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The politics and the personal in language education: the state of which art?

Review article on *The politics of language education. Individuals and institutions*, edited by J. Charles Alderson. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009.
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Robert Phillipson

The politics of language education. Individuals and institutions is an important book. It is an informative collection of evidence from a wide range of language projects in the age of globalisation and European integration. It documents the gap between project professionals and their political masters, and how the personal qualities and agendas of both groups may decisively influence whether activities succeed or fail. It reveals how universities and disciplines are being transformed from commitment to academic freedoms into commercially motivated businesses. The anthology also demonstrates that some of those involved are asking questions about the ethics of their professionalism, and that sensitive topics like unprofessional behaviour and journal censorship should be given scholarly attention. A declared goal is to promote debate about many aspects of work in language education that tend to be kept private. I shall explore whether the book succeeds in living up to its ambitious goals by presenting each article. I then contribute to debate by expanding on many of the important issues raised¹.

The book has a narrower focus than the title leads one to expect. 'Language education' refers in fact to *English Language Teaching*. The reader is assumed to know what ELT is, since this abbreviation is introduced without definition on page 1. More specifically, the book deals almost exclusively with the *export of British know-how worldwide*, and the way its domestic variant in higher education in the UK, in relation to foreign students as English learners, is driven by economic rather than pedagogical rationales. Also absent from the title is *language testing*, which is central to most of the papers. Many of the 12 contributors would consider themselves testing specialists.

Charles Alderson's goal for the anthology is to flesh out *micropolitics* in the sense of the individual's personal agenda within an organization or institution in order to achieve specific goals. Many articles deal with the interface between individual professionalism and political constraints, which entails engagement with the role of politicians and decision-makers in relation to British ELT expertise. Alderson (2, 14) excludes from consideration macropolitical issues of development 'aid', international relations, and hierarchies of language: why British know-how is considered relevant worldwide is left unexplored. The vignettes presented in his initial Overview (8-10) provide glimpses of the arrogance, corruption, and incompetence in the pernicious world of the donor and the foreign big shot. These are all too familiar: irrelevant or over-theoretical guest lectures, self-promotion rather than sensitivity to local needs, the consultant who functions like a bull in a china shop cross-culturally, etc. Alderson claims that 'in principle the issues addressed are generalisable beyond any particular language' (14). This may well be true of the presentation of personality types, strategic behaviour, management and organisational theory that Alderson summarizes. However, the statement that 'Language education is an international business and activity' (25) in fact only applies to English, because of the massive Anglo-American promotion of

English worldwide, which dovetails with demand for the language. The much more limited international marketing of other languages (most notably Chinese, French and Spanish) has few of the characteristics of the global English language industry.

The assumption of the universality of the British experience and the English language reminds me of the Polish-Australian linguist, Anna Wierzbicka's strictures (2006, 12-14) on the ethnocentricity of many from the Anglo-American world who mistakenly take Anglo English for the human norm. This mindset represents a continuation of the way the ideals of the French and American Revolutions and of European imperial powers were exported worldwide in different variants of the civilising mission, their values being considered universally relevant. Globalisation has largely taken over this role in recent decades (Bourdieu 2001, 84)ⁱⁱ, with English as both handmaiden and driving force (Phillipson 2009a).

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Charles Alderson's 'Setting the scene' states a need for theory in this area, but wishes to ensure that theory is securely anchored in experience. He relies heavily on existing definitions of micropolitics that list factors and parameters. Perhaps as a result the term is used in a pretty loose sense by all contributors to the book. Alderson summarises sociological and psychological analysis of organisational behaviour, management theory, politics and power, the last two superficially, but without relating this thematic presentation to the articles in the book or analytic discussion. Few of the contributors attempt to refine how best micropolitics might be theorised or operationalised. The chapter reads like a search for ways of pigeon-holing empirical work, before any coherent synthesis has been achieved. Much of the descriptive matter from Anglo-American analysis of business and educational cultures, turf games, and strategic behaviour is presented as though it is universally valid, which serves to consolidate hegemonic ideologies rather than critiquing them.

Alan Davies's article, 'Professional advice vs political imperatives', reports on his experience as a consultant advising the Nepali government on the optimal starting age for English learning, and the political resistance to what academics recommended. The task was undertaken in the early 1980s. There is also brief exemplification of inadequate advice given to a West African Examinations board. The article is a sensitive examination of the constraints affecting such work, and ultimately of the subordination of the professional to the political. The article fails to explore the individual contribution of the three British and three Nepali consultants, treating them as a united team – not much micropolitics here - was there really no leader, no hierarchy between the internationals and the locals?

Among the reservations I have about what is a useful contribution to the historical record is a fear that the entire exercise seems to have assumed that the learning of English could be undertaken monolingually. Translation does not figure in the British ELT professional mindset, nor does the influence and role of Nepali as the sole medium of instruction, which for most Nepalis is not the mother tongue. In addition, the sample extracts of the reading tests used as the instrument for assessing language proficiency strike me as culturally suspect. Reference to headgear (caps), to dogs as pets, and to attitudes to facial features as though 'prettiness' is universal, look decidedly Eurocentric.

