Multilingualism in the English-speaking World

Pedigree of Nations

Viv Edwards
Multilingualism in the English-speaking World
The Language Library was created in 1952 by Eric Partridge, the great etymologist and lexicographer, who from 1966 to 1976 was assisted by his co-editor Simeon Potter. Together they commissioned volumes on the traditional themes of language study, with particular emphasis on the history of the English language and on the individual linguistic styles of major English authors. In 1977 David Crystal took over as editor, and The Language Library now includes titles in many areas of linguistic enquiry.

The most recently published titles in the series include:

Ronald Carter and Walter Nash  Seeing Through Language
Florian Coulmas  The Writing Systems of the World
David Crystal  A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, Fifth Edition
J. A. Cuddon  A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, Fourth Edition
Viv Edwards  Multilingualism in the English-speaking World
Geoffrey Hughes  A History of English Words
Walter Nash  Jargon
Roger Shuy  Language Crimes
Gunnel Tottie  An Introduction to American English
Ronald Wardhaugh  Investigating Language
Ronald Wardhaugh  Proper English: Myths and Misunderstandings about Language
Multilingualism in the English-speaking World

Pedigree of Nations

Viv Edwards
In memory of Hannah Davies,
Rachel Williams and Nicole Bérubé
Contents

Preface viii

Part I  The extent of diversity 1
1  The myth of monolingualism 3
2  Roots of diversity 13
3  Language and the provision of services 48

Part II  Language at home and in school 77
4  Language in the family 79
5  Language and education: a history 94
6  Language and education in the modern world 105
7  Minority languages and majority speakers 137

Part III  Language in the wider community 147
8  Language and the economy 149
9  Language and the media 167
10  Language and the arts 188
11  Language, diplomacy and defence 207
12  Is life really too short to learn German? 214

References 223
Index 241
Preface

Many people think of globalization as a recent phenomenon. In fact, the population movement we are currently witnessing is best seen as the second wave of a process that started several hundred years ago and became firmly rooted in the nineteenth century. Most people in the English-speaking world today can either trace their ancestry to another country or can name a member of their family who has embarked on the great adventure of migration.

In my own case, my great-aunt Rachel migrated from Wales to the USA in 1929. The farewell gift from the congregation of her chapel was a Welsh Bible with an inscription wishing her luck not in the ‘new world’ but in ‘the other world’. Rachel did not return for 40 years, by which time both her parents had died. To all intents and purposes, the new world for which she departed might just as well have been the other world.

On one of many subsequent trips, she told us about a long-forgotten episode of family history. In the 1880s, her own grandmother had waited until her youngest son left school to start work at the age of 12, and had run away with the lodger to make a new life in the USA. The following year, she returned to her husband and the incident was conveniently forgotten. When asked at some point why she had decided to come back, she is reputed to have answered simply: ‘The other one was even worse!’

This book has been inspired by a fascination with people like my great-aunt and my great-great-grandmother and the journeys they have made. It has also been moulded by my own childhood exposure to bilingualism in Wales and my work as an adult on the education of the ‘new minorities’ who have settled in the UK since the 1950s. It has provided an opportunity to weave the threads of my own experience into the much larger multi-lingual tapestry, which potentially enriches the lives of everyone in the English-speaking world.
My great-grandparents wrote a weekly letter to Rachel, who loved receiving letters but was less enthusiastic about writing. She would, I am sure, have far preferred the electronic conversations I have been able to have with friends and colleagues in several continents as I have worked on this book. I owe a debt of gratitude to the many people who provided me with material or feedback: Stephen May in Aotearoa/New Zealand; Michèle de Courcy, Michael Clyne and Ian Malcolm in Australia; Nicole Bérubé and Jim Cummins in Canada; Jim Anderson, David Crystal, Mira Katbamna, Paddy Ladd and Chris Morriss in the UK; and Diana Eades, Susan Dicker and Anne Sienkewicz in the USA. Finally, my thanks to my husband, Chris Morriss, for his practical and moral support over several months of enforced house arrest with a prolapsed disc, which – ironically – allowed me to complete this book.

In keeping with the spirit of this book, and following the lead of Stephen May, I have deliberately departed from the publishing convention of italicizing non-English words, as a visual metaphor designed to make the point that minority languages are in fact a normal part of life in English-dominant countries.

Viv Edwards
University of Reading
Part I

The extent of diversity
The myth of monolingualism

In *Tour to the Hebrides*, Samuel Johnson remarks: ‘I am always sorry when any language is lost, because languages are the pedigree of nations.’ Pedigrees are concerned, of course, with historical antecedents; but they are also helpful in interpreting the present and predicting the future. This book will venture well beyond the Hebrides to chart the influence of other languages on the English-speaking world. The aim will be to throw light on the social and historical complexities of relationships among the many different peoples who make up the English-speaking world, and the languages they speak.

Given the importance of English as a global language, this focus on multilingualism may seem perverse. English is used in some capacity by at least a billion people worldwide. Different people, of course, use English in different ways. In some countries, it is the majority language; in others, it is spoken as a second language for ‘official’ purposes such as education and government; in still others, it is learned as a foreign language in schools. The notion of concentric circles is useful in explaining these different patterns. In the ‘inner-circle’ countries – the UK, Ireland, Canada, the USA, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand – English is the native language of the majority. In the ‘outer-circle’ countries, such as India and South Africa, English was introduced by colonial governments and remained an official language, alongside selected local languages, after independence. In ‘expanding-circle’ countries, such as China and Japan, English is a foreign language used for purposes of wider communication. The pre-eminence of English lies, in fact, in the combined numbers of native, second-language and foreign-language speakers.

In the inner-circle countries that will form the focus for this book, the ability to speak English is considered such an asset that many find it difficult to understand the need for other languages. This monolingual...
The scale of linguistic diversity in the English-speaking world is greater today than at any point since the mass migrations of the nineteenth century. Photograph by Dave Andrews.