It is an axiom of contemporary linguistics that language events should always be seen in context. This applies to books as well as to the reviews they receive. And in accepting the editor’s kind invitation to respond to the review by Phillipson (P) of *English as a Global Language* (*EGL*) in VII/1, I must begin by doing some contextualising—some discourse analysis, even—for it is not otherwise possible to make sense of it. Only by careful reanalysis of the quotations used, and of the context in which they appear, can one identify the hidden agenda which motivates a review of this kind. I hope the exercise will be useful to *Messenger* readers, who will undoubtedly encounter the ideology involved from time to time, and who may be wondering how best to deal with it.

**A Reviewer with Attitude**

What mindset has P brought to the task? Here are two illuminating extracts from towards the end of the review. ‘The idea that experts from countries such as the UK or the US, deeply monolingual and with a very patchy record of foreign language learning, can contribute to policy on education and language matters in multilingual societies is completely counter-intuitive.’ And next: ‘Linguistic hierarchies reminiscent of the colonial period, and masterminded by the type of linguistics and applied linguistics department that Crystal used to work for, still underpin much “aid” and World Bank policy’. You might like to read these quotations again—yes, you from any linguistics or applied linguistics department anywhere—the man is talking about you, not just me. Simply by being professionally involved in linguistics you are, it seems, imperialist and triumphalist, and if you are from a department in Britain or the USA, your inherent monolingualism makes you incapable of saying or doing anything useful in relation to multilingualism. Ignore the fact that hundreds of linguists from monolingual countries have spent years working with minority and multilingual situations, are fluent in more than one language, and are worried sick at the moment by the endangered language situation in the world today. Ignore the vast amount of work that has gone on within sociolinguistics. None of that can help. Linguists are misguided, incapable, conspiratorial people, with a colonialist political agenda. That is the state of mind you have to recognize before you can possibly begin to see what is going on in the review of *EGL*.

P complains about me: ‘his loyalty is to linguistics’ (ignore his reference to my p. 113, where there is no mention of this issue). He’s absolutely right—but the kind of linguistics he is thinking of isn’t anything like the world I know. Apparently if you’re a linguist, so says this review, your work is valueless when you come to study globalisation, education, or the media. Eat your hearts out, educational linguists, anthropological linguists, sociolinguists, clinical linguists, critical linguists, and others. You’re all wasting your time. Personally, I think it is an insult to thirty years of sociolinguistic research to suggest that linguists have nothing to say about ‘multilingualism, official, national and minority languages’. In fact, where would such topics be today without sociolinguistics? ‘Lack of any grounding in the social sciences is a major weakness of the work’ (*EGL*, that is). But to me, linguistics is a social science. When I was at Reading, the department of linguistics was in the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences. Our next door neighbour was Sociology.

Knowing only the above about a reviewer who was sent a copy of *EGL*, how would you expect such a person to approach the review task? To begin with, any descriptive statement would be immediately suspect. An observation like ‘English is a global language’ would be automatically construed as triumphalist. Secondly, you would expect the book to be combed for sentences which could be
interpreted in a triumphalist way. You would expect them to be quoted out of context. You would expect remarks which didn’t suit your position to be ignored. You would expect a concentration on only that part of the book which was relevant to the reviewer's ideological background. You would expect the use of loaded vocabulary. And you would expect there to be protest—oh how much, methinks, there would be protest—that the reviewer was not being ideological at all, that all he was doing was identifying scholarly weaknesses. That is what you would expect to find. And that is exactly what you get.

First choose your evidence

Let me begin by doing some basic discourse analysis to show how an ideologically fuelled selection of information works in practice, in a review of this kind. The account of EGL’s content is a good example. P’s summary is in terms of chapters. Why? Because that suits his argument. If you look towards the beginning of his review, you will find the briefest of remarks about each chapter, with the whole summary taking up twenty lines in all; and of this twenty, he devotes ten to an account of Ch. 5. He states that ‘nearly half of this chapter’ is on US English, ‘implying that Crystal’s understanding is that the internal affairs of the present-day US are central to the future of “global” English’. It sounds impressive—half a chapter devoted to this topic. That sounds like real evidence of a right-wing plot lurking somewhere around.