In passing, Davies exonerates himself from any involvement in linguistic imperialism. With reference to the language legacy of several empires, he writes: '*pace* Phillipson (1992), the

prominence of such excolonial languages does not necessarily kill off local languages, as we see, for example, in India and Africa' (48). It is true that the direct cause of languages being killed off in postcolonial countries is the impact of dominant local languages rather than the former colonial language at the top of the language hierarchy (Mufwene 2001, 179). However, even if Davies is rightly critical of many aspects of the Nepali scene, the effect of the consultation was to consolidate two types of linguistic imperialism. The use of Nepali as the sole medium of instruction contributes to the marginalisation and possible extermination of Nepal's over 100 languages, an issue that the article does not refer to. Secondly, even when the expatriates were well informed in arguing for English to be learned late in the schooling cycle, in the end they felt obliged to go along with local politicians' wishes. The compromise agreed on strengthened the position of elites, since it effectively meant that access to English would benefit exclusively them, and not the mass of the population. The consultants' task (presumably their costs were borne by the British taxpayer) was not to strengthen general education but English, which consolidates its linguisticⁱⁱⁱ privileging, as in virtually all postcolonial contexts.

Currently Nepal and some states in India are moving towards mother-tongue based multilingual education, with 'tribal' languages (the local term) and their cultures being used in the initial years of literacy (Mohanty et al 2009, Skutnabb-Kangas et al 2009)^{iv}. Recent consultants have been rather more successful in making the Nepali government listen, and without needing to compromise (Skutnabb-Kangas and Mohanty 2009). A government decision to promote universal literacy and give all Nepalis the right to complete primary education in the mother tongue was announced in July 2009^v.

Tom Hunter's 'Micropolitical issues in ELT project implementation' supplements Alderson's presentation of relevant variables by summarising the 'aid' goals of the UN and large commercial or NGO players. He then presents the roles of ELT consultants, potential sources of conflict, and how they might be theorised. This is followed by a case study of experience in what must be Bangladesh, though the country is not named. He relies on 'political psychology' to present types of interaction and cross-cultural frustrations. While there is a rich description of the project, which is termed a success, even if many weaknesses and failures are noted, much of the general material presented in the first half of the article is not drawn on in the analysis of the project. It is also strange to stress *process* as though this is of particular importance in ELT projects. Isn't it true of any international 'development' project? The ambivalent role of donor 'experts' comes through very clearly throughout the entire description of the project, including when locals are blamed for failing to accept the reality of a time-bound project of this kind, or to plan for sustainable change. Ultimately the project was 'at the mercy of macropolitics' (82), i.e. the reluctance of the British government to make a long-term commitment, and the weak position of professionals vis-à-vis their political masters.

The book is a collection of papers by individuals describing their own experience. Each contribution presents the self-reflective *post hoc* of only one side of a story. It would be extremely relevant if voice were given to key Nepalis or Bangladeshis involved in the projects described here. This might shed light on whether the entire British package was at all culturally, pedagogically and linguistically appropriate, and whether the individuals involved, whatever their good intentions might have been, were optimally qualified, or, more probably, less so. Structurally and ideologically, the privileged position of English, and the powerful interests behind the language, are being confirmed in these projects.

Justification for the book providing a run-through of management ideology is impressively confirmed in *Ron Kerr's* 'The politics of ELT projects in China' in the 1980s. His article documents that the aim of British 'development assistance' was to penetrate the Chinese academic world and convert it to British approaches (Business English, and communicative methods, whereas what the Chinese wanted assistance with was translation) through the cachet of native speakers (British supply, Chinese demand) whose language competence could be converted on the job into influence as teacher trainers and project managers (the British strategy). Hard evidence is provided of the policy, in eighty higher education institutions, following an exclusively donor agenda, which not surprisingly met massive Chinese resistance. Kerr refers aptly to the British Council as quasi-governmental, rectifying Alderson's false labelling of it as an NGO (40). Kerr's data show that the BC was totally subservient to government policies (the Overseas Development Administration, ODA, and its successor, the Department for International Development, DfID): 'the English language acted as a vehicle for the spread of management and marketing discourses' (87) as a lever for the 'free market economy ... and commercial advantage' (88, citing the BC). The ODA and BC were ultimately serving commercial purposes, and English was to conform to this matrix. Kerr shows in depth how ELT professionalism itself was to be transformed in this re-writing of academic and political agendas, its conversion from scholarship and pedagogy to managerialism.

