

LINGUICIDAL TENDENCIES?

It could well be that English has 'linguicidal tendencies', and that the diminution or death of other languages is the price paid in some parts of the world for the growth and utility of this vigorous, insidious super-language.

If English is wholly or partly responsible for the demise of other tongues, the process is certainly slow. Languages are hard to kill off, as witness the survival of that unique medium Basque in the face of pressures from both the French and Spanish states. Languages do die, however, and in the late 20th century the ecological metaphor comes easily to mind. In his letter (*ET*3, July 85), Philip Ward called certain languages 'endangered species', as much in need of global rescue plans as the animals and plants that are under threat because of the biological success of *Homo sapiens*.

Much of the time, users of English see it as a self-sufficient entity, whose welfare can be discussed in isolation. It does not exist alone in the world, however, and this magazine in particular would be failing in its remit if it did not look, not just at how English interrelates with other languages – *franglais* and *gairaigo* in this issue – not just at English flourishing in distant climes – the Indian subcontinent in this issue – but also at how the vitality of English affects the health of such other languages as Gaelic and Welsh, Hawaiian and Maori.

At the same time, however, the variety within continues to fascinate, as our Post & Mail columns demonstrate. In *ET*6, in addition to the global linguistic situation, we also look at fears about the safety of English *inside* its largest home territory, the United States, at the problem of purism, at whether or not there is a hidden extra tense – the plupluperfect? – in the language, at the Story of English told in an up-coming TV series, and a variety of other topics, from typewriter keyboards to *faux amis*. There are few places in the world we don't get to – Japan, India, the Philippines, the Pacific, etc. – and few topics that do not come up – etymology, the qualities of dictionaries, split infinitives, reformed spelling, you name it.

It is also good to report that *ET* now travels to almost every corner of the world. So far, the Soviet Union has

proved resistant, but we are read in the Republic of China and most nations of the world now have at least a scattering of subscribers. Inevitably, our strongest showings are in the United States and England, but in relative terms countries like Canada and Scotland, France and Finland are healthily holding their own. The USA is way out in front with university subscriptions; some – like the University of Northern Iowa – with multiple subscribers. The Canadian province of Ontario has an almost ideal subscriber profile, with many individuals alongside many institutions, including government bodies as well as colleges, the Canadian Medical Association and even – service beyond the call of duty? – the Ontario Milk Marketing Board.

The magazine is on target, and promotion plans are geared to further expansion. *ET* is a commercial venture; it must prove itself in the market. It receives no subsidies, but it is not strictly speaking a profit-making venture either. In this it is something of an anomaly, and like all good anomalies will always benefit from a little help from established friends, particularly in developing its contacts with more:

- interested individuals
- schools of all kinds
- colleges and universities
- institutional and public libraries
- professional associations
- publishers and periodicals

A lot of the English-using world still hasn't heard of *English Today*, and people still write in who haven't seen a copy but have only sort of heard tell of it. It will be good to do something about that.

Tom McArthur

The editorial policy of *English Today* is to provide a focus or forum for all sorts of news and opinion from around the world. The points of view of individual writers are as a consequence their own, and do not reflect the opinion of the editorial board. In addition, wherever feasible, *ET* leaves unchanged the orthography (normally British or American) and the usage of individual contributors, although the editorial style of the magazine itself is that of Cambridge University Press.



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