Globalization, Global English, and World English(es): Myths and Facts

Salikoko S. Mufwene
For our present purposes, whence it all started:
It is a story of colonization, reminiscent of that of Rome and Latin:
And the latter was repeated...
... concurrently, in similar ways:
The different meanings of ‘Globalization’

- Network of economic interdependencies
- New form of economic colonization controlled by multinational corporations ==> insidious form of economic domination by world powers
- Condition of interconnectedness, such as with inter-governmental consultations in world affairs
- All-inclusive condition, such as with “global wars”
- Diffusion/Distribution all over the world
- World-wide or regional uniformity in economic and cultural systems ==> a sort of cultural homogenization
- Deterritorialization and/or Reterritorialization
But globalization is not about equality...

• It has increased economic inequities
• It has produced uniformities with lots of local characters
• Glocalization is consistent with globalization
• Globalization has not affected the whole world in a consistent way
• There are parts of the world that are more engaged in it than others; and there are segments of populations that are more engaged in it than others
• Globalization is not about to obliterate disparities between the First and the Third Worlds
• Globalization is not about to erase differences between former settlement and exploitation colonies
• Globalization is not about to lump “native” and “non-native” Englishes in the same category
It should help to re-examine some claims associated with “global English” in light of the complex nature of “globalization”...

• as a condition of both homogeneity and heterogeneity,
• or as an evolution toward world-wide uniformity and cross-local diversity,
• or as evolving in one and many parts of the world at the same time
What is “Global English”

If English is diverse, in what sense is it global?

• English as a language spoken all over the world...
• by native and non-native speakers
• It is becoming the lingua franca for the whole world
• According to Crystal (2004:4), it is “the world’s first truly global language”
• A language that plays an important role in the globalization (i.e., unification) of the world into a “global village”
• But Crystal (2004:31) also suggests that, like Latin, English is probably fragmenting, or it will, into mutually unintelligible varieties (i.e., separate languages)
• As we know, English creoles have already been disenfranchized (by linguists)
“World Englishes” vs. “World English”

• “World English” smacks of “world language”, highlighting the role of English as a world language and as an international lingua franca

• “World Englishes” is similar to “New Englishes”, though the latter raises the question of what modern English variety is not new.

• According to Braj Kachru (p.c., 14 July 2004), the notion of “World Englishes” is independent of whether or not English functions as a world language...

• The concept was intended to capture the pluralism and the regional and cross-cultural variation that obtains among English varieties around the world, the distinct identities of these varieties.
Bolton (2004) corroborates this...

... citing Kachru and Smith (1985) and underscoring...

- the centrifugal and centripetal dynamics of international Englishes... with *Englishes* symbolizing
- “the functional and formal variation in the language, and its international acculturation” ...
- its inclusivity and pluricentricity, its international, regional, and local characters
- Thus, *world Englishes*, in the plural, is not associated with the issues I raise about Crystal’s notion of “Global English”
There is also that important distinction between the Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles of English (Kachru 1992)

- It is partly correlated with the distinction between non-plantation settlement colonies and exploitation colonies (Mufwene 2001)...
- to which can be added territories that had not been colonized by England/the United Kingdom
- English functions as a vernacular in former settlement colonies...
- as an official language and as an important intranational lingua franca for the educated in former exploitation colonies...
- as a useful international lingua franca in the other countries (including continental Europe)
The variation in the ethnographic status of English can be correlated with its differential coexistence with indigenous languages in former colonies

- English has been more of a risk to the indigenous languages of former settlement colonies than to those of former exploitation colonies, if at all
- A vernacular competes with other vernaculars, whereas a lingua franca competes with other lingua francas...
- Moreover, a lingua franca can compete only with lingua francas that it shares ethnographic functions with
How “global” can English be while it is not spoken by large segments of the population outside the England/UK and its former settlement colonies?

- “[S]ome two thirds of the world population do not yet use it” (Crystal 1997:23)
- Thus, English is *global* only in the geographical sense!
- But this is not what is suggested by the myth of English as a “killer language”
- “Perhaps a global language will hasten the disappearance of minority languages, or (...) make all other languages disappear” (Crystal 199:13). Under what conditions?
Is English a driver of globalization or a free rider?

- Do languages have lives independent of their speakers?
- Do languages engage in wars with each other?
- Does globalization need English?
- Are businessmen language missionaries?
- Does *McDonaldization* amount to *Anglicization* of the world?
- Did British colonization intend to Anglicize the relevant territories of Africa and Asia? (Brutt-Griffler 2002)
- Why have we been fighting for the legitimization of “New” or “Indigenized Englishes”?
Is there going to be an “English-only Europe”? (Phillipson 2003)

• Is there going to be an English-only India too?
• Or, is there going to be an English-only South Africa?
• The answer is likely to be negative in all these cases, even in Europe, despite the success of the European Union
• The EU has promoted linguistic nationalisms and has supported linguistic minorities, though it has not created the requisite ecologies for the latter to thrive
• In any case, when it comes to language endangerment, the distinction between ‘vernacular’ and ‘lingua franca’ can’t be overlooked!
• An important lesson about language practice, above all ideologies, can be learned from Africa and Asia
Is a “truly global language” likely to emerge that functions alone as a world vernacular?

- “[C]ould English kill off all other languages altogether? A world in which there was only one language left (...) is a scenario which could in theory obtain with 500 years” (Crystal 2004:41).
- Theories of evolution are about the past, not about the future (Stephen Jay Gould 2000, report of a conference in Paris).
- Look what genetic linguistics shows us about the fate of languages like Latin and Proto-Bantu that have prevailed over other languages.
- Crystal (2004:31) too suggests that, like Vulgar Latin a millenium ago, “English is going to fragment into mutually unintelligible varieties” (i.e., languages, p. 134)
- Isn’t this the story of English creoles? They are not dying, by the way, not even by “decreolization.”
Much of the non-Western world has taken a different socio-economic evolutionary pattern from the West

• It is not globalizing in exactly the same style
• There is also a significant part of it that has been marginalized from economic and cultural globalization of the kind most commonly discussed in the literature
• Neither the languages nor the cultures of this marginalized world seem threatened by English
• Even places such as Taiwan, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Singapore, which seem to have benefited from world-wide and regional globalization are not about to evolve into English-only polities...
• <= because globalization does not make monolingualism a prerequisite.
... and because the rest of the world does not want to replicate the West, though it has emulated the good sides of it...

- and even if it wanted too, there is a particular kind of local cultural infrastructure that would not support that kind of evolution... a sort of ecology that is not particularly accommodating to that foreign infusion...

- a cultural ecology that exploitation colonization was not able to, or probably did not intend, to change.
Thank you