



RESTRUCTURING INDIAN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *English Language Teaching emerges as one of the major academic enterprises in our times. This discipline is seen as a monolithic entity. The linguistic divergence like plurality reflects in the socio-cultural map of Indian English. The present paper deals with the theoretical analysis of English Language Teaching in India. The first part of the paper deals with the position of English during pre-independent and post-independent times. The second part of the paper deals with how to decolonize Indian English class rooms.*

Keywords: *ELT in India, linguistic imperialism, post-method, teacher autonomy, critical thinking.*

New perspectives are taking place at a fast pace in the broad academic discipline of English Language Teaching (ELT) today. English language in India carries the cultural residue of colonial past. English is taught as a Second Language like in other newly independent countries after 1947. English represents as a marker of modernity and social progress in post-independent India. After independence, language becomes the most intimate index of one's own identity. It was a tough time for choosing a 'national/unified language 'of India, which is supposed to unify the different multi-lingual or cultural terrain. During 1950s, English is assumed as the link language to unify Indian states. The present paper tries to analyse the role of English Language Teaching in India within the frame work of post colonial approach.

English in Pre-independent Era

Language goes always hand in hand with power. Down from the ages, the prevailing language was replaced by the ruler's/conqueror's language India is a multi-lingual country having different cultural experiences. English slowly gained the status of elite language with the establishment of English East India Company. Ushering EIC as a domineering agency in India's administrative affairs, English began to enjoy the privilege of being the elite language of the upper class Indians. Learning English

creates a status marker among the well-bred Indians in Calcutta, the former capital of India. Coupled with power, English influenced all the spheres of main stream culture of nineteenth century. Many Indians started to learn English in order to try their luck in colonial service system. The deterioration of feudalism and the rise of Industrialisation coupled with colonial modernity made a drastic change in the mind set-up of Indians especially upper class Indians. The decline of feudalism paved a new demand for enriching service sectors under colonial government. The process of colonization involves one nation or territory taking control of another nation or territory either through the use of force or by acquisition. As a by-product of colonization, the colonizing nation implements its own form of schooling within their colonies.

The controversial Lord Macaulay Minute of 1835 was the turning point in the history of English education in India. The educational policies outlined by Lord Macaulay in 1835 aimed at training a class of people, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect' by exposing them to the best that has been thought and written. The contemporary discourses of Dalit identity take a turn by labelling Macaulay as the 'Father of Indian Modernity'. Even though this policy document had no direct references to the

downtrodden communities, this document is seen as an entry card to liberate dalits from the prevailing social system by the counter discourses. The Woods Dispatch of 1854, which is often regarded as the Magna Carta of Indian Education, stabilized the position of English in India. English was introduced in Indian educational framework in compliance with request by liberal moderns like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda et al. They envisaged the necessity to acquire English language in order to master scientific and technical knowledge. Though the colonial power was in agreement with the need to educate Indians, they disagreed on the methods of imparting the knowledge. Simultaneously the Orientalists (the supporters of classical languages) and the Vernacularists (the supporters of Indian languages) opposed colonial education system. The 'civilizing mission' of the empire slowly introduced English at the threshold hour. The 'modernising project' got ushered with the ardent support of liberal Indians and the liberal colonial policies.

Mean while English Language teaching takes a historical turn in Indian educational scenario. One of the earliest works in ELT in India was 'The Tutor in Bengal' (1797). A great chunk of English Language teaching was done in bilingual mode. The teachers were either bilingual or with the support of translators, taught English, the foreign language to the students. The special word list based on their limited vocabulary was taught by learners. The whole pedagogical instruction was textbook-centred. These text books tried to imbibe its humanistic orientation based on the works by canonical writers. Only a few English medium schools introduced dictionaries and grammar books which made them do translation of longer texts. During the last phase of nineteenth century, the direct method was chosen as a method of ELT in elite institutions. At the turn of the twentieth century, the reading method by Michael West was practised in English classes.

