

Linguicism and Language Variety

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Abstract

Linguicism is a concept defined by Phillipson (2011), as discrimination in the same vein as racism and sexism, but relates to societal favouring and preferencing of one language variety or use over another in the intrinsic belief it is just and right. Thus, non-normative use of privileged languages or elements of said languages can have negative implications for those choosing to use language in non-normative ways.

Key words: linguicism, language varieties, global Englishes

1. Introduction

1.1 English

The spread of English, developed historically through colonization and more recently through globalization (Kachru & Smith, 2009; Schneider, 2014), has led to the development of English varieties and the appropriation of English elements to suit local needs (Davydova, 2012; Schneider, 2012). As Honna (2012) posits English these days is now a pluricentric and multicultural language. This has also led to the development of the World Englishes (WE) paradigm, that espouses the equal legitimacy of all varieties of use (Bolton, Graddol & Meierkord, 2011). In particular its use of the plural 'Englishes' is an attempt to imply that all users, whether they be native or non-native users, speakers of perceived standard varieties or not, are all legitimate users of English each and of themselves (Lok, 2012).

However, despite the work emanating from within the WE paradigm these different varieties of English and appropriation of English elements are often critiqued

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as deficient and illegitimate forms of English as they deviate from the widely recognized standard varieties, namely either American English or British English (Honna, 2008). For Phillipson (2011), this is evidence of linguisticism. As he further explains, linguisticism privileges the users of standard forms and its speakers (Phillipson, 2011), in essence adhering to and aspiring to the standard varieties is viewed as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ and, anything that deviates from it is viewed as deviant and mistaken.

1.2 Non-standard English and linguisticism

Despite the spread of English, the codification of different varieties, and the development of paradigms such as WE, the distinction between native and non-native English users and therefore the distinction between standard English use and non-standard English use continues to persist (Phillipson, 2011). This in essence ascribes a superiority and legitimacy to certain varieties and usages over others (Lok, 2012) and means that grammars and dictionaries prescribed by these ‘standard’ varieties become the goal by which ‘good’ English use is judged (Kramsch, 2014). Therefore, learners of English or users in locations where English is neither a main nor official language are expected to emulate and adhere to these standard varieties when using English or elements of English, such as the Roman alphabet and lexical items.

This favouring of standard varieties and its users, and the critical assessment of any use that deviates from it, is for Phillipson (2011) a form of linguistic discrimination. In essence, in this globalized world where English is heralded as the language of the globe, the belief that standard varieties are the ‘correct’ use of English implicitly, and at times explicitly, prestiges those that adhere to the standard varieties, and negates the legitimacy of any use viewed as non-standard (Phillipson, 2011).

As Widdowson (1994) further explains using perceived non-standard varieties of English in perceived non-standard ways runs the risk of being assigned less importance and diminishing the chance to be taken seriously. Furthermore, failing to adhere to these standard varieties signals deviant use of English and is a sign that you are not a legitimate part of the globalized English-speaking world (Widdowson, 1994).

2. Non-normative English use and Japan

The spread of English has seen it develop into different varieties as well as become a legitimate linguistic tool to be used by all and flavoured with local meaning, pronunciation, and creativity (Pennycook, 2010). In essence, English is no longer the sole domain of the so-called ‘native speakers’ usually conceptualized as the An-

glophone British English or American English speaker (Honna, 1995). Indeed, Schneider (2012) notes that the reality of English use today is far from being constrained by standard norm orientations and that English, or even just certain elements of English, are now a creative and innovative language resource that transcends boundaries of nation, people, and appropriateness. However, despite this reality the popularity of the native speaker ideal and prescribed standard varieties still persists in much of the world today (Collins & Yao, 2013).

Indeed, Japan houses an extremely contrastive relationship with English. On the one hand it is utilized as a local linguistic tool whilst on the other, adherence to the idealized standard variety still permeates much of the feeling towards English and English use. In essence English seems to exist for dual purposes in Japan, but is often only critiqued against standard English expectations.