But when we summarize the book in terms of pages, a very different picture emerges. Excluding the preface and further reading, EGL takes up 140 pages. Ch. 1 (pp. 1-24) asks why there is a global language; Ch. 2 (pp. 24-63) outlines the historical context; Chs 3 and 4 (pp. 64-112) present the cultural context; and Ch. 5 (pp. 113-140) discusses the future. Note that only twenty-seven pages—just over an eighth of the book—are devoted to Ch. 5. And only just over eleven of these are devoted to the official English issue in the USA. I leave it to you to do the statistics. It is plain that the US English issue is not a major topic for me. Nor indeed is the book chiefly about US English, not ‘English Only’: P is evidently ignorant of the differences between the different US protectionist movements—but it is important not to oversimplify what is a very complex situation.

Second, I don’t know what P means by ‘the intellectual community in the United States’, but I would have thought that my extensive quotation from the Linguistic Society of America’s official statement on the matter, and some associated proposals, would do to represent that perspective. Ah, but I was forgetting. They’re linguists, of course. They don’t count.

It would indeed be an ‘intuitively puzzling assertion’ if I had said that US affairs are ‘central’ to the global English question. The most I would claim (as I do on p. 118) is that the issue is ‘of some relevance’. Read my p. 117 for a fuller comment: ‘Given that the USA has come to be the dominant element in so many of the domains identified in earlier chapters, the future of English must be bound up to some extent with the future of that country’ (fresh emphasis). As official English worries have been heard in recent years in several other English-speaking countries, the relevance is obvious. (P seems not to be able to make his mind up on this one. At one point the thrust of his complaint is that I give space to US English at all; at another point he says I should have gone into the educational issues further. Now that would have been stupid, given the different policies in the different states, the many changes of federal policy, and the many minority and pressure groups on both sides. It would take a separate book, and someone on the spot within the USA, to do justice to the situation. I know when I’m beaten. Even linguists have their limitations.)
Fair comment?...

The content summary of the book is just one example of the way P’s political views have led him to misrepresent EGL. But the whole review is like this. The whole review? I tried to reconstruct P’s method, for this response, identifying the quotations he used, looking at their context, and seeing whether they were ideologically motivated. I was searching for fair comment. I found none. On the other hand, I found plenty of cheap points. You be the judge, as I work my way through them.

It is very important, in this kind of review, to try to discredit your opponent by as many means as possible. P begins with politics, quoting my observation that the book has been written ‘without any political agenda’. Out of context, it does sound silly, and this then allows P to impute political naivety: ‘even the wish to be apolitical involves political choices’. But the context of my remark, in the preface, was the competing agendas of the two positions outlined there. My observation refers to the fact that I was not adopting either of those agendas. It is well known that there are two senses of the word ‘political’ in English, one referring to a general concern for the state and its citizens, and the other for the partisan world of party politics (compare OED ‘political’, senses 1 vs. 4). It is also standard polemical practice to blur those meanings—which is what P is doing here. I say I am not taking sides (sense 4). P tries to get you to believe that I am saying my book is outside politics (sense 1). Don’t be fooled.

Having tried his hand at politics, P then moves on to history. Here’s how he tries to justify his claim that my historical account is unimpressive. First, he notices that I head a section in my ‘historical context’ chapter (Ch. 2) ‘America’. ‘Oops’, he says, Crystal ‘does not mean the two continents, but the USA—his synecdoche reflects a hegemonic preference’. Well oops to you too, P. I chose that title for one reason only: the fact that the section begins with pre-US events, in 1584, and continues with pre-independence issues for two of its four pages. To have used the heading ‘USA’—now that would have been a real cause for criticism. But has P told you in his review that my American section is so wide-ranging? Look very hard before you answer.

