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Unsettling Capital and Assemblages of English

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Question: What must the world be like for the normative model of standard English to be the dominant form?
‘World trade and the world market date from the sixteenth century, and from then on the modern history of capital starts to unfold’ (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 247).

Chapter 1
The political economy of English in a capitalist world-system

Chapter 2
English and the political economy of informal empire, 1688-1850

Chapter 3
The political economy of global English, 1850-1914

Chapter 4
The political economy of global English, 1918-1979

Chapter 5
Capital-centric English and the modern world-system, 1979-2008

Chapter 6
The decline of the US world-hegemony

Chapter 7
Superdiverse translingualism, commodification and trans-spatial resistances

Chapter 8
The demise of capitalism and the end of the hegemony of English
English as the dominant global language

• British and US ‘empires’ as world economies within a capitalist world-system which has existed since the sixteenth century.

• The raison d’être of the system is the accumulation of capital:
  • ‘In my view for a historical system to be considered a capitalist system, the dominant or deciding characteristic must be the persistent search for the endless accumulation of capital – the accumulation of capital in order to accumulate more capital’ (Wallerstein cited in O’Regan, 2021b: 28-29)

• M-C-M
M-C-M'

- M-C-M': ‘where $M'=M+\triangle M$, i.e. the original sum advanced plus an increment [...] and this movement converts [money] into capital’ (ibid: 251-2).
English as a free rider on capital

M-C-M' and M-M'

M^E-C^E-M'^E and M^E-M'^E

1) investment (the raising of money): M
2) trade (in commodities): C
3) the return (on the money originally invested): M'
The normative grammar

• ‘a governing stratum [ceto] whose function is recognized and followed’ (Gramsci, 1975: 2343, cited in Ives, 1998: 40).

• ‘The dominance of English and standard varieties of English is intact both globally and within English-speaking countries, marginalizing and disadvantaging non–English-speaking or nonnative-English-speaking populations’ (Kubota, 2016: 489).

• [A]lthough English has become a global language, native-speaking English varieties from North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand are still often regarded as the desired standards for international education’ (Phan, 2015: 224).
Autocentrism and global dominance of SE

The ‘internalization’ of US corporate practices within the organizational domains of giant business corporations (TNCs) and the world’s global governance institutions (e.g. Coca Cola, McDonalds, Goldman Sachs, Apple etc.; IMF, the World Bank, WTO, US Federal Reserve etc.) (Arrighi, 2010)

Advanced structural power of the US in economic and cultural production, in global credit (IMF, WB, Federal Reserve) and security institutions (NATO, Asian security pacts), in military reach (air, land and sea), and in control over the global knowledge base (technological knowledge over social knowledge; empirical knowledge over theoretical knowledge; paywalled knowledge over free knowledge) (Strange, 1989)
Superdiverse translingualism: assemblages of English

• ‘the communicative practices of transnational groups that interact using different languages and communicative codes simultaneously present in a range of communicative channels, both local and distant’ (Jacquemet 2005: 265, cited in O’Regan, 2021a: 219-20)

• Superdiversity, translingual practice, translanguaging, trans-spatial assemblage, English as a Lingua Franca, World Englishes and language commodification as subsets of superdiverse translingualism.
Neologisms

Reproduction of the normative form

• Academic journals and international research remain a ‘sacred hall’. (Phan, 2020)

• The journal peer review process with few exceptions remains wedded to dominant standard forms. (Phan, 2020)

• Those most committed to the legitimacy of English language diversity are in practice very often complicit in the reproduction of dominant standard forms. (O’Regan, 2021)
Standard English and the markets of academia

- International scholars are employees of universities, whose personal economic livelihoods [as waged workers] in addition to the [symbolic] success of their careers, and that of their universities, depend upon their teaching and supervision activity, the ‘winning’ of competitive research grants, their cumulative research outputs, and the [symbolic] growth in their international profiles. For international scholars writing for publication and presenting at academic conferences in English, success in the economic marketplace of academic waged labour also depends to a great extent on success in the linguistic marketplace of standard English [...]. (O’Regan, 2021a: 184)
Phonocentrism in superdiverse translingualism

• The documentation of actors and agents who are involved in ‘practices’ involving or implying *speech*.

• Phonocentrism as the principal means of identifying a radical politics of resistance to normative standard forms.
Not speech, but writing

• While it is good that linguists and anthropologists wish to find paths to resistance in speech, it is with *writing* that the hegemony of English in the world rests. (O’Regan, 2021a: 204)

• In opposition to Rousseau, it seems that in the present era it is not so much that writing is the representation of speech but rather the reverse; it is speech that is the representation of writing. This is in the sense that in global English the speech of capital is that of the normative written form, and it is this form which dominates the world-system in all its structural facets. (O’Regan, 2021a: 205)
What must the world be like?

• The endless accumulation of capital within a capitalist world-system in which the dominant hegemonic powers for nearly four hundred years have been anglophone nations.

• Has enabled the development of a dialectical practical consciousness whose unintended consequence [...] has been the endless reproduction and free riding of normative standard English [...] as the fetishized universal for global English production and use [...] and against which all deviations are implicitly compared (O’Regan, 2021a: 156)
Global English and Political Economy

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Select references


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