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Comment 4 on 'Lingua Franca or Lingua Frankensteinia? English in European Integration and Globalization'

Fatima Esseili

University of Dayton, fesseili1@udayton.edu

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Comment 4

FATIMA ESSEILI

Phillipson's paper *Lingua franca or lingua frankensteinia?* addresses key concerns of linguists and politicians in the Outer and Expanding Circles, especially in relation to the spread of foreign languages and their threat to local languages, national aspirations, culture, religion, and identity. As a native of Lebanon, a multilingual country where Arabic, French, and English add to the linguistic complexity of Lebanese society, I agree with Phillipson that language policy-makers need to be aware of the dangers of the uncritical promotion of English and what he identifies as linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). However, I am not convinced by specific arguments he makes with respect to identity, culture, and language. I will illustrate this by addressing Phillipson's notions of *lingua americana* and *lingua cucula*.

Phillipson seems to be treating English, or American English (*lingua americana*), to be more exact, as a sort of a Big Brother language that is going to brainwash people and force them indirectly to adopt it in what seems like a conspiracy theory. While it is true that the actions of language agencies and the speeches of politicians provide evidence of the underlying agendas of some countries, like the USA, this is not proof that people and nations are unaware of such agendas, or that the choices they are making are uninformed, rather than driven by practicality and economics in the first place. An example of this is the trilingualism policy in Lebanon (Shaaban and Ghaith, 1999).

Along the same line, Phillipson uses the cuckoo metaphor to refer to the situation of English (*lingua cucula*) in Europe. The metaphor goes like this: secret agents (cuckoo = politicians and/or policy-makers) sneak in and put the English language (cuckoo's egg) in the European nest (education system). Unaware that the egg they are incubating (English teaching and promotion) is not their own, Europeans are tricked into raising English, the fledgling that will eventually replace the thriving native birds (other European languages). The *lingua cucula* metaphor fails to take three important issues into consideration. First, it does not take into account identity, religion, and nationalism, which play a major role in the preservation of languages. Second, it is against factual evidence presented by many studies of world Englishes which reveal that countries adopt and adapt English as their own when they start using it (see e.g. Kachru, Kachru, and Nelson, 2006; Thumboo, 2001). Thus, it is no longer American English or British English, it is Indian English, Nigerian English, and so on. Third, and finally, if a policy does not serve a country's interests, people will speak out. The demonstrations and strikes in France and Greece against the Bologna initiative, which Phillipson references, are evidence that people are aware of their linguistic needs and their motivations for responding to them.

To his credit, Phillipson admits that the concepts of *lingua frankensteinia* and *lingua cucula* need further analysis; however, his underlying argument that "the English monster" is hegemonizing other languages and cultures implies that this is what he believes to be the reality. To him, English is a *lingua frankensteinia* and a *lingua cucula*.

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