At the personal level for all the ELT professionals concerned, including Kerr, the entire exercise, and the professional capital that the individuals accumulated, were ditched by an abrupt change of British government policy. Tony Blair's new Labour government in 1997 wished development 'assistance' to shift from higher to basic education. Manifestly the BC's capacity to function as an autonomous professional body was a myth during the entire ELT scheme, and was made to look even more of a sham by the policy shift. The Chinese presumably drew their own conclusions. What is interesting from a British perspective is whether the British political and ELT establishments have drawn any conclusions. Fortunately for scholarship, Kerr went on to do a doctorate analysing the experience he went through. He has now left the field. This perhaps explains his forthright but balanced denunciation of his experience. What he describes fits squarely into the mould of classic imperialism, exploitation of a market through penetration (a foot in the door), fragmentation (co-opting some locals) and marginalisation (stigmatising local practices) (see Phillipson 1992, chapter 3), based on the native speaker monolingual approach (*ibid.*, chapter 7), and an assumption that British ELT knew what was best for China.

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A macropolitical interlude

In January 2008 Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister, chose the occasion of a visit to China and India to announce a massive new programme of activity to strengthen English worldwide^{vi}. In India the British Council are to recruit 'Master Trainers' charged with developing the skills of 750,000 teachers of English over a five-year period. The British daily *The Sun* proudly declared that 'Mr Brown believes teaching English will quickly become one of Britain's biggest exports. It could add a staggering £50billion a year to the UK economy by 2010'. The BC was given the task of establishing a website to mastermind this thrust: 'We know that right around the world young people want access to English language to give them the skills they need to take part in the globalising economy but also to get access to all the knowledge and understanding that we have *in this country*. And our ambition, as an organisation, is that every learner and teacher of English

right around the world should have access to the best of English language teaching *from this country.*' (www.britishcouncil.org, emphasis added)

India teaches an elite very successfully in English. India's economy has massively expanded a consumerist middle class, but over half the population remain in deep poverty, due to the inequitable societal policies that globalisation involves. Educational problems and challenges are articulated unambiguously by Indian scholars: 'In today's India, English is the language of power, used as an indication of greater control over outcomes of social activities. [...] Over the post-Independence years, English has become the single most important predictor of socio-economic mobility. [...] With the globalized economy, English education widens the discrepancy between the social classes' (Mohanty 2006, 268-9). India's poor need initial literacy in local languages (Jhingran 2009) in an education system that builds on the realities of multilingualism rather than an exclusive focus on English (Agnihotri 2009).

The focus on British national promotion through English flatly contradicts one of the marketing myths of the prophets of 'global' English, namely that British 'ownership' of the language is a thing of the past, since the language now 'belongs' to everyone who uses it. Quite apart from the major commercial significance of the ELT industry, English has been a primary instrument of US and UK foreign policy since the 1950s (Phillipson 1992). A survey from the Foreign Policy Centre, a pro-government think tank, commissioned by the Blair government, recommends that people who study English worldwide at BC teaching centres should be more actively cultivated (Leonard, Stead & Smewing 2002, 81, italics added).

The British Council has developed relationships with arts administrators, scientists, civil servants, academics, teachers, journalists, policy advisors, and even military personnel through language tuition, training and capacity building, arts projects, school exchanges, and ... scholarships *More could be done to build relationships with the 350,000 people who are taught English in British Council offices every year, and it should also be a priority to carry out clear profiling of the 800,000 people who take exams administered by the Council every year.* Anecdotal evidence shows that these are all highly educated, skilled individuals who would make good targets for public diplomacy activity.

Diplomacy by Stealth: Working with others to achieve our goals. Trust is essential for effective public diplomacy. [...] The general lesson is ... make sure it appears to be coming from a foreign government as little as possible.

It is helpful to have government 'advisors' explaining the macropolitical purpose of international cultural collaboration so openly. Learners of English and those submitting to the objective 'testing' of their English are seen by policy-makers as useful pawns in the game of political propaganda. English learning and teaching should be exploited to serve British governmental purposes in the international business of shaping minds and making money.

The pound sterling dropped in value by over 20% during the 2008-9 economic and financial crisis. As a result of this, and a reduction in British government funding, the British Council announced in June 2009 that it is reducing its UK workforce by a third and cutting back its operations worldwide. To create more revenue, it is expanding its teaching and examining business (cited as earning \$450m in 2008). 'India is one of the countries set for expansion' (de Lotbinière 2009, 2). English learning is profitable in several senses in the neoimperial age.

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David Little and Barbara Lazenby Simpson's 'Teaching immigrants the language of the host community: Two object lessons in the need for continuous policy development' is a sophisticated description of how applied linguists in Ireland have met the English learning needs of refugees and labour immigrants, and their offspring in schools. They position their experience in the context of several European countries setting high but often unclear proficiency targets, and Ireland failing to follow the recommendations of the Council of Europe on how integration might optimally be organised (with task forces coordinating with the relevant learners' representatives). Little and Simpson describe how language learning courses were adjusted to employment and social integration needs, through an extensive teacher upgrading programme. They stress the dialogic nature of interaction with teachers who were new to ESL, and activities to promote learner autonomy and task-based pedagogy, the use of portfolios, and more valid (self-)assessment. The later arrival of migrant labour from the Baltic states and Poland (EU member states) led to more attention being paid to children's mother tongues, partly on the assumption that the migrants would go back home. It is surprising that the authors consider that immigrant children who start school 'at the age of four and a half: by the end of their second school year are to all intents and purposes native speakers of English' (117). In the absence of more qualification, the statement is in conflict with minority education research, which stresses that superficial interactive skills may well be in place at this stage but not the underlying cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins 2009, Thomas and Collier 2002).

