

Lost into the Orbit of English Industry: A Postcolonial Exploration of the Politics of Linguistic Hegemony

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Abstract

The development of English as an Industry is connected to the rise of English as a global Language. The impressive global reach of English is only a four hundred years old phenomenon, and deeply entangled with British imperialist history. This paper intends to show the various strategies through which corporations as well as governments utilize English to make money/ generate profits, and simultaneously promote certain ideologies and practices. To attain this end this paper particularly focuses on the issues around the marketing/industrialization of English. This is important to understand the various subtle politics through which linguistic hegemony pervades our globe, especially in this part of the world which can tentatively termed as the global South. This part itself constitutes the third largest market of English in the world, just after England and America. This paper particularly analyses the several myths upon which English Industry is grounded and spread which includes the myth of development, myth of standard English and myth of native speaker. The owner/managers of different profit making organizations circulate these myths to gain profit. This paper also engages itself with the issue of proselytizing to understand the politics of linguistic hegemony well. Hence, this paper finally shows that the global south to a great extent is lost/ entangled into the orbit of English industry whose purpose is mostly monetary/ multiplication of capital as well as ideological. The paper also suggests the possible negotiations with such situation and how to positively transform it.

Keywords: Capitalism, Linguistic Hegemony, Ideology, Negotiations.

Introduction:

The development of English as an 'industry' is connected to the rise of English as a global language. Though the history of English as a language is thousand years old but its having a global level reach is rather a very recent phenomenon. Before that languages like Latin and German had such superior and prestigious status. This impressive global reach of English is only a 400 years old phenomenon, and deeply associated with British imperialist history. There are various strategies through which corporations and governments utilize English to make money or to generate profits. In the similar vein they also promote certain beliefs and practices.¹

The English Myth and English Language Teaching:

Currently, the English industry or market worth billions of dollars. It is worth more than 10 billion dollars now. This testifies to the very fact of the industrialization process of English which consequently give birth to linguistic hegemonies.² It is interesting to note here is that this part of our world namely our Indian Sub-continent consists the third largest market for English Industry just after England and America. Various states, corporations and organizations implement different strategies to spread this market of English.

¹ For details see Nunan, David. "The Impact of English as a Global Language on Educational Policies and Practices in the Asia-Pacific Region." *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2003, pp. 589–613, p. 590

² Phillipson, Robert, and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. "English Only Worldwide or Language Ecology?" *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1996, pp. 429–452, p. 436

Several myths³ regarding English language learning is continuously being disseminated on a global scale. Firstly there is the ‘myth of development’. It suggests that the language of English and the idea of progress are synonymous because English is the language of science, technology and progress. Majority of the people consider English as prestigious and useful and universities – the highest educational institutions – are using English as the medium of instruction and examination. As different disciplines, such as science and commerce, have great utility of English, they have high admiration for it. It is nowadays a striking matter that, as if, English has become the omnipotent to provide solutions to all problems.⁴

English has become an inseparable part for the people of modern world which is based on technology and capitalism. In this modern, technological world, we cannot think without computer, internet and telecommunication networks which are gradually becoming very important part of educational and financial sectors of human life such as academic related database based websites, online banking systems, online based ticketing for transportations, different websites for online shopping, and so on. In all these cases, different types of software and websites that are used are developed and operated in English language. So, for this reason, the people of the developing and under developed countries of third world countries are forced to learn and use English language for their existence and development as it has become an effective tool for modernization being the language of science and technology.

Secondly, the ‘myth of standard language’ implies that there is only one variation of the language which ought to be considered and implemented globally as the only standard international language. Although in reality we know that this standard language is nothing but one of the various dialects of English. A particular dialect of Britain is selected, studied and codified as ‘standard’ or correct version of English.⁵ Last but not the least, we discover the existence of the ‘myth of the native speaker’.⁶ This myth suggests that only BANA people are the authentic carrier/ representative of English, and thus best as trainers of the language. Even the second generation diasporas are not considered authentic trainers of the English language. British and American trainers are often coming to Asia and teaching the language whereas very often their academic credentials are not up to the mark. Sometimes they have only passed A level or completed only University graduations. We hardly qualify them even with our PhD degrees! These native speakers are hired as the ‘best possible trainers’ and offered with a very high range of salaries.⁷ People located in our area will hardly suffice in comparison to them in spite of being highly qualified. This ‘Standard’ English language variety plays a vital role in testing which is done for various purposes such as admission to universities, jobs, immigration etc. In case of TOEFL and IELTS, standard American or British English is used as a norm. While these ‘high stake’ tests are used as gatekeepers to the universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, current research shows that they do not determine student performance in academic courses. Therefore the validity of these tests is not out of question.⁸

