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**THOMAS CLAYTON**

*Education and the Politics of Language: Hegemony and Pragmatism in Cambodia, 1979–1989.*

Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong, 2000.

Thomas Clayton makes a forceful case for recognizing the value of “linguistic pragmatism” in his case study of Cambodian education during the Vietnamese occupation, 1979–1989. Vietnamese forces allied with “a few thousand Cambodians of the National United Front for the Salvation of Cambodia” invaded Cambodia on the 25th of December 1979 and during the next few months drove the Khmer Rouge into Thailand. The Vietnamese withdrew in 1989 “leaving a fragile but functioning government and system of social services” (148). This book argues that “assistance from Vietnam and its allies secured the survival of Cambodia and its people in the post-Khmer Rouge era” (81). Also, importantly, Clayton “will argue with many Cambodians that the Vietnamese were neither strictly “saviors” nor strictly “plunderers”, but were both at the same time” (81). In other words, interests of the dominating and the dominated partially overlapped: “Cambodians both resisted and accommodated Vietnamese leadership and ideas during the occupation; while most accepted hegemony pragmatically, some collaborated or converted, and others demonstrated opposition through everyday or quietly subversive-politically progressive acts” (165–166).

The structure of the book is as follows. Chapters 2 and 3 critically review and raise questions about world-systems theory, in relation to education and language policy studies, respectively. Clayton is interested in world-systems theory and wants to find out how well its predictions apply to

the situation in Cambodia, where in world-systems' terms hegemonic core groups dominated peripheral groups, i.e. while Vietnam was occupying Cambodia. Chapters 4 and 5 provide historical background on colonial histories and communist histories of Cambodia, respectively. The chapters mainly rely on scholarly literature but in their selection offer uniquely interesting information on Vietnamese and French colonial education and language policies. The key chapters of the book are Chapters 6 through 9, which account for education and language policies and language use in education during the years 1979–1989, the period during which Vietnam occupied Cambodia. These chapters are based on original research work that the author conducted in Cambodia. The interview material is especially rich. The book ends with an interpretative theoretical Chapter 10.

Clayton reviews language policy studies from a world-systems theory point of view in Chapter 3. The chapter contextualizes the author's research questions. It is the author's privilege of course to work within a particular theory. But I have a question which I feel reveals a fundamental weakness in the world-systems theory that he so chose. The question arises, for example, from Clayton's discussion of the Ford Foundation. He labels it a "core enterprise". He thus allows the full weight of the theory's evaluations to fall on the foundation. This may be the result of carrying over the labelling of the foundation as a "core" institution from the literature that he reviews. Although of course there are institutions that are vehicles of exercise of hegemonic power, this is my question. Shouldn't judgement in each case rest on critical examination of the role of each particular institution in its particular setting, i.e. until after a criterion-based analysis has determined which agencies indeed can be said to be "core enterprises" and in which way they can be said to act in ways compatible with being vehicles of exercise of hegemonic power. The Ford Foundation's language grants program in the 1970's explicitly supported the development of national languages according to national policies in countries, at least in Africa and the Middle East. While a formulation certainly can be found that expresses how such a policy serves a U.S. government interest (of some kind), it is equally certain that a formulation can be found that expresses how such a policy serves other cooperating governments' interests. In the case of Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia, Clayton's key point is that the Vietnamese were neither saviors nor plunderers but were both at the same time. But the world-systems theory pushes him into denying the same status to the Ford Foundation rather than calling for or conducting a

thorough examination.

On the same page, and arising similarly from the a priori labelling of institutions, doubt is cast wholesale on the Soviet Union's complex language policies. Clayton does not argue the labelling of the Union as a "core enterprise". The implication is that whether the Union's education system used Russian or indigenous languages or combinations thereof, it has been prejudged as committing either the one or the other act of hegemonic imposition. Perhaps that is the point in world systems theory? If you are big, you are "core" and a bully? Clayton writes, "Of course, linguistic pragmatism [use of indigenous languages] may have been small consolation for Soviet periphery students who began to be bombarded in schools by ideologies incongruent with their traditional ways of thinking" (41). Is an ideology that recognizes a national phase of development that requires respect for indigenous languages all that bad? And was the Soviet case that simple? As with the case of the Ford Foundation, the reviewer is not arguing for a one-sided positive evaluation of the Soviet policies, but for the acknowledgement of multiple interests, and their realistic assessment.

I like Clayton's questions that end his theoretical review. He asks (and I cite him omitting a lot of theoretical idiom), "What, indeed, do [...] students, teachers, and policy makers do with [...] languages that have been "forced down their throats"? Answering this question will involve [...] studies of the various forms of accommodation and resistance [...]" (43). He finds an answer that I also like very much, namely, "in the final analysis the language policies do not appear to have been imperialistic" (44). At this point, he acknowledges that "hegemonic core groups invoke linguistic imperialism in some situations and linguistic pragmatism in others" (44).

Clayton's findings are interesting and valid whether or not world-systems theory provides his theoretical and idiomatic framework. Clayton's declared interest in finding out how individuals respond to changes in their environment demonstrates a broader validity of his study that goes beyond the a priori imagery of world-systems theory of some actors as evil and the dominated as passive and suffering victims. He does not accept a theory that turns people into passive, non-thinking puppets. In his account, people react to imposition by reflection, by accommodation, by resistance, as one should expect in a variety of manners. And there are reasons for these reactions. A student may hate having to submit to an occupying power. In the case of Cambodia, a student had to attend classes in Vietnamese communism in order to get an education. But, further, if the only teacher of mathematics is

a Vietnamese who does not know Cambodian, then the Cambodian student may well accept learning Vietnamese. The student makes a rational decision to acquire mathematics. The student also has to pass the ideological examination to participate in the mathematics class — so be it! It so happened in the case of the Vietnamese occupation, as Clayton convincingly shows, that the Vietnamese themselves sought to find the least troublesome solutions to communicating with Cambodian students. They even used French because some Cambodians already knew French. They used interpreters, they translated, they educated teachers who could teach in Khmer. (Again, this is not to say that the reviewer would only see the positive aspects of the Soviet policies.)