The many activities reported here were undertaken by a private organization attached to Trinity College Dublin. The entire undertaking suffered from a 'policy vacuum' (120) and the failure of administrators to undertake proactive policy-making. Ireland experienced a massive economic recession in 2008, as a result of which the organizational infrastructure has been scrapped, causing job losses and waste of resources. The cynicism and opportunism of policy-makers lead Little and Simpson to conclude that it is 'inappropriate to use a private company to deliver public services' (122).

Glenn Fulcher's 'The commercialisation of language provision at university' describes in detail how he has elicited data to illuminate the effects of the commodification of British universities. While modern languages enrolments are shrinking, applied linguistics and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are seen as useful cash cows since they deliver fee-paying students, the surplus serving to fund university fields with more academic prestige. He documents a deprofessionalisation of ELT work through both marginalisation within universities (no research duties or rights) and through EAP being outsourced to commercial organizations.

It is useful to have a picture of the effect of universities submitting to financial market dictates. However the article assumes familiarity with British 'foundation and pre-sessional language programmes' (125, 129), and if these are basic language training prior to university entry, must they necessarily be considered as forming a core university activity with a research commitment? If EAP outsourced entrepreneurship cuts serious professional corners, aren't universities doing themselves a disservice if they end up with under-qualified students? The case for considering TESOL/EAP provision as something other than a 'subdegree/pre-university activity' (141) is not made convincingly enough, and this is a problem if the status of such activities is to be raised.

The UK has experienced a massive increase in the number of foreign students. According to a survey of higher education in *Blair's Britain 1997-2007* (O'Leary 2007), the most central issue of this decade was a shortage of funding, which the controversial introduction of student fees was intended to alleviate. A second source of income was fees from international students: 'higher education is now recognised as a global market in which the UK is a leading player' (ibid., 484). A Prime Minister's Initiative launched in 1999 aimed at increasing the number of students from outside the EU to 75,000 by 2005. In fact the total number of 'international' students in the UK in 2009 is 513,570 (*The Guardian*, 21 May 2009): '... postgraduate courses are dominated by overseas students. They make up more than 80% of graduates on business and administration courses and more than 70% on social studies and biological sciences departments. ... It is estimated that overseas students add around £6bn to the British economy.'^{vii} The language policy challenges of this differentiated clientele ought to be addressed by universities.

Fulcher correctly reports on the global dominance of English, and massive demand for it, but to state that 'English is now the de facto lingua franca of the world. [...] its unchallenged dominance in international communication, including the internet' (126-7) is factually incorrect. English does not open all international doors, economic, political, cultural or whatever. There are many lingua francas in the world, serving a multitude of purposes, including internet communication. The ethnocentric assumption that English is all one needs is symptomatic of the myopia that the business world is trying to counteract, even in the UK (e.g. Nuffield Foundation 2000), as are many of the policies for promoting multilingualism in the EU^{viii} (on myths of lingua franca English see Phillipson 2008, reprinted in Phillipson 2009a).

Fulcher is, of course, not alone in employing this supremacist discourse, but endorsing a hegemonic linguistic hierarchy is incompatible with critical scholarship. Coleman (2006) falls into the same trap in his survey of English-medium teaching in European higher education, which Fulcher cites with approval. Coleman wrongly claims that there is a consensus about the likelihood of global diglossia with English as the exclusive language of science, and that 'it seems inevitable that English, in some form, will definitely become *the* language of higher education' (ibid., 11, italics added). In countries where the level of proficiency in academic English is higher than in virtually all parts of Europe, such as Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, the governments are committed to ensuring that this does not happen, see Phillipson 2009a, chapter 9, and the 2006 'Deklaration om nordisk språkpolitik'/Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy, published in 8 Nordic languages^{ix} with a translation into English. This key document was worked on over a period of years in Scandinavian languages: inter-Nordic communication uses several lingua francas.

Mark Crossey's 'The role of micropolitics in multinational, high-stakes language assessment systems' presents a lengthy description of his involvement, as a British Council employee, in efforts to upgrade and test the language competence of military officers from post-communist countries seeking access to or joining NATO. The many frustrations of an exercise that apparently did not have full backing from NATO leadership are described. It is a detailed but rather incoherent description, with abbreviations of central terms like 'Stanag 6001' introduced without explanation. The project, funded by Britain, found itself attempting to structure proficiency evaluation in novel ways, but some of the confusion seems to have been predictable: granted that US dominance of NATO and good US funding for language learning are realities, to have the British muscling in on the scene throughout eastern Europe must have represented a challenge to US orthodoxy. Crossey's article becomes more comprehensible if one reads an article by another

British Council staff member, Paul Woods, 'The hedgehog and the fox': Two approaches to English for the military' (2006, Phillipson 2009b). This provides much of the macropolitical detail (the budget and content of US and UK activities) and reflections on context and professional ethics. The British are sceptical of US language teaching methods (rigid audiolingualism), and think they know best. On the other hand, it seems bizarre that NATO, which presumably adheres to principles of discipline and precision, should not wish to ensure clear commanding orders in determining the language competence of their staff. In Crossey's analysis, policy is fluid and flexible, which gives a wide range of macro and micropolitical interests room for manoeuvre. Sending for the linguistic marines does not seem to work well. But perhaps the marines were not optimally qualified or trained? And can language teaching function as though it represents principles of human rights and the rule of law (as Woods claims) in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan?