In case of academic purposes, argument in favor of these tests may be established on the ground that students are supposed to read books written in standard language and write for the people in the most formal context. But, when the same issue is raised for the immigrants, the context is a little bit different. Some native countries of English language demand at 6.5-7 score in IELTS test if a non-native speaker of English language wants to get immigration in those countries. These countries are trying to justify this process on the ground that as English is the national language in those countries, immigrants are expected to have competence in the language. But behind this argument, some other issues are related to this sort of tests. Such as, no-native speakers of English language, without having a particular educational and socio-economic background, will not be able to achieve the expected score because to do it they need to be

³ For details see Ahmar Mahboob, ‘English: The industry,’ JPCS Vol 2 No 4, December 2011, pp. 46-61

⁴ Norton, Bonny. “Language, Identity, and the Ownership of English.” *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1997, pp. 409–429. P. 427 *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3587831. Accessed 25 Jan. 2020.

⁵ Mahboob, A. (2002) “No English, no future!” Language policy in Pakistan. In S. Obeng & B. Hartford (Eds.) *Political Independence with Linguistic Servitude: The politics about languages in the developing world*. New York: NOVA Science. P. 77

⁶ Rampton, M. B. H. (1990). Displacing the “native speaker”: Expertise, affiliation, and inheritance. *ELT Journal*, 44(2), 97-101.

⁷ Leung, C., Harris, R., & Rampton, B. (1997). The idealised native speaker, reified ethnicities, and classroom realities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31, pp. 543 - 560. P. 557

⁸ PILLER, INGRID, and JINHYUN CHO. “Neoliberalism as Language Policy.” *Language in Society*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2013, pp. 23–44. P. 41

educated in English in their home country and solvent enough to pay the fees for the test which costs quite a lot especially for the people living in a developing country with lower income. So, the preference for standard English language for the immigrants shows how with the use of this notion a way of economic manipulation is established through these different costly tests and how it serves the purpose of the English government that wants only a certain group of people to migrate.⁹

The Ideology of Standard English Language:

In the current practices of language teaching, the trainers select a particular dialect of the language and refer to it 'standard' English. But in linguistics, there is no technical difference on the basis of which we can justify one dialect better than another. The dialect that has been selected, studied, and codified for education, media, and other official purposes is considered by us as a standard language. To train the non-English speakers such standard language, the trainers are emphasizing the use of specific grammar books, textbooks, and teaching resources. To avail these books and resources, the non-English people need to spend a lot of money because they are in most of the cases expensive. Even keeping this issue in the mind, the English people are publishing low price edition of these books and resources for the non-English people because the market of buyers of these books and resources is immense. So, even by selling these books and resources at a low price as the sell is huge, the profit ultimately is a big amount. In this way, the English people are financially benefited through linguistic imperialism.

The native speakers are considered as the ideal users of language and the best models for language learners. On the basis of this assumption, especially in the non-English speaking countries, in language schools the native-English speakers are getting preference even if they have no credentials in English language teaching. Applied linguists in their definitions of the native speaker have emphasized traits such as birth, heredity, and innateness of linguistic qualities. Leung, Harris and Rampton argue that there is an "abstracted notion of an idealized native speaker of English from which ethnic and linguistic minorities are automatically excluded".¹⁰

English Language and Colonization:

English language in general and English language teaching in particular function as one of the vital medium of connection between the West and the Third World countries where English language works as a powerful ideological instrument to achieve potentially (theoretically) hegemonic culture, economic and political aims. At the postcolonial context, through the British and the American domination over the world, English language teaching, as a global activity, is playing a vital role which may be termed as a sort of business activity of English Industry where the goal of financial benefit is achieved through cultural domination. As the global marketplace knows that we, the people of third world countries, will not be able to come up with the luxurious or technology based electronic products or fashion items to have significant control over it and be confined within the production of garment products, the marketplace of English Studies expects us to achieve that level of efficiency in English that will help them to have a better communication with us so that we can provide them profitable services. Thus English is working as a vital factor to control world economy, power, and neocolonial domination.¹¹

In the interview titled "English in Bangladesh: An interview with Professor Aali Areefur Rehman", the interviewee, one of the scholars of English in Bangladesh, has raised the striking issue whether "English studies is "studying English" or "English ways of study?" and expresses his opinion about the notion by a majority of English educationists in Bangladesh:

Though of course we can think of not just English studies but our whole system of education as basically an English (i.e., British) way of study. Our schools and universities, the subjects we study in them, the titles of the degrees we get from them, have been inherited from the British. I think we are only now beginning to emerge from these western ways, changing to newer ways – though I rather think that most educators of my age would

⁹ PRICE, GARETH. "English for All? Neoliberalism, Globalization, and Language Policy in Taiwan." *Language in Society*, vol. 43, no. 5, 2014, pp. 567–589., p.566 www.jstor.org/stable/43904599. Accessed 24 Jan. 2020.

