

# heteroglossia

Dossiers e Strumenti



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# Heteroglossia - Dossier e Strumenti

Costruire la ricerca tra lavori in corso e opere di riferimento:

I dottorandi incontrano gli autori del *Précis du Plurilinguisme et du Pluriculturalisme*  
(Zarate, Lévy, Kramsch)

Atti del seminario dottorale in Politica, Educazione, Formazione Linguistico-Culturali (P.E.F.Li.C.) 25-26 Marzo 2010

a cura di Danielle Lévy e Mathilde Anquetil

eum

Università degli Studi di Macerata

Heteroglossia - Dossier e Strumenti - n.s. n. 11 | 2011

Quaderno della Sezione Linguistica del Dipartimento di Studi su  
Mutamento Sociale, Istituzioni Giuridiche e Comunicazione

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Isbn 978-88-6056-297-5

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## Martine Derivry in dialogue with Ludovica Briscese

The notion of language symbolic power of language is an essential concept in language learning and teaching. According to Bourdieu: By trying to understand the power of linguistic manifestations linguistically, by looking in language for the principle underlying logic and effectiveness of the language of institution, one forgets that authority comes to language from outside, a fact concretely exemplified by the skeptron that, in Homer, is passed to the orator who is about to speak (Bourdieu 1992: 109).

Indeed, in order to fully grasp this notion, one must apply the above definition at a higher macro-level and through the lens of historical dynamics (L.-J. Calvet 1999, 2002). Languages are attributed with different social and symbolic values throughout time and space, and significant cultural symbolic variation can also be observed within different local linguistic markets. Without sufficient historical background however, it is impossible to fully apprehend the changing dominant position of languages in Europe: first, Greek and Latin, followed by French and finally English. Languages are dependent on the military, political and economic situation of the countries in which they are used. The dominant geo-political position of the US in the 20<sup>th</sup> century explains why English has become the international language for economic, military, political and cultural purposes. But despite the fact that the economic driving force of globalisation is usually emphasized as to explain for the prevailing position of English, Philipson has shown that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US and the UK, in fact, developed effective linguistic policies by promoting English worldwide through the cultural services of US Embas-

sies and the British Council. The combination of these policies has greatly increased their effectiveness (Philipson 1992, 2003).

The current position of English as a *lingua franca* is increasingly being viewed as “everybody’s and nobody’s language” highlighting the instrumental and a-cultural dimensions of English use, and in particular within ELT. Some native English-speaking linguists have already declared that English-speaker people do no longer own English (Crystal 2003). As a matter of fact, non-native English speaker teachers outnumber native teachers worldwide, also reflecting the fact that non-native English speakers greatly outnumber native English speakers (Graddol 2006). In other words, non native speakers of English own English... Some sociolinguists and applied linguists are studying the many emerging varieties of English and an *ELF* corpus (The Vienna Oxford Corpus) is being developed under the supervision of B. Seidlhofer, in which English teachers are being encouraged to re-think the way English should be presented to learners if the objective is no longer to mimic a native speaker (Seidlhofer 2003; Kirkpatrick 2007) but to develop English skills according to learners’ own needs, either cultural, instrumental or both. Similarly, there has also been a re-structuring of how English phonetics and phonology could be taught (Jenkins 2001). The dominant position of the English language has therefore had repercussions not only on the development of the language itself but also on its teaching to native and non-native speakers.

Are we heading towards a new mono-multilingualism? This is a very complicated issue as there is currently a power struggle going on between English and other languages. For instance, the EU proclaims itself *United in Diversity*. Some people view this motto as enshrining English as the common language while preserving a recognition of the other languages (mono-multilingualism) whereas other maintain that a united Europe is based on the full recognition of all European languages (multilingualism). However, the increasing role that China is playing diplomatically and economically on the global scene, might well counterbalance the linguistic position of English in the future.

Indeed, China is currently working on its own linguistic policies, developing the means to promote Chinese as a foreign language worldwide through its Confucius Institutes. The language teacher and more particularly the English language teacher should not be blind to these international forces as they have direct repercussions at the classroom level. However, as a teacher dealing with human beings, he/she has a responsibility to resist the many forms of dehumanisation – all of which are extremely powerful at the moment – and follow the same pattern of over-simplification, consisting of marketing people and reducing them to products, and of marketing languages, to their mere, cost-effectiveness as tools or products in a market. Fortunately, there is still room available to the teacher for organising circumstances within stimulating situations in the classroom, and for facilitating questioning, criticising and understanding.

«Are teachers mediating among the requests of the world of work?» Are teachers subservient to the demands of the working world? This question is exactly what is required by society nowadays, and expresses a very limited and restrictive view of *homo economicus*, with the implication that teachers should be “modern” and comply with the demand of the world of work. My view follows the classical educational stance that teachers should not, as a matter of principle, be concerned with the working world but with education. Teachers as social actors (CEFR 2001; Zinn 2006) and more specifically language teachers, have to mediate cultural and language knowledge as well as “know how” about language practice among a diverse range of people, of learners as actors with the single goal of the learners’ own intellectual, cultural and language empowerment.

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ISBN 978-88-6056-297-5



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