Gary Buck's 'Challenges and constraints in language test development' reads like an encyclopedia entry on the theory and practice of language testing in the sense of exclusively item-based multiple choice evaluation. Producing such tests requires exceptionally well qualified testers, of which there apparently are too few. Referring to the task of achieving validity and reliability, Buck bewails: 'In science, all measurement is accompanied by some degree of error [...] We never get it right, but this imperative drives us all' (176). 'Most testers have a feeling that their tests are not sufficiently accurate' (181). Worse still, on the basis of a wide range of experience, among other things, in the multi-million dollar TOEFL test business 'there is a fundamental conflict between the needs of good assessment practice on the one hand, and sound financial management and good business practice on the other' (177). These are curious insider admissions, which surely raise serious doubts about whether this type of evaluation has any place in education. It is worrying in view of the multiple gate-keeping functions that tests fulfil. The worry ought to be widespread, since the US corporation Educational Testing Services markets its services worldwide, considers its products universally relevant, and plans to expand a wide range of education services (Templer 2004).

Buck describes a wealth of experience of personality and corporate goals clashing, and concludes with a section on ethical concerns, in which he virtually advises that any testers with qualms about the ethical standards of the testing corporation that they are employed by ought to look for work elsewhere (182). His closing words (183-4) stress that rigorous thinking and intellectual creativity are of paramount importance for the future of testing. Alderson, in his initial Overview of the book, states (6) that what Buck stands for, when balancing professional principles and institutional constraints, is principled compromise. But what principles? While Buck is painstaking in explaining the complexity of the testing task, what is absent is any clarification of what principles should be insisted on when accepting the need to compromise. Alderson notes the work of scholars such as Shohamy and McNamara, who have stressed the gate-keeping and ultimately political role of testing in maintaining 'the power and influence of ruling elites', but this awareness does not appear to have influenced contributors to the book.

'The politics of examination reform in central Europe' is written by a Slovene, *Karmen Pižorn* and a Hungarian, *Edit Nagy*, who worked for the BC for 12 years. In both countries, the efforts of many well-intentioned people were thwarted. In Slovenia, efforts to reform language education, with guidance from the BC, were blocked by vested interests in the Ministry and in higher education. Pižorn refers to 'external' assessment, but it gradually transpires in the article that what this means is nation-wide rather than local or school autonomy in evaluation and standard setting.

Pižorn criticizes Slovene bureaucrats for their ignorance of the technocracy of testing, but in a demographically small country like Slovenia, with a standard of living approaching western European levels, couldn't more relevant models of change have been found, for instance in countries where English is learned relatively successfully as a foreign language, such as Finland, Germany or Sweden? Why should a monolingual British variant of evaluation be ideal?

In Hungary too, resistance appears to have sabotaged what could, according to Nagy, have led to a substantial upgrading of English language evaluation^x. Many Hungarians have undergone relevant training, but the system remains unchanged, and decision-makers are suspicious of foreign interference. If many Hungarians are now well versed in testing principles (though perhaps not as the test designers and psychometricians that Buck considers essential), presumably all is not lost, and reform can be locally-driven once the foreigners are out of the picture? Isn't making oneself redundant an admirable goal for a language education project? However, item writing is incredibly difficult in one's mother tongue. Exporting this practice to continental European countries, where items are generated in a foreign language, must run the risk of creating dependency on British expertise. Shouldn't these sobering reports lead to a fundamental re-think of the language education business, the nature of the relationship between donor (the BC investing for a mix of political, educational and commercial reasons) and those at the receiving end?

English was energetically promoted in formerly communist countries after the implosion of the Soviet system. Successive British Foreign Ministers in the 1990s equated English with democracy and the 'free' market (see British Council's Annual Report 1991-92). Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and I (1994) warned against such fraudulent claims for English. We listed five factors, among them well established national languages and foreign language learning traditions, ELT monolingualism and under-qualified British teachers, which made it unlikely that English, even if it could serve many useful purposes, would prove to be a panacea. English is now more widely learned, but neither this nor market forces has guaranteed the rule of law, an end to corruption, or strong democratic societies.