Second, he quotes my observation (in relation to the specifically US situation) that ‘Rulings are needed to regulate conflict. If there is no conflict there is no need for rulings’. He then adds: ‘implying that language issues have been free of conflict in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and North America’. How he reads in that implication is beyond me, seeing as on the very next page I refer to the conflicts which have given rise to official language issues in Ireland, Wales, Quebec and New Zealand. But what you need to notice is that the contested proposition is his implication, not mine. This proposition then becomes the theme of the rest of the relevant paragraph in his review. And he concludes: ‘There is a huge literature on these issues which flatly contradicts this position’. Which position? The one P has just made up, as an implication. And on that basis, I am condemned for poor history.

He also picks on my South Africa section, in Ch. 2. This doesn’t satisfy either, because I don’t use the word apartheid. On the other hand, such phrases as ‘political divisions’, ‘authority and repression’, and the like are very much in evidence in that part of EGL. Plainly apartheid is being referred to, in spirit if not in name. The criticism turns out to be trivial. Similarly, he complains that I do not give the names of any African languages. True enough—but what is the force of that observation? Is he saying that when I say ‘The 1993 Constitution names eleven languages’ I should have listed them all by name? If that is all my poor history amounts to, then I am not impressed.

Several parts of the review compete for the prize of ‘selective quotation of the year’. He complains that I don’t describe past language policies in South Africa and have ‘invisibilized’ the blacks—a typical piece of polemic, which quickly becomes nonsensical as you read the relevant pages. For there you will find such phrases as ‘spoken by the black population’, ‘[used] by increasing numbers of the (70 per cent majority) black population’, ‘a series of government surveys among black parents’, and so on. The word ‘black’ turns up repeatedly. Why would anyone not see this? Only if they don’t want to see it. But ask yourself: why would someone not want to see it? What hidden agenda must underlie this review?
Or again, 'There is no reference to the many African scholars who have pleaded for the upgrading of African languages and denounced “aid” that strengthens European languages'. Yet in the next paragraph he acknowledges that I have referred to Ngugi, and if he had wanted to he could have mentioned my references to Chinua Achebe, and others. Chapter 5 in fact begins by referring to the rejection of English. Why would a reviewer not want to draw the reader’s attention to this?

And when I do say something about South Africa that P wants to see—referring to the country's new multilingual policy, and the position of English in the new political situation—this is dismissed as a ‘passing reference’. So let's try another piece of discourse analysis here. The section on South Africa is eighty lines long. What would you expect a ‘passing reference’ to be? Answer now, before you read on. ‘Passing’ must mean what—three or four lines max? I begin my comments on these matters with the remark 'There is thus a linguistic side to the political divisions which have marked South African society in recent decades'—and developing the point from there to the end of the section takes 35 lines. Why call something ‘passing’, when it plainly isn’t, or say there is no description of past language policies when there plainly is? What, you might wonder, is going on?

Another thing about political mindsets is that they tend to be obsessed with certain words and phrases, and if they are not present, the content they represent is deemed to be absent. Their owners look for the letter, and not for the spirit. So, P objects to the way my narrative 'avoids any upsetting talk of bloodshed ... capitulation ... domination ... '.

Evidently my use of such words as 'slavery', 'stealing our talents and geniuses' and 'humiliating experiences' (pp. 114-115) doesn’t count as being part of the language of domination. Or again, P reduces my deeply felt concerns about dying languages to a word, picking 'anxieties' out of context, and allowing that to represent my position. He might have selected other words I use—'urgency' or 'tragedy' (p. 18)—but that of course wouldn’t have suited his purpose.

Or again, when he notices that I do refer to other views, such as Gandhi’s and Ngugi’s, he says I have ‘buried’ their remarks ‘in comments on the expense of bilingualism’. If you look at the relevant quotations in EGL, you will find that they are spread over two pages, in a section prominently headed 'The rejection of English' (p. 114), and that the reference to the cost of bilingualism occurs in a single sentence over a page later. Buried? That’s the ‘passing reference’ syndrome again. Moreover, the sentence on bilingualism is immediately preceded by one in which I applaud ‘the promotion of bilingual or multilingual policies’. P doesn’t draw your attention to that, because that would go against the case he is trying to build up.

