Anthropology and Anglo-Hegemonics

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It seems to me that negative valuations of the present world language situation are often not frankly expressed in publications, in order to avoid conflicts or criticism of being resentful or simply for reasons of politeness. The absence of explicit value statements is therefore, in my opinion, a questionable indicator for real judgment. (Ammon 2001:vi)

This brief paper explores the relationship between the discipline of anthropology and the linguistic and cultural world dominance of English. The common critique of anthropology as the handmaiden of imperialism, while acknowledged by anthropologists in Canada and the U.S.A., is often seen as only applying to an immoral, long-gone past. Still, the propensity for publishing only in English at the expense of other languages needs to be problematized. In a world increasingly dominated by English, we, as scholars, might desire making our findings known to as wide an academic audience as possible. As anthropologists, however, we also struggle for the preservation of human diversity in the face of globalization and homogenization.

John Borneman (1995) argues that a four-fields approach to human unity-in-diversity has historically not provided anthropology with a coherent subject. Instead, anthropology has been about constructing the Foreign as a radically alter and asymmetrical counter-concept to the Self. According to Borneman, North American First Nations served as the original model for this construct of the Foreign, slated for commensuration (cf. Povinelli 2001) through assimilation or annihilation. While administrators were packing away First Nations children in residential schools where they would be punished for speaking their mother tongues (Fournier and Crey 1998), Boasian anthropologists were “salvaging” the same languages by recording them on paper. In fact, this original Foreign – though greatly reduced in vitality – has never entirely disappeared. Having realized that oral languages cannot survive through mere transcription, anthropologists today are working with some of these same First Nations on collaborative projects to foster environments in which the performative act of

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speaking these languages is positively valued. Nowadays, however, a new and more properly Foreign, in the form of immigrants originating from elsewhere, has come to be perceived as a bigger hurdle to Anglo-hegemonics (Borneman 1995).

By Anglo-hegemonics I simply mean the linguistic and cultural world dominance of English, an empirically observed pattern rather than an intentional program of linguistic genocide (cf. Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Of course, there is evidence that organizations like the British Council and the English Only movement in the U.S.A. are involved in precisely this sort of intentional promotion or structural imposition of English at the expense of other languages (Daniels 1990, González and Melis 2000-01, Phillipson 2003, May 2008). I reserve the designation Anglo-hegemonists only for these linguistic imperialists who intentionally and willingly promote Anglo-hegemonics. This distinction between the intentional promoters of a project and an empirically observable pattern that happens to coincide with the desired outcome of the project allows for a discussion of Anglo-hegemonics that is not entirely extracted from its politicized historical context. It also holds Anglo-hegemonists accountable for hiding behind a façade of supposed “neutrality” in the face of extensive evidence that multilingualism rather than linguistic imperialism is a better way of disseminating English in contexts where this is deemed desirable (e.g., Daniels 1990, Pennycook 1995, Cameron 2000, González and Melis 2000-01, Ammon 2001).

Supporters of linguistic diversity tend to focus on the plight of endangered languages with very few speakers (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, Maffi 2005), which is not the case for most languages with academic traditions of anthropological publication. Although the plight of these, mostly European and East Asian, languages is taken up by opponents of the English Only movement, their focus is on primary and secondary rather than tertiary education. Meanwhile, studies of English expansion in the university context largely focus on the natural sciences and medicine (e.g., Ammon 2001, Reagan and Schreffler 2005). Where social sciences and humanities are considered, the data indicate that Anglo-hegemonics is not as prevalent as in the natural sciences (e.g., Murray and Dingwall 2001). And although many of these studies try to quantify (contributors to Ammon 2001) or explain (Cameron 2000, Heller 2002) diachronic linguistic shift, I am not aware of any work that deals specifically with the situation in anthropology.¹

As anthropologists, we have a vested interest in preserving cultural and linguistic diversity not only because that is what we study but because it is a moral imperative. As we work in pre-existing fields of power, however, our actions often fail to achieve the intended outcome. Sometimes, of course, we ourselves work against our own interests. By considering English to be the language of anthropology and of the study of human cultural diversity, might we...
not be commensurating intellectual traditions in other languages, relegating them to the status of kitchen tongues through domain loss in academic settings?

This question can be investigated by considering language choice for major contributions (articles, editorials and reports) in several multilingual anthropology journals. In late 2006, I tabulated the languages of published contributions for select volumes – as evenly spaced in time as publication history allowed – of six anthropology journals from Europe. These journals cover all four subfields of anthropology and have both domestic and international readerships. They were chosen for study because they were readily available to me or because I had consulted them during previous research.\(^2\) Although a larger sample is necessary to confirm general trends, the evidence indicates that the use of English is rising at the expense of other languages.

We start with *Anthropos: International Review of Anthropology and Linguistics*, one of the most prominent international journals of socio-cultural and linguistic anthropology. This journal’s German roots are well indicated by the large percentage of articles written in German during the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century (Figure 1). However, in the 1960 volume of *Anthropos*, as many contributions were written in English as in German, and since then English has prevailed as the most frequent language of communication.