The behaviour of Western scholars when involved in post-communist social science has been explored in Hungary (Csepeli and Örkény 1996). Post-communist academics experienced that eastern European countries in transition were subjected to a wide range of research and development activities that served the interests of Westerners rather than the countries they were supposed to be analysing or 'helping'. The relationship between Westerners and locals was hierarchical, asymmetrical in terms of payment and prestige, research funding opportunities, and working conditions. Westerners demonstrated an ethnocentric insistence on methods of proven value in the West that were assumed, erroneously, to be equally valid in central and eastern Europe. Miklós Kontra agrees (2000a, 1): 'All too often western "experts" offer their help to us and fail because they don't know the issues in the east. They don't know the languages we speak, let alone the cultures we have'. Inequality is maintained through a false hierarchisation of languages and the British English as a foreign language (EFL) publishing industry (Kontra 2000b). British textbooks and reference books now dominate the market in Hungary, but are unprofessional in that the mother tongue of learners is not considered: 'business interests override a fundamental professional interest, or: business shapes the ELT profession in ways that we know are unprofessional' (ibid., 172).

Neus Figueras's 'Language educational policies within a European framework' is a lucid survey of many efforts to strengthen foreign language learning in Europe, much of it triggered by policies

elaborated by the Council of Europe or recommended by the European Union. Again the narrative describes plenty of dashed hopes, inadequate planning and leadership at both the international and national levels, bureaucratic incompetence, and poor dissemination. Figueras, from Catalonia, summarizes three international schemes of the many she has been associated with, refers to hopelessly misguided educational policies in Spain, and draws rather gloomy conclusions, though she tries finally to remain optimistic. She makes constructive suggestions for international coordination (217), and stresses that when testing is dominated by commercial enterprises, their interests are incompatible with free public education: certification ought to be a public responsibility.

Her profound familiarity with international trends produces an insightful summary of much current activity. Of particular importance is the reference to EU member states deciding in 2006 to introduce a European Indicator of Language Competence. This is a coy label for the EU commissioning Europe-wide standardised *testing* of foreign language competence, which she rightly describes as ‘a rather tall order’ (213).

Ina Druviete (who is a sociolinguist by profession) was Minister of Education and Research for Latvia at the time when the Indicator was decided on. She has informed me personally that in her almost two years as Minister, language policy issues were relegated to working luncheon discussions, and only once on a meeting agenda. A few countries, including her own, protested against introducing the Indicator as proposed, because they were unwilling to accept that the initial phase of the project would only be concerned with the five languages that are most widely taught as foreign languages. Their concern was that this would continue the linguist favouring of the ‘big’ languages and the continued marginalisation of others, in conflict with the principle of the EU having 23 languages with equal rights as official and working languages (Phillipson 2003, 2007a). Unequal investment in expertise and networking in this new initiative results in a consolidation of the languages in relation to which there already is substantial experience of ‘objective’ testing – not least English, with Cambridge ESOL and IELTS – for later export to others. As the contributions to the volume under review show, the testing business does not currently have ideal solutions, let alone a system that would be equitable in 27 member states.

One minor criticism is that Figueras writes, with reference to ‘European proposals’ that ‘Each country in Europe has to integrate them into their own national policies’ (213) and that member states are being ‘forced to take action by external, European authorities’ (213). There is in fact no obligation on member states to act. The EU cannot enforce its recommendations, though countries may ultimately be under some moral pressure to do so, just as the Council of Europe’s European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages can lead to the shaming and blaming of countries that pretend they do not have autochthonous linguistic minorities (hitherto France, Greece, and Turkey). But does anyone in the UK anticipate that Britain will require the learning of two foreign languages in the primary school soon ... or ever?

One detail is that Figueras refers to ‘meetings in Europe’ (207), when she actually means meetings at an EU institution, generally the Commission, occasionally the Parliament. Such discourse conflates the EU (27 countries) with ‘Europe’ (the Council of Europe has 47 member states) and exemplifies how the integration of ‘Europe’ is rhetorically furthered.

One country that is making a concerted effort to reform foreign language evaluation in an innovative way is Greece. The Greek state is organizing a state certificate for foreign language

proficiency for several languages (KPG, summarized in Dendrinos 2008^{xi}), i.e. it is acting in ways that Little and Simpson, and Figueras advocate. The rationale underlying the exams is explicitly articulated. Evaluation is compatible with EU aims and Council of Europe principles, involves multiliteracies, mediation, and information and communication technologies. It uses a greater variety of discourses, genres and registers than in the tests of other exams, is multi-modal, and there is transparency regarding the language theory behind KPG testing. Dendrinos sums the principles up:

- ‘It is not stimulated by private but by the public welfare and for this reason it is subsidized by the state
- Its motive is not the promotion of a single language as the cultural capital of a country
- The exams focus on the socially located use of language and not on language as an autonomous system of notions and structures – independent of their socially construed meanings. In other words, they take into account the social conditions of the target language use
- KPG is linked with education and the social life in Greece
- The thematic concerns of test texts and activities are socially sensitive.’

This is an impressive example of work that is familiar with developments worldwide, but determined to create foreign language evaluation that contributes to greater social and educational justice locally. This is also a ‘tall order’, as those involved are well aware, but it is being conducted by people who see their role as educators rather than trainers or testers.