For Pennycook (2010) anywhere a language has touched it will adjust to that influence in ways appropriate to the reality of that particular locale. In this way all the uses of English or English elements are as legitimate as each other. However as discussed above usages of English elements that do not fit standard varieties may be critiqued as mistake ridden, which can be the case in Japan, for example when something is expressed in romaji or the roman alphabet is used and viewed from an exonormative perspective (Honna, 2012).

As Gottlieb (2010) asserts, though there has been a long history of language play and creativity with existing linguistic tools in Japan recent technological innovations such as the Internet have now made these innovations available to and accessible for judgement not just by the locals but by a global audience. Some of whom do not view perceived non-normative English use favourably.

2.1 Japanese English and the idealized variety

The creative use and localized appropriation of English in Japan contrasts sharply with the idealised English varieties that learners wish to achieve. Research shows that Japanese English learners still consistently prefer native speaking teachers, native pronunciation, and standard varieties of English over other varieties, and imagine English communication to be with Anglophone native English speakers (Saito & Hatoss, 2011; Sakai & D'Angelo, 2005; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011). Indeed, Honna (2008) posits that despite the use of English or perceived English, whether it be the roman alphabet used in a sign, random words used for a store name, or for communication that doesn't conform to a standard type, in everyday life in Japan, most people still judge it as deviant and an illegitimate form of English. Therefore, despite the rise in recognition of English varieties in academic and scholarly circles, the wider populace in Japan still seems to favour standard English use dictated by standard varieties, despite the fact that most commonly English is

now used between non-native speakers, each of whom brings with them their own variety of English or appropriated English use (Hino, 2009).

For some this is the result of English education in Japan (Honna, 2008; Hino, 2009). An enormous amount of energy is put into the learning of English, however with its heavy emphasis on accuracy and adherence to prescribed American English, learners often lack confidence in their English abilities and the legitimacy of their English or perceived English use in Japan (Honna, 2008; Hino, 2009). For Honna (2008) this idealisation of 'standard English' is not a realistic goal, and this massive effort exerted by students in Japan along with the influence of English in local everyday practice has thus resulted in the formation of Japanese English. Indeed, Japanese English is a recognized variety within the WE paradigm and is just beginning to be codified (Ike, 2010). For example, Ike (2010) found that Japanese English speakers use backchannels much more often than speakers of other varieties. This is indicative of Japanese conversational styles in general (Ike, 2010) and is evidence of how Japanese practice is incorporated into Japanese English use, which of course includes other aspects such as pronunciation, lexical choices, expressive choices, and how speech acts are performed (Hino, 2009; Honna, 2008).

3. Implications

What does this all mean for language pedagogy? For Kramersch (2014) and Honna (2008) the dynamic reality of global and local English use does not mean that standard language teaching should be abandoned, as there still needs to be a starting point. However, Kramersch (2014) does propose that language education should include teaching that allows students a glimpse of the broader horizons that globalization has created. She further explains that globalization has multiplied the possibilities exponentially in the ways that meaning can be made, ways that far exceed what can be found in standard dictionaries and grammars. It is therefore the language teacher's role to help diversify meaning and point out other possibilities (Kramersch, 2007).

This type of pedagogy may be supported by the kinds of educational tools developed by Busch and Schick (2006). They developed resources for use within Bosnia-Herzegovina to reflect the heteroglossic reality in those regions. The tools reflected the variety of language actually in use in Bosnia-Herzegovina at the time, without preference or favour.

With access to language education that embraces the teaching and existence of language variety such as mentioned above, linguisticism may become less problematic. As Pessoa and Freitas (2012) point out language education often focuses on communicative competence over the importance that language plays in how people interpret

themselves and the world. Therefore, it would seem that language education that embraces the possibility and existence of language variety would not only help build greater acceptance in regards to language use that deviates from the so-called norm, but better help people make informed decisions about how they might be perceived and judged, and make informed decisions about what is relevant to their situation or not.

Pessoa and Freitas (2012) further espouse the need for critical language teaching. That is, teaching that promotes dialog and critical thinking. Indeed, as much as critical language teaching might ask students to reflect on how sexism, or class discrimination are manifested, perhaps critical language teaching may also start a wider discussion on linguicism and how that is manifested in the wider community, perhaps initiating a meta-discourse much like those that take place in the wider community about other forms of discrimination.

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