![Figure 1: Language of publication in Anthropos.](image)

The *Anthropologischer Anzeiger: Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Anthropologie*, a physical anthropology journal from Stuttgart, Germany, shows a similar trend. Although favoring an approach to physical anthropology that is mostly used in Central and Eastern Europe as opposed to North America, articles
in *Anthropologischer Anzeiger* began to be published predominantly in English by the 1980s (Figure 2).

![Language of publication in Anthropologischer Anzeiger.](image)

**Figure 2**: Language of publication in *Anthropologischer Anzeiger*.

*Dacia: Revue D’Archéologie et d’Histoire Ancienne* is a Romanian archaeology journal intended for a non-Romanian audience. Figure 3 shows how first German and then English replaced French as the main language of communication. The domestic counterpart, *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie*, also shows an increase in German as the choice language for abstracts during the 1980s (the articles themselves all being in Romanian until very recently). The newly established *Studii de Preistorie*, aimed at an audience that understands Romanian, had as many contributions in English as there were in Romanian in its 2006 volume.
Figure 3: Language of publication in *Dacia*.

*Documenta Praehistorica* (previously *Poročilo o raziskovanju paleolita, neolita in eneolita v Sloveniji*), a prehistoric archaeology journal from Ljubljana, Slovenia, published all articles in Slovenian and abstracts in German prior to 1993. The journal’s scope and intended audience was broadened that year when it began publishing the proceedings of the annual, international Neolithic Seminar. Despite being officially listed as a multilingual journal in the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH), articles are now exclusively in English (with a single exception in German in the 1993 volume) with abstracts in Slovenian. Like the journals already discussed, this one indicates an increasing reliance on English.

So what can be done about this? For the past couple of decades, anthropological associations have been working on ethical codes to make their memberships aware of ethical issues if not necessarily to provide set guidelines for behavior (Pels 1999). While ethical codes of archaeological organizations generally mention little about language of publication (e.g., SAA 1996, RPA 1998, CAA 2000, and even WAC 1990), ethical codes of socio-cultural anthropological organizations usually at least mention this topic. Let us compare the relevant sections of the ethical codes of three such organizations.

The Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association (U.S.A. and Canada) states under section III.B.4. that anthropologists should “whenever possible disseminate their findings to the scientific and scholarly community” (AAA 1998). This does not mention the language of publication and is potentially
interpreted as a call to publish in English by those who desire English to be the sole language of the scientific and scholarly community.

The Ethical Guidelines of the Association for Social Anthropology (United Kingdom and British Commonwealth) has a slightly different focus in its section III.3.a: “Research findings, publications and, where feasible, data should be made available in the country where the research took place [and, if] necessary, it should be translated into the national or local language” (ASA 1999). This recommendation is much clearer in urging to make one’s work available in languages other than English, where “necessary” and through translation.

Lastly, according to the Swedish Association of Anthropologists’ (SANT) ethical standards, it is desirable to publish “in a language accessible at least to local intellectuals in the country studied” (G. Dahl in Pels 1999:118). Where non-English academic traditions remain vital, this would mean publishing in their respective languages. Although none are explicit about it, the SANT’s and ASA’s recommendations seem to imbue publication in more languages than just English with a more positive value. The AAA’s code, on the other hand, assumes a single scholarly community.

Even those who support English Only in the natural sciences pause to think whether social science and humanities discourses can adequately be reduced to a single language (e.g., de Swaan 2001). Beyond engaging in other intellectual traditions, publishing in another language also supports and values cultural diversity as well as respects linguistic diversity. In the face of the apparent trend to increasingly publish in English, it is also an ethical stance against Anglo-hegemonics. While the Canadian Anthropological Society (CASCA) does not have its own ethical code, its journal, *Anthropologica*, is very much bilingual. Extending this positive valuation to publishing in other languages is a small step. It would place the onus of multilingualism not only on those who are learning English, but also on those whose first language is English.

Should everyone publish in another language? Not necessarily, but those who are already bi- or multilingual might as well make use of their knowledge and be encouraged to practice it. It is important, however, that academic institutions and anthropological organizations be supportive of this endeavor. At the University of Toronto, where the Department of Anthropology already requires its doctoral students to learn a second language, it makes sense to further develop this skill by encouraging publication in languages other than English rather than devaluing and discouraging it at career development workshops for graduate students.

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Notes

1 However, Hoffmann (2000:9) remarks in passim that linguistics has come to be dominated by English.
2 Because I am an archaeologist, the sample is biased towards archaeology journals.
3 Of course, once non-English traditions cease to exist, this becomes a moot point. Brock-Utne (2001), for example, observed the negative effects monetary bonuses for publication in English at the University of Oslo’s Institute of Philosophy were having on the vitality of the Norwegian-language academic tradition.
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Brock-Utne, Birgit

Canadian Archaeological Association

Cameron, Deborah

Daniels, Harvey A. (ed.)

de Swaan, Abram

Fournier, Suzanne and Ernie Crey

González, Roseann D. and Ildikó Melis

Heller, Monica

Hoffmann, Charlotte
Maffi, Luisa  

May, Stephen  

Murray, Heather and Silvia Dingwall  

Pels, Peter  

Pennycook, Alastair  

Phillipson, Robert  

Povinelli, Elizabeth A  

Reagan, Timothy and Sandra Schreffler  

RPA (Register of Professional Archaeologists)  

SAA (Society for American Archaeology).  

Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove  

World Archaeological Congress  