The book’s final article, by *Charles Alderson*, is different in character from all the preceding ones. It deals with his past experience in drawing attention to micropolitical issues, and his inability to get an article on the topic published in a key applied linguistic journal. The justification for preventing publication was that the publishing house was worried about liability to charges of defamation. Since I have personally also experienced attempts to silence me by the editors of two journals, I am happy to read a colleague going public about the role of journal editors in promoting or restricting academic freedom and debate.

Alderson draws on personal experience of seeing ELT expatriates living in neocolonial luxury, and without providing any specific evidence, he suggests that he has been witness to ‘unprofessional behaviour’ (225), since individual career wishes or institutional ambitions (micropolitics) can outweigh professional criteria. But if, as Kontra suggests (2000b), confirming my reading of several articles in this book, the professionalism itself is inappropriate, is backed by strong financial interests, and serves to make money for the UK, shouldn’t the language education efforts themselves be seen as unprofessional behaviour? Do they not dovetail neatly with the trend over the past two decades of public education increasingly being seen as a commodity, and as an economic opportunity for strong Western interests – publishers, universities, consultant ‘experts’, professional associations with explicit global ambitions such as TESOL and IATEFL? Do people in the development business, as Alderson suggests, sacrifice serious professionalism on the altar of their own careers by reporting back favourably to ensure the next contract?

In conclusion Alderson reverts to the literature on organisational behaviour and Machiavellian personalities, and how symptoms can be assessed on a five-point continuum. To me this indicates that engaging with the profound and important issues is still in a very provisional phase of analysis and theorisation, a process that will hopefully continue. He expresses gratitude to the publisher for the opportunity to air the issues, and hopes that more investigative exploration will be fruitful.

One serious grouse is that the book has *no index*. If the book is to serve as a springboard for debate, one should be able to access easily many of the key *concepts* used in the ‘language education’ field, and to trace them in the various contributions to this volume. For instance, many articles assume a dichotomy between the professional and the political, as though these somehow exist in isolation from each other. I argue in *Linguistic imperialism* (Phillipson 1992, 48) that a major weakness of ELT professionalism is that it that it construes ELT as non-political, and falsely ‘assumes that educational concerns can be divorced from social, political, and economic realities’ (op.cit., 67).

While I firmly believe that the articles in this book are all of great interest, the extent to which this book is really pioneering and theoretically creative can be disputed. Each of the contributions raises fundamental issues in new ways, but as my comments on each article show, many of the significant issues for ‘debate’ are left open. In concluding I refer briefly to some relevant earlier work that I hope will be helpful in furthering this discussion, following which more general points are made, whereas minor ones are relegated to a footnote^{xii}.

- Language education projects have been evaluated at the request of their sponsors, such as the Ford Foundation and the British Council, for decades, though admittedly confidential institution-internal reporting on the qualities of individuals is not publicly available.
- Language and ‘development’ projects have been subjected to critical review, including personal reflections (e.g. Kenny and Savage, eds., 1997, Markee 2002, Bolitho 2005). In the general field of educational ‘aid’ there are many journals and countless books.
- Of major significance in relation to the issues raised in this book is Adrian Holliday’s *The struggle to teach English as an international language*, an honest attempt to address and redress the ‘deep-seated prejudices of a dominant professionalism’ (2005, x) and native speakerism in the sense of ‘an established belief that “native-speaker” teachers represent a “Western culture” from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology’ (ibid., 6). Holliday’s book draws on personal analyses, elicited through email, of ‘36 ESOL educators from 14 countries, who include 20 colleagues from outside the English-speaking West’ (ibid., ix). It is a profound engagement with personal values and professionalism that challenges many unquestioned ELT dogmas.
- The interlocking with ELT of a Christian vocation is explored in *Christian and Critical English Language Educators in Dialogue: Pedagogical and Ethical Dilemmas*, edited by Mary Wong and Suresh Canagarajah (2009). It begins with short ‘Spiritual Identification statements’ by contributors. Papers relate to the role of combining a Christian mission with ELT worldwide. Their analyses of whether ELT can be compatible with proselytising - half the contributors are in favour, half against or sceptical - indicates that the role of individual beliefs is increasingly being addressed. It is a major issue for the profession when some missionaries are recruited as ELT people and conceal their mission. Covert goals are also in force when bodies like the Summer Institute of Linguistics are active in the field of general education without their ultimate goals being revealed. This has caused major problems in India and Nepal (see contributions to Mohanty et al 2009).
- Julian Edge’s edited collection *(Re)locating TESOL in an age of empire* (2006, reviewed in Phillipson 2009b) addresses key political, ethical and professional issues. His own paper demonstrates how micropolitical issues can be explored constructively as part of collegial professional awareness-raising and change.

The articles in this book are none the less extremely useful and necessary. The large number of questions that it has triggered in my own reading of it indicates that serious issues need following up, by the individual in ELT and by its influential guardians in academia, commerce, and state institutions (among which I include the British Council). In addition to these, I would suggest two concerns for further debate, Firstly, *testers*, since they administer the sanctions of educational control, globally and locally, are in a position with major micro- and macropolitical responsibilities. How can their expertise be used in ways that address the broader concerns, prerequisites and consequences, of their activities? Secondly, many of the questions I have raised thus far are practical or empirical ones. The book does not succeed, in my view, in clarifying the important question of adequately *theorising language education*: key concept clarification and overall approach are still largely implicit. How can more adequate theorisation be accomplished?