Hegemonic interests could result in utter disinterest in interaction with their subjects. People may even be malicious and prevent access by denying subjects education and language acquisition opportunity. Colonial systems in the recent past allowed only the minimum expenditure to support intercommunication. The colonial power expended only what was required to stay in power. The latter case predicts typical colonial language policy. In the historical overview of earlier periods of foreign intervention in Cambodia, Clayton illustrates how “education positioned Cambodians for direct and exclusive colonial relationships with successive metropolises”. He attributes interests to the colonial powers such as

- to train Cambodians for the “colonial civil service”
- to oblige Cambodians “to contribute to international economies” [controlled by the colonial powers] and
- “to accept, at least overtly, the cultural practices of these countries” (160).

Those periods were “characterized by linguistic imperialism” in Cambodia, writes Clayton. This was not the case during the 1979–1989 occupation.

Clayton claims that the language policy during the Vietnamese occupation was what he calls “pragmatic” and not an instance of “linguistic imperialism”. Clayton implicitly defines “linguistic imperialism” by the hypothesized presence of yet another feature, namely, a negative evaluation by subjects of the opportunity to learn the colonial language. It is also possible that the negative evaluation is the author’s. I have to induce this feature in order to understand the important distinction that Clayton makes between imperialism and pragmatism.

What then should I understand him to mean by “linguistic pragmatism”? Clayton characterizes “pragmatism” as “successful communication of ideology motivated Vietnamese linguistic pragmatism during the occupation...” (160).

Then, as also during certain earlier periods, the Vietnamese occupiers supported a Cambodian system that “offered education for Cambodians in indigenous languages ‘so that everybody could understand what was being said’” (160). This is how I understand Clayton: if the rulers’ interest has a particular content which they wish to share with their subjects, a content which they wish their subjects to properly understand, communication and language policy get fashioned thereafter. The subjects’ language can be used.

Obviously then rulers may under certain circumstances prescribe the use of one language in particular domains and another language in another domain. Clayton elaborates this insight in relation to “world-system tradition” of thought as a major finding and corrects world-systems theory accordingly. The reviewer very much agrees with the necessity of this correction.

I would go further. Working in a different theoretical framework, the reviewer does not see a purpose in retaining the distinction between “imperialism” and “pragmatism”. An account of how the various participants in communication evaluate language selection and use and what adjustments they make in consequence of those evaluations would seem both sufficient and explicit. “Successful communication”, a concept that I very much agree with and that Clayton introduces to explain Vietnamese language pragmatism (160), is the result of communicative adjustment by individuals who consciously note and evaluate non-linguistic interests. The colonial (occupying, aid organizations’, etc.) interests interact with subjects’ (subordinates’, supplicants’, et al.) interests and whatever language the parties require to successfully communicate their respective positions come to be used. Obviously, this is a simplification since it takes time to learn languages and resources are required to provide access to language acquisition opportunities. But as Clayton shows, if the interests are such as to motivate immediate communication, interpretation and translation can accomplish successful intercommunication, and language learning programs can be targeted at special client groups.

Clayton describes (122) how during one phase of educational development during the occupation the language depended on the donor: “The Soviet Union supplied the [Khmer-Soviet Friendship Higher Technical Institute] with professors, books, materials, and equipment, and Russian served as the medium of instruction... In the first semester of the first year, students studied Russian 24 hours per week”, and as they progressed the hours of study dropped. Vietnam resourced the Economics Institute so

Vietnamese served as the language of instruction and students studied Vietnamese concurrently. “In fact, the Vietnamese and Soviets opened and maintained Cambodia’s higher education institutes using whatever languages met the possibilities and constraints of the evolving situation” (131).

For pragmatic reasons — for successful communication and in harmony with socialist ideology — “all parties worked to establish Khmer, the language of greatest accessibility and educational efficiency, as the medium of instruction”. Khmer was used from the very beginning in the reconstruction of general education. An important interest held by the occupying regime was political education and for the same reasons “Khmer served as the language of instruction in these educational gatherings.” (141).

Appendices I-IV make available in English translation four important policy documents from this period on Cambodian higher education. Thomas Clayton’s book may excite many readers by its engagement with world-systems theory, but its value is guaranteed by the detailed information that he makes available about Cambodia and Cambodia’s relationship to Vietnam.

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ACHILLE SERRAO, LUIGI BONAFFINI and JUSTIN VITIELLO (eds.)  
*Via Terra. An Anthology of Contemporary Italian Dialect Poetry.*  
 Ottawa: LEGAS Press, 1999. 286 pp.

Sixth in the “Legas Italian Poetry in Translation Series,” under the general editorship of Gaetano Cipolla, one of the translators of the poems contained in the present volume. The statement on the back cover notes that:

This anthology of contemporary Italian dialect poetry (or neodialect poetry, as it is commonly called), was born out of the need to document the unprecedented flowering of dialect poetry that has been taking place in Italy in the last few decades, and which constitutes one of the most important developments in recent Italian literature.