¹⁰ qtd in Nunan, David. "The Impact of English as a Global Language on Educational Policies and Practices in the Asia-Pacific Region." *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2003, pp. 589–613. P. 612. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3588214. Accessed 25 Jan. 2020.

¹¹ Ibid p.612

see this not so much as simple change but as a regression or fall in standards. The perception is that when we were more English or western in our ways of study, we had more rigorous standards.¹²

In this modern world, usually the colonial governments with the help of different institutions and establishments connected to them try to expand their lingual influence and implement all the possible abilities and potentialities to enrich this language. They know and believe that in this modern world linguistic imperialism is more effective and less costly than the military invasion. On the other hand, conquered societies suffer from the inferiority complex regarding their language and culture and therefore they submit themselves to all the aspects of lingual and cultural sovereignty of the colonialists. Colonialists apply this lingual improvement and power not only for the language itself but for the more powerful aim to strengthen their political base and their colonialism on other lingual minority group.¹³ The important issue in the role of language is it can provide and remove one's identity. According to Homi Bhabha (1990: 112), "there is no language in vacuum situation but it is used in humane society for connection so it is meaningful and to be meaningful is what makes a language a useful thing and it is the only reason for its being."

The English colonizers' one of the goals is to motivate the colonized people to accept that western culture is an introducer of universal culture and acceptance of such culture is beneficial for them. It saves them from remaining behind and makes them free from the weaknesses of their cultural aspects such as darkness of ignorance and superstitions. This notion raises a significant motivating factor in favour of the colonizers native landscape in the mind of the colonized where it is considered that the colonizers' landscape is a bright and formative one of western culture and civilization that is the only humanity savior to free them from the darkness of native knowledge and culture. Said states that power and knowledge are inseparable. The 'Wests' claim to knowledge of the East gave the West' the power to name, and the power to control. This concept is essential to understanding of colonialism and therefore post colonialism. (Said, 2000: 34)

Through the role that British Council plays as a dynamic organization in spreading, selling, and marketing ELT to the world, the economic goals and gains of ELT are exposed. The British Council Annual Report (1968-69) states that "there is a hidden sales element in every English teacher, book, magazine, film-strip and television programme sent overseas" (pp.10-11). The Chairman of the British Council stated in his Annual Report (1983-84):

Our language is our greatest asset, greater than North Sea Oil, and the supply is inexhaustible; furthermore, while we do not have a monopoly, our particular brand remains highly sought after. ...¹⁴

Furthermore, from history we know that in this part of the globe during colonial period the process of proselytizing was packaged with English language teachings. Colonizers used various tools to 'civilize the savage'. One of civilizing tools was spreading the English language and Christian beliefs and life practices along with it. Missionaries were English teachers. So, ideological purposes were there. Christian morality/values were needed to be civilized. Along with profit generating machine, there were also these agenda. The process of colonization by the English over the non-English people is an ever ending process which started in the disguise of business of spice at first, then in the form of spreading religion and helping the different civilizations to learn the language of the colonizers in the name of illuminating them with the modern knowledge and culture, and after that by using military invasion to have control over various territories where they met resistance from the colonized. With the passage of time, these colonizers had to leave some territories that were in their control either because of the powerful resistance of the colonized group or by the influence of some global organizations that try to ensure the human rights. But these colonizers have not completely stepped back rather they have tried to find out some new ways to have control over those territories that were in their control and linguistic imperialism is the new and quite easy and accepted way to continue it.

¹² Akhter and Tariq, An Interview with Professor Ali Areefur Rehaman, Praxis 3, University of Rajshahi Press: Rajshahi p.91

¹³ PRICE, GARETH. "English for All? Neoliberalism, Globalization, and Language Policy in Taiwan." *Language in Society*, vol. 43, no. 5, 2014, pp. 567–589., www.jstor.org/stable/43904599. Accessed 25 Jan. 2020.p. 569

¹⁴ qtd in Phillipson(1992), Linguistic Imperialism. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 144-145

Conclusion:

These are the prominent myths among many others through which linguistic hegemony is being disseminated throughout the globe. Huge amounts of books are sold every hour which are written in English and there are professional trainers/ teachers who are directly or indirectly connected to the sole intention of the multiplication of capital. The owners or managers of the industry actually circulate these myths globally to gain profit. In this industry the states and corporations are on the top and we are only lesser executive of this industry knowingly or unknowingly. Now it is high time we reflected upon these issues. Only then would it be possible for us to chalk out effective means of dismantling all neocolonial enterprises.