‘Buried’ is just one of several loaded terms scattered throughout this review. It is typical of the polemic approach. Here are a couple more examples. He says that 'some of the formulations ... are lifted verbatim' from my Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language. Note the shiftiness implicit in the term 'lifted'. P wants to convey the impression that I am doing it behind the reader’s back. The only problem is that the reliance on CEEL is something I’ve already drawn the reader’s attention to in my Preface. Or again, 'Crystal writes blithely' that I overstate the role of America in my account of the growth of global English. Note the weasel word, suggestive of an uncritical carelessness. I stand by my phrasing— I said 'almost single-handedly'—and the book certainly doesn’t ignore the British Council and ELT, for example (see pp. 103-4). But I remain convinced that, without America, English would not be a global language now; and that only America could have put English in this position. It may be a debatable view, but it certainly isn’t a blithe one.

Here are some other P imaginings. '[Crystal] sees no causal relationship between the globalisation of English and the demise of other languages'. P ignores my section on language death, in which I deplore such demise. I call it 'an intellectual and social tragedy' (p. 17). That’s pretty strong, wouldn’t you say? I say quite clearly that we need a general perspective on language dominance and loss. Big languages have been killing off little languages throughout history. Today, thanks to decades of work in sociolinguistics, we stand a chance of becoming aware of what the issues are and doing something about it. But to make
inequalities are increasing, and that the global system is having catastrophic ecological and cultural effects. I found that point especially ironic, because just after I had finished writing EGL I began work on two projects to do with endangered languages. One was a dramatic treatment of the catastrophe: it took the form of a play called ‘Living On’, which was completed in 1997. The other was a general academic account of the situation, on similar lines to EGL, which will be published by Cambridge University Press in 1999—or, at least, it will be if the perceived inadequacies of EGL do not generate any more time-consuming P-like red herrings! Perhaps my awareness of the impending projects kept me from including more on the endangered languages issue in EGL. I don’t know. If it did, the imbalance has now been made good.

I can understand P wanting the position he espouses in his own book to be given greater prominence in mine. He’ll be pleased to see that I added a reference to it, and a few others, when the Press gave me the opportunity to make some minor changes, earlier this year, for the paperback edition (out in September 1998). But that’s as far as I would want to go. When I read Linguistic Imperialism, I was unimpressed by the curious hotchpotch of political innuendo which it manifested. I was unconvinced by the ‘great plot’ scenario painted there. Whatever truth there might be in the view that there is a correlation between linguistic and political hierarchy, I felt that the case was blown by its overstatement. There was nothing to be gained by attempting to restate or counter that kind of polemic, I thought. There are real issues of pain and tragedy caused by language policies around the world—P and I are agreed about that—but they are not helped by the one-sided, black-and-white picture which P presents. I think I can see—I certainly try to see—both sides of the coin. P does not even try. And along with all polemics he condemns any attempt at a balanced statement, using the classic language of their trade to do so. All polemics say of their opponents that they have been ‘selective’, that they use ‘biased and ideologically loaded claims’, that they ‘trivialise’ the issues. This is standard claptrap. They fail to see the ideological mote in their own eye. They fail to detect subtlety. P, for example, has totally missed the conventional irony implicit in my use of the phrase ‘[English being] in the right place at the right time’. A bit more discourse analysis. When someone says this, they are typically reflecting on the unexpected and often undeserved good fortune of the recipient. If I say, when John turns up at the bar just as I’m offering to buy a round of drinks, ‘John’s always in the right place at the right time’, I am not praising him, nor being triumphalist about him. The usage is ironic. Rather than trivialising the issue, the phrase adds a depth to it, which P has completely missed.

