Globalization and language teaching

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Globalization (generally written with a Z) has been defined by Giddens as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens 1990: 64). Although there seems to be a consensus that we are living in an increasingly globalized world, there is by no means agreement about related issues. Five such disagreements follow:

1 Some believe that globalization began in 15th century Europe, when Europeans began to map and colonize the world; others see it as a phenomenon of the latter part of the 20th century.

2 Some see it as essentially a 'done deal'; others as a 'work in progress' which is unequally developed in different parts of the world.

3 Some see globalization as both progress and progressive (benign and indeed 'good'); others see it as the steamroller of late modernity taking away all that is authentic and meaningful in our lives.

4 Some see globalization as hegemonically western, and above all an extension of American imperialism; others see the process as more egalitarian, and reject discussion in terms of Western dominance over 'the rest'.

5 Some discuss globalization in a prescriptive way, as a way of life that should be adopted; others see it as a sociological descriptor of events going on around us.

With such issues in mind, Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton (1999) argue that here are three general responses— the *hyperglobalist*, the *sceptic,* and the *transformationalist*—to the questions: 'What's new?' and 'What exactly is going on?' The *hyperglobalist* response is that we are living in a new and unprecedented world, where global capitalism, governance, and culture have replaced more local institutions, such as local financial institutions and business, national governments and local cultures, and in general terms have upset old hierarchies and ways of life. The *sceptic* (primarily neo-Marxist) response is that we are simply living in an age of capitalism by updated and more efficient means (above all recent developments in information technology). Finally, the

transformationalist response is that we are living in an age of greater upheaval and change, with unprecedented levels of interconnectedness among nation states and local economies and cultures, which are thanks in part—though not exclusively—to technological developments.

For language teachers around the world, the question is how discussions about globalization taking place in sociological circles relate to their overall approach to language teaching, and to their day-to-day practice. Two examples of responses to globalization follow (for additional instances, and further discussion, see Block and Cameron 2002).

In ELT, until quite recently, a hyperglobalist position dominated discussions regarding the spread of English as a benign outcome of globalizing forces. However, from the late 1980s onwards, Robert Phillipson and others called this view into question (see Phillipson 1992). Their neo-Marxist analysis of the spread of English was notably sceptical in nature, positing as it did an English language linguistic imperialism. From the 1990s onwards, new voices, such as Alastair Pennycook (1994) and Suresh Canagarajah (1999), have begun to see the spread of English as altogether too complicated to be considered benign or evil. These authors are part of a growing transformationalist camp who see this phenomenon from a variety of perspectives, ranging from the critical to the postmodern.

In a similar vein, as recently as 20 years ago there was seldom any suggestion in ELT circles that it might be problematic to package and transfer around the world particular approaches to language teaching (in the shape, for example, of communicative methodologies, materials, and textbooks). There seemed to be an implicit hyperglobalism which envisaged the entire world learning English via one dominant methodology, and one particular type of pedagogical material. However, it was again the work of authors such as Phillipson (1992) and Pennycook (1994) which persuaded many ELT professionals to consider the social, political, and economic factors which come into play when methods and materials cross borders. The result has been that in recent years there is an altogether more reflective and nuanced approach to language teaching methods and their transferability around the world (e.g. Kramsch and Sullivan 1996, Ellis 1996, Duff and Uchida 1997, Canagarajah 2002) as well as to the cultural appropriacy of particular language teaching materials in different parts of the world (e.g. Gray 2002, McKay 2003).

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