

## PHILLIPSON'S RESPONSE TO MY REVIEW: A REJOINDER

from  
John Honey

It will save a lot of space if I begin by saying that my criticisms of Phillipson's book are abundantly illustrated by the tone and content of his Response, which I therefore greatly enjoyed. A number of specific points, however, need to be spelled out.

Given his many accusations of 'misrepresentation', readers will be interested to note his own activity in this respect. He claims that I accuse him of not revealing his true motives in writing this book until 'seven eighths of the way through the book'. Quite false. My phrase 'seven eighths' refers quite explicitly to Phillipson's theoretical starting-point, the notion which underlies the whole of what he calls 'two substantial chapters which ... elaborate an adequate theoretical apparatus for coming to grips with language dominance' – namely, the notion of linguistic equality: 'any language [is seen] as potentially fulfilling any function...'. So his charge that at this point I am impugning his *motives* is simply false.

But the theoretical premiss I drew attention to here is a serious one, and deserves fuller consideration. Readers may well have noted that, even here, Phillipson gets his facts wrong. What Phillipson is referring to may be called the theory of 'linguistic equality', and he is completely correct in saying that linguists are trained to accept this hypothesis. This has been an important principle of linguistic orthodoxy for at least three decades, though there have been some dissident voices and some requests for a more refined statement. But Phillipson – for all his claims to having given an exhaustive review of the relevant literature in order to provide 'solid foundations to support necessary debates about language policy' – has actually misrepresented the theory which is fundamental to any debate on language planning. The classic statement of the linguistic equality principle was by Dell Hymes (in 1964 and elsewhere), and Hymes specifically warned of the mistake of denying that there were any *functional* differences at all between languages [Hymes 1964, p. 75]; he went on to call for more adequate discussion, not of 'the *potential* equivalence [of different languages] in complexity and functional

adequacy' but 'in terms of their *actual, achieved functioning* at the present time' (76) (my emphasis). In other words, unlike the general concept of linguistic equality, potential equality of *function* cannot simply be stated, it must be demonstrated for each and every language for which it is claimed. Will Phillipson please indicate which chapters of his book spell out the ways in which present-day languages that are victims of 'linguicism' are, or are not, equipped to function in a modernised society?

'Honey does not attempt to assess whether the book advances theory formation in the field of language policy'. Quite wrong: my review refers explicitly to its 'deeply flawed' theoretical assumptions and specifically challenges the author for his *total* failure to spell out the practical implications by which any such policy must be tested. There is in my review a whole series of direct questions on this, to which Phillipson might have addressed himself if he had not chosen instead to take refuge in bluster – they are on pages 118-119 and I ask them again now: what processes does a preliterate language have to go through in order to become usable as an edulect? What kinds of 'development' are necessary for this? What is the time scale involved? Can this, in practice, be done for every language in the world? If not, which ones will qualify? How rational is it, in economic terms, to give high priority to such development in a subsistence-level Third World country? Unless these are answered satisfactorily, no advance in theory formation is possible, and it is totally unhelpful to talk of 'linguicism' or the unfair dominance of one language over another, since these may be logical and inevitable (though of course unwelcome) adjustments to educational reality.

I am completely happy to leave it to readers to judge the truth of Phillipson's claim that subjective comments do not belong in scientific journals. One word he objects to, 'stupidity', was only used in my review to describe the complex of attitudes which *Phillipson himself* ascribes to Third World communities which show a desire for modernisation. As to my use of 'contemptible' of a remark which Phillipson's Response gave him a chance to withdraw or to modify, I now take this opportunity to repeat that use, with emphasis: 'many readers may feel that to liken Britain's project of collecting surplus textbooks to the dumping of poisonous chemicals, as Phillipson does (p. 60) is merely contemptible'.

Phillipson's comment on my reference to Nkrumah is doubly inaccurate: his remarks on the word 'tribalism' (not, as he now claims, 'tribe') are described by me, not as upsetting, but as *unconvincing* for

the very defensible reason that he does not attempt to produce evidence, merely citing opinion with little pretence at argument. He claims that I misrepresent him as referring to 'unwitting stooges of neocolonialism': this was my paraphrase of half a page in which he describes ELT professionals as blind actors engaged in an enterprise of dubious legitimacy, deluded into believing they are free agents – how far my paraphrase was indeed, as Phillipson implies, a travesty of the original can easily be checked because I provided a page reference (308) in my review. My references to Marxism are 'crudely juxtaposed with a line-up of dictators': but my explicit point was that Marxist theory can never be dissociated from Marxist practice. Is the testing of theory by reference to practice a 'crude juxtaposition'? But of course I understand, and accept, that Phillipson must be uncomfortable at such references.

I would indeed be sorry if I were the only reviewer to spoil his self-satisfaction at the largely uncritical reception of a book which contains so many contestable assumptions. But I have news for him. Since he refers to the Japan Association for Language Teaching, he should note that the latest issue of JALT's monthly journal (Vol. 19, no. 5) prints a review which contains some similar criticisms, including the very significant phrase 'swallowed up by his own polemic'.

I strongly agree with the closing words of Phillipson's Response, and with the need to explore the power of English, but unless this is done in a much more accurate, discriminating and dispassionate way than Phillipson's book does, and on the basis of a theoretical discussion which genuinely addresses the fundamental issues, these crucial questions cannot be given the kind of attention, and the degree of priority, that they deserve.

*Osaka International University*  
*Sugi 3-chome, Hirakata*  
*Osaka 573-01, Japan*

#### Reference

- Hymes, D. (ed.). 1964. *Language in Culture and Society*. Harper and Row.