Did I get anything useful from this review at all? By hunting behind the verbal smokescreen (‘inconsistency and errors’) I did actually get something out of his remarks on Africa. I described Cameroon as multilingual, but not Nigeria (I certainly should have done that—in my other writing Nigeria is my main example of West African multilingualism). Mea culpa. Also, when I said ‘Ghana was the first Commonwealth country to achieve independence, in 1960’, I meant ‘in Africa’, and it was silly not to have made that clear. Mea culpa. Also, I didn’t include separate sections on Namibia, Botswana and Lesotho, and I should have done so. Mea maxima culpa. This is the sort of helpful comment one likes to see in a review, as it can genuinely improve the quality of a work. If only there were more points like that in P’s review. But most of the important linguistic issues which I do raise in EGL he passes over in silence. Is the possible emergence of a World Standard Spoken English a plausible scenario? Is a global language such a unique event? Is there really a research advantage to those who have English as a first language (let us hear the views of those whose English is fluent—the EEM is an ideal forum)? Are there other factors which have fostered the growth of global English in addition to the ones I list? Have I overestimated any of the ones I list? P pays no attention to Chapters 3 and 4, which are (in my view) the core of the book, taking up a third of its pages. I hope the debate in the EEM, if it grows, will concentrate on such substantive issues, and not be sucked into the kind of anti-linguisticism which P believes in.
Finally

P concludes: ‘My analysis of Crystal’s book has tried to concentrate on its scholarly shortcomings rather than any assumed differences between his ideology and mine’. Well, he has tried and failed. The review is a mass of ideology and innuendo. My favourite is ‘Crystal’s apparent assumption that English is exclusively for the good’, though a close second is the ‘daunting challenge’ I am supposed to have set myself, in writing this book, namely ‘how a British view can present itself as universally relevant and appropriate’. Such things are part of P’s fecund imagination only. And then, after all the selective quotation and misrepresentation, P has the cheek to say it is me who is excluding types of information ‘that do not fit into the world-view underpinning his narrative’. It is me who is supposed to have ‘unjustifiably oversimplified the complexity and reality of global English’! Oy vay.

P would do well to take his own advice, from his final paragraph, and ‘probe more deeply into fundamental issues of approach and validity in coming to grips with global English, in relating our value judgements and ideological preferences to the types of data we invoke and the generalisations about cause and effect that are permissible.’ If he did so, he would see that his review of EGL is little more than a pastiche, in which a selection of pages (about a fifth of the whole book, I estimate) have been used to (mis)represent the book as a whole. It doesn’t help me, nor the audience interested in world English issues, and confirms my original instinct that his position has little to offer.

Editor’s note: the above ‘Rejoinder’ is longer than would normally be the case. Prof. Crystal explains his reasons in his introductory remarks – to which I would only add the importance of the matters at issue. Given the length of the ‘Rejoinder’, I accepted Robert Phillipson’s request to provide a brief response, which follows.

Edward Said, in his 1993 Reith lectures (published as Representations of the Intellectual, Penguin, 1994) describes the role of the intellectual as: ‘to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations ... someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do’ (pp. 9, 17). The global linguistic ecology would benefit if all academics could live up to this ideal.

Scholarly dialogue would benefit if there was more openness and willingness to explore alternative perceptions and readings. Crystal’s response indicates that in the ‘political minefield’ (his term) of English as a global language, he is convinced that his paradigm can safely navigate the hazards, whereas my alternative paradigm is valueless and interfering. His defensive concentration on the man rather than the ball and an agenda that he fabricates for me reveals little effort to address the substance of my critique or probe into his own ideological or epistemological position. It is more comforting for him to attack my assumed motives, concede a few scholarly peccadillos, and explain away or misrepresent other valid objections, rather than address more fundamental issues of bias and perspective.

His imprudently frank comments on my book Linguistic Imperialism clearly indicate that he did not come to my review with an open mind, quite the opposite. Crystal saw no reason to ‘restate or counter’ the position that I am assumed to represent. This arrogance ignores the substantial efforts of many scholars in many parts of the world to link English to processes of structural power, globalisation and linguistic hierarchies. Crystal’s response provides fascinating insight into the workings of the mind of those who are promoting the cause of English worldwide (a primary purpose of the British Council, on whose august board Crystal now sits). If I really was adrift in my analysis of contemporary global English, it is unlikely that my book would have already been reprinted three times, that people from China, Japan and