three languages – Gĩkũyũ, Kiswahili and English. Currently, I am Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative literature at the University of California. I write my fiction, drama and poetry in Gĩkũyũ only. I have published a small journalistic piece in Kiswahili. I write my academic books in English. I believe in translations as a way of making languages and cultures give and take from each other equally.

Robyn Ober

Researcher, Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory, Australia.

I identify as a Murri (Aboriginal) woman, with connections to the Djirribal/Mamu rainforest people in North Queensland, through my mother, and the KuKu Yalandji, through my father. I do not speak my heritage languages, because of past government policies and historical events which had a huge impact on Indigenous Australian languages. I speak a dialect of Australian English known as Aboriginal English or Murri English, which is a distinct North Queensland dialect. This is my first language, but, of course, I also speak and code-switch to Standard Australian English as the need arises. I am very interested in the history and emergence of Aboriginal English as a contemporary Indigenous language in Australia.

Arjuna Parakrama

Former Professor and Chair of English, Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka.

Among academics, I'm often seen disapprovingly as an activist, and among activists, I'm invariably treated with some suspicion as an academic, both fraught relationships generating productive unease. Not fitting in seems to be my fate and forte. This analysis of language and power stems from my broader lifework (un-)learning from multiple marginalised communities and my doomed attempts at understanding the nature of subaltern resistance to dominant discourse. I love teaching and that's about

the only thing I seem to do, in whatever job I find myself. When I'm convinced that I'm of no more use to anybody, I'm going to spend my days birdwatching and writing poetry. I'm almost there now.

Joseph Sung-Yul Park

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore, Singapore.

I am a Korean-American who was born in the US, but grew up in Seoul, South Korea. As I reveal in my chapter, even though I identify myself as Korean, there are many aspects of my life that make me feel unsure of my sense of belonging. This is particularly so as I have spent a large part of my adult life outside of Korea, including the USA, Macau and Singapore. As I grow older, I feel less certain about where 'home' might be for me. But that has also given me ample opportunities to think about the questions of belonging and identity.

Alastair Pennycook

Professor of Language Studies, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.

I have been working for many years in language education in many parts of the world, and for much of that time, I have been struggling to make sense of English, the role it has played historically, its contemporary role in relation to globalization, the damage it does, the hope it brings. Now that I have the privilege of a senior academic position and the chance to travel even more widely around the world, listening to teachers, looking at linguistic landscapes, talking to people from so many different backgrounds, I continue to ask these questions around English, endlessly exploring the ways it is understood, taken up, rejected and discarded and trying to work out its shifting relation to other languages. I remain puzzled and troubled.

Robert Phillipson

Professor, Department of International Language Studies and Computational Linguistics, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark.

After a conventional middle-class British upbringing, I worked for the British Council in English teaching in post-colonial Algeria and communist Yugoslavia. Strong influences in my exile have been living in more socially just Scandinavia, work at a university stressing multi-disciplinarity, critical scholarship from Africa and India and writing with my radical wife, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. I continue to be appalled by the hypocrisy of the West in educational language policy. I attempt to undermine linguistic imperialism, to strengthen linguistic diversity locally, in the EU system and through collaboration with inspiring scholars from many parts of the world.

Vaughan Rapatahana

Native English-speaking Teacher, Hong Kong.

Former head of English departments in Aotearoa-New Zealand, Republic of Nauru, Brunei Darussalam, P.R. China.

Vaughan Rapatahana feels his viewpoint is well covered in the Genesis of this Book and the Introduction, respectively.

Rani Samant Rubdy

Associate Professor, English Language and Literature, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

As an Indian who grew up to an awareness of the many rich subcultures that co-exist within what may be called the Indian culture, I have come to regard linguistic diversity as a natural and indistinguishable part of cultural diversity. And so I see the imposition of any uniform or common language on a multilingual country, such as India or Singapore, as wholly unsuitable to (indeed, as violating) their very spirit and ethos. The basic problem is that having gained independence, we have striven to be no more than imitators of the West in shaping our social, political and cultural ideologies (biases, really), instead of recognizing the complexity and uniqueness of our situation and evolving our own solutions. This we have yet to do. A good beginning would be to stop thinking of our linguistic situation as a problem and start building on its strengths.

Graham Hingangaroa Smith

Distinguished Professor. Vice Chancellor/Chief Executive Officer, *Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi:* indigenous-university, Whakatane, Aotearoa-New Zealand.

My name is Hingangaroa Smith. I am an indigenous Māori from Aotearoa, New Zealand. My Tribal backgrounds are Ngāti Apa, Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti and Ngāti Kahungunu. I work in alternative and conventional education settings to transform high and disproportionate levels of educational under-development. I believe that the social and economic transformation that is necessary by Māori can only be built on a prior or simultaneous education revolution. Furthermore, successful education for Māori must embrace their desire to still 'be Māori' and to maintain their Māori language, knowledge and cultural integrity.

Acknowledgements

We wish to sincerely thank the following people for their invaluable advice and support: all of our interviewees and our tireless contributors; the Cocos Malay people of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands; Dr Patrick Armstrong; Dr Alastair Pennycook; Dr Robert Phillipson; Dr Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Bill Purves.

As the English language Hydra has reared its ugly heads in a great many other locations, we also acknowledge those contributors whose chapters we were unable to squeeze into the present collection: those from China, Scotland, France, Ethiopia, Japan, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates. Thank you for your support.

Series Editor's Note

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas

A feel for this book comes immediately upon reading the editors' statements on its genesis. When an 'outsider' (Pauline) – turned almost an 'insider' – and an almost 'insider' (Vaughan) – turned almost 'outsider' – meet, and they recognise a common analysis – disgust and rage – and possibilities for change-agency, the resulting combination can be extremely powerful. Admittedly, the economic/class situation of both Vaughan and Pauline makes them true outsiders, in relation to most of the world's colonised people/s, regardless of the degree of physical or mental means used in past and present colonialisms. But it is also a fact that a fairly secure economic situation is mostly a prerequisite for writing and editing books. That said, however, very few well-paid TESOL-ers ever turn radical or even critical. Here, it has happened, and this is also why the book's relevance reaches far beyond the countries it describes.

Linguistic capital is convertible to other types of capital and resources, including formal education and life chances. Capability deprivation (in Economics' Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's sense) leads to poverty. Knowledge of the English language is today made to seem an important part of linguistic capital for most people in the world. If the subtractive performing of what is supposed to be teaching English actually leads to linguistic capital dispossession and, thus, capability deprivation, it may, together with the lack of mother-tongue-medium multilingual education that often accompanies it, be part of a linguistic and/or cultural genocide and a crime against humanity.

The editors and authors of this important book (that *had* to be written, as the editors acknowledge) make a valiant and, to a large extent, successful effort to capture the Hydra's heads. They describe the glorification of (competence in) English and the stigmatisation of (people speaking/signing) many other languages and (their) competences in them (sometimes even when one knows English in addition to them). They also expose the rationalisations of the relationship between them, where the knowledge of English and the ways it is taught are always presented as something beneficial to the learners. 'We' are 'helping' 'them', supporting them in acquiring new resources, even when this invalidates the very resources they do have: their own languages, cultures, knowledge and world views.

Using Ngũgĩ's metaphor of languages as bridges (also see Mohanty, 2009), we surely do need two-way bridges, where information can flow equally