My own feeling is that rather than attempting to separate off the micropolitical from the macropolitical, it would be more productive to integrate both. Alderson considers my 1992 book as being concerned with the macropolitics of education (2), whereas I would claim that the five fallacies I identify as underpinning English linguistic imperialism in education (Phillipson 1992, chapter 7) - monolingualism, the native speaker as the ideal teacher, an early start, maximum exposure, and the subtractive fallacy – are in force at the grassroots level of planning and delivering appropriate teaching or evaluation. The individual's awareness of these fallacies, and the role they may or may not play in one's ELT professionalism, strike me as central micropolitical issues (Holliday 2005). This is especially the case in development assistance, if one's expertise is to be relevant and constructive.

Alderson labelling *Linguistic imperialism* as entailing a 'conspiracy' (13) is a false reading of the work, an accusation that I explicitly reject in the book itself, and have responded to (Phillipson 2007b, reproduced in 2009a). Nor do I use the term linguistic genocide in the book. The annihilation of languages may well result from linguistic policies, and has done so on several continents. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas draws on a definition of linguistic genocide from international law (2000, Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar forthcoming) so that it can serve as a valid concept for empirical and historical analysis, and for promoting political change.

Macropolitical language policy decisions ought to be related to relevant micropolitical variables, and ELT professionalism should work to achieve policies that strengthen linguistic diversity. Language education needs to address whether English in any given context is serving useful, necessary purposes or more sinister ones (Phillipson 2009a). I see the contributions in Alderson's volume as providing insightful descriptions that reveal ways in which changes in the global economy and educational practices interlock with the ways English is being promoted. The linguistic, educational and professional imperialisms of earlier times are being repackaged in new forms of dependency. The articles make it possible to explore the powerful myth that ELT professionalism is universally relevant in a dynamic multilingual world. This lies at the heart of the politics of language education. We who live multilingually do not under-estimate the importance of English, its learning and testing, and endorse the need to subject the business of (English) language education to critical scrutiny.

Let me conclude with some profound thoughts from Paulo Freire (2004, 7) which possibly all of us can agree on:

To the extent that we become capable of transforming the world, of naming our own surroundings, of apprehending, of making sense of things, of deciding, of choosing, of valuing, and finally, of *ethicizing* the world, our mobility within it and through history necessarily comes to involve *dreams* toward whose realization we struggle. Thus, it follows that our presence in the world, which implies choice and decision, is not a neutral presence.

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ⁱ I am grateful to Bessie Dendrinis, Miklós Kontra, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Shelley Taylor and the editors of *Language and Education* for very useful comments on a first draft of the article.

ⁱⁱ Globalization: 'Ce mot, qui fonctionne comme un mot de passe et un mot d'ordre, est en effet le masque justificateur d'une politique visant à universaliser les intérêts particuliers et la tradition particulière des puissances économiquement et politiquement dominantes, notamment les États-Unis, et à étendre à l'ensemble du monde le modèle économique et culturel le plus favorable à ces puissances, en le présentant à la fois comme une norme, un devoir-être, et une fatalité, un destin universel, de manière à obtenir une adhésion ou, au moins, une résignation universelles.' Obviously the model favours the English language.

ⁱⁱⁱ Linguicism refers to 'ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language' (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, first defined in 1988).

^{iv} National Multilingual Education Resource Centre, New Delhi, India: <http://www.nmrc-jnu.org/index.html>. Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Norway: <http://www.galdu.org/web/?giella1=>.

^v Reported in the *Himalayan Times*, 15 July 2009.

^{vi} See Brown's press release of 17 January 2008 <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page14289.asp> and video on Youtube <http://www.youtube.com/downingst>.

^{vii} The British figure is almost as high as for foreign students in the USA, the market leader, 632,805, where doubtless there has been a fall due to the Bush II government's policies. The largest nationalities represented in the UK are China 49,090, India 35,245, USA 24,020, Nigeria 21,010, and Pakistan 13,515.

^{viii} See the many documents listed on http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/orban/keydoc/keydoc_en.htm.

^{ix} The languages are Danish, Faeroese, Greenlandic, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Sámi, and Swedish.

^x Although Alderson states (page ix) that he was the BC Project Advisor in Hungary, he is not named in the article.

^{xi} http://www.uoa.gr/english/rcel/texts/Rationale_and_Ideology_of_the_KPG_Exams.pdf. See also http://www.cc.uoa.gr/english/rcel/kpg_info.htm.

^{xii} 1) Sexist language ('man', 22, 23) is used uncritically. 2) *Linguistic imperialism* is dated incorrectly (2, 7). 3) The reference to an International House brochure (13) is attributed to Péter Medgyes in 1994 but first appeared in my *Linguistic imperialism* (1992, 8).