Christof Demont-Heinrich (Ph.D. ’06)
Associate Professor, Mass Communications and Journalism Studies, University of Denver (Denver, Colo.)

Dissertation Title
English by Popular Demand: American Prestige Press Discourses on Language and Globalization in a Post Cold War World

Committee
Andrew Calabrese, Chair
Lynn Schofield-Clark
Janice Peck
Stewart M. Hoover
Kiral Hall (Linguistics)

Abstract

Systematic textual analysis of 106 texts and 46 headlines taken from a larger data pool of 275 texts reveals that the story of English's hegemony as told in the American prestige press accounts is an overwhelmingly positive and optimistic one. This story grounds itself in a number of discourses that both reflect and (re)produce long-running and deeply entrenched American notions about who "we" are, what "we" are about, and what "our" legacy, linguistic and otherwise, means to "us" and the world. Among other things, the predominant story told foregrounds and valorizes an American universalism rooted in individual and popular choice, upward mobility, and essential American benevolence and innocence. This story also ultimately presumes the intrinsic superiority of American values.

This study does not just provide an overview of the ways in which several American-owned prestige press newspapers represent the global hegemony of English, it also seeks to: (1) critically and comparatively interrogate prestige press discourses with respect to scholarly discourses on the global hegemony of English as well as other academic work devoted to cultural and communicative dimensions of globalization, (2) problematize and challenge both media and scholarly discourses on the global hegemony of English that represent this social phenomenon in largely uncritical terms, (3) put forward alternative representations in order to open up rhetorical, philosophical, ideological and creative space to think and live this social phenomenon differently.

There is, the author suggests, more to the story of the global hegemony of English than is generally being told in the texts examined. That is, the story of the global spread of English is not only one of universal progress, global unity, popular choice, universal inclusion, or boundless creative appropriation and production, it is also one of continued domination, linguistic privilege and hierarchy, directed "choice," considerable and
widespread exclusion, and continued linguistic imposition and homogenization. It is crucial to take note of the potentially negative aspects of this intensifying global social phenomenon, concludes the author. Without such critique, the dialectic driving linguistic global practice swings too far toward linguistic homogeneity.