English in post-independent Era

As a link language, English was granted the status of an additional language by the official Language Amendment Act of 1967. With the

support of statesmen like Jawaharlal Nehru, Radha Krishnan, English was taught as a compulsory subject for undergraduates and is taught at schools as a Second Language. Though English is a foreign language, it enjoys the status of an Indian language in India. Nagaland adopts English as its official language. Simultaneously certain states insisted to make English as the associate official language of India. The Secondary Education Commission affirmed the relevance of English. This commission justifies English, must continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature – humanistic, scientific and technical. Finally our nation tries to follow an integrated language policy encompassing three languages which is necessary for educational, cultural and political reasons. The Three – language formula (English, Hindi and the mother tongue) was institutionalized in schools during the middle of 1960s. English is occupied the position of 'power language' within the controlling structures of the nation.

On the other hand, the structural syllabus from London was introduced in Madras during 1950 by the British Council. 'A Snow Ball' campaign, funded by the British Council aimed at giving training for teachers in methodology of English teaching. Meanwhile several institutions like Regional Institute of English (RIE) and Central Institute of English and Foreign Language (CIEFL) were established in order to produce syllabus materials and train teachers to improve the standards of English teaching across India.

Any debate on the hegemony of English in India will have to address the larger issue of cultural formation in the last century and a half. We need to contend with several questions such as the constitutive agency of English in the restructuring of social formations and its relations to the distribution of social and political power. The post- colonial academicians located the use of English in the centralization of culture and knowledge through the state apparatus like the institution of education and its relation to global economy. English Language Teaching (ELT) is a major pedagogical enterprise in

the world. With the rapid growth of English around the globe, ELT becomes a major international industry. The growth of English draws a parallel with the growth of England as an imperial power. The colonization made English as an imperial language and the rise of United States as the super global power consolidated its legacy of being the world language. Towards the end of the twentieth century, in a wholly changed political context in which the global spread of English has become not so much part of colonial control but rather part of neo-colonial exploitation (Philipson, 1992).

Decolonizing English language teaching is the central aspect of many colonized countries like India. ELT is the part of colonial education scheme and its well-known theories have their roots in western educational philosophy. A great chunk of post-colonial theories boldly questions the assumed universalisms of western thoughts. Imparting English education in India was a pragmatic policy to facilitate colonial rule in India. The colonial enlightened sense of 'self-satisfaction' created a cultural and ideological demarcation. It bestowed an ontological legitimacy upon western progress and conferred an inferior status on the other languages in the world. Bourdieu describes this legitimacy as "the power of imposing a vision of the social world through principles of di-vision"(Bourdieu, 1991: 221).

The legitimacy is accelerated with the neo-colonist apparatus like globalization and glocalization. Brumfit notes that "the second substantial shift is not linguistic at all, but relates to oil, and the economy associated with it" (Brumfit, 2001: 118). The British Council Report of 1987/88 identifies that "Britain's real black gold is not North Sea oil but the English language" (Philipson, 1992: 48). These socio-economic realities posit a question before us. Whose English do we study? Is the central question which reflects the link between academics

and global politics? The changes in pedagogy also influenced English Language Teaching in India.

By the end of twentieth century, many ELT theoreticians thought of the death of the methods and approaches in teaching language. The post method era emerged after the gradual dissatisfaction with conventional methods. It came to light during 1990s. This method refigures the relationship between theoreticians and practitioners. Methods are based on idealized concepts which geared towards idealized context. B. Kumaravadivelu stresses on teachers' autonomy. Teachers employ their own experience, framework and knowledge in classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to formulate their own methods of teaching and thus, overcome the limitations of method. The focus may be shifted from method-based pedagogy to post-method pedagogy. The post-method can be defined as the construction of classroom procedures and principles by the teacher himself/herself based on his/her prior and experiential knowledge and/or certain strategies. As Kumaravadivelu (1994) states, post method condition is; An awareness that as long as we are caught up in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, an awareness that such a search drives us to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas and an awareness that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the situation. (p. 28) the limitations of the methods and hence, another method cannot aim to overcome the limitations of the concept of method. Whilst recognising firstly the significance of the communicative language teaching movement. This new pedagogical approach attempts to create new forms of knowledge, grounded in principles of personal liberation, critical democracy and social equality. Like critical pedagogy, this post-method is associated with optimism and self-reliance as its goal.

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