Landmarks

English as a Second Language: Pedagogy, Paradigms, and Politics

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Introduction

Any discussion about the teaching of English in India, or for that matter of any modern Indian language, needs to begin by asking, among other things, three critical questions: (i) What is appropriate pedagogy?; (ii) What are the current paradigms of practice?; (iii) What are the language policies; specifically, the politics of production of 'legitimate' language that dictate answers to (i) and (ii)? The third question, it seems to me, is ultimately the most important question to consider in outlining the methodological framework needed to put together efficient language-delivery systems. In this short essay, I will frame the answers to questions (i) and (ii) from the perspective of question (iii): What is the politics of English language—globally and locally—that shapes English Language Teaching (ELT) in India? My approach should be familiar to all those readers who keep track of the current language politics in the state of Karnataka, dragged out for over two decades and still under litigation as of the writing of this piece. That discussion seems to me to be predicated on the competing ideologies—local and global—about the role of the two languages Kannada and English. Following closely the various court verdicts and subsequent appeals, it becomes clear to me that language choice, even in the stable multilingual context of India, is extremely politicized. In the case of Karnataka, language choice is tied closely to the politics of knowledge production, either what counts, what is valued, or what really matters. Is knowledge sacred, and hence only deliverable in Kannada that recalls the Brahmanic-Sanskrit heritage traditions, or is knowledge secular, and hence deliverable in English that links the fate of the learner, potentially, to post-modern traditions and global cultural flows. There are, of course, other socio-cultural and political threads associated with the Karnataka language policy, which I will not be considering in this essay. Instead, I will engage with three constructs of English Language Teaching in India—Pedagogy, Paradigms, and Politics—arguing, tacitly, that the vernacular-standard options should both be feasible and indeed desirable in a teaching curriculum that is inclusive, plural, and heteroglossic.

Appropriate Pedagogy

I will begin by exploring what appropriate pedagogy is. Appropriate to the context of learning? Perhaps. The transformation of English in India—from a colonial idiom to various indigenous forms—was inevitable for it to represent faithfully the ethos of the local cultural context of use, and to enable speakers of English in India to use it as an additional resource for linguistic, sociolinguistic, and literary creativity. So when we talk about 'appropriate pedagogy', we have to start with the assumption that the classroom teaching norm is Indian English. It is the variety of English involved in recording, reflecting, and creating various complexes of socio-cultural nuances indigenous to local, Indian contexts of use. And yet, the picture of English

education is further complicated, as it has created class (as opposed to caste) distinctions in its very distribution; specifically, as Ramanathan (1999) notes,

the Indian middle class, with […] relatively easy access to English [that now] represents an inner circle of power and privilege that for a variety of reasons remain inaccessible to particular groups of people in India … [that are pushed] into outer circle (p. 211).

The logic of Ramanathan's argument is rather straightforward: although English is available to everyone, the linguistic class-hierarchy is maintained through the uneven distribution of different types of Englishes. The middle class has access to "standard" varieties that approximate the global norm, whereas the lower classes speak less prestigious varieties. Agnihotri and Khanna (1995) note this empirical generalization as follows:

The most significant consequence of sustaining English in India has been a major social division between the select elite and the "Englishless" masses. Even within the educated English-knowing group there is a split between those for whom English is the medium of instruction in prestigious public (i.e., private) schools and those who largely study English as a subject in ordinary government schools. The route to power, prestige and riches, even today, lies through English. (p.15)

Given the variation in English language learning outcomes, the question about appropriate pedagogy has to be framed as following: what are the ground realities of English language use? This question has to do with the issue of authenticity. Broadly construed, the issue of authenticity has to do with how the grammar of Indian culture constrains the grammar of English language in India. This question goes beyond the often (re-)cited morphological variability, such as the kind one notices in the pluralization

of mass nouns (e.g., furnitures, softwares, underwears, etc.). Let me illustrate my point about authenticity by discussing, in some detail, the use of tag questions in Indian Englishes where clearly English language use seems to be constrained by the grammar of local culture.

In Standard Indian English (SIE), which is the variety of English in India that is closest in its form to Standard British or American English, tag questions are formed by a rule that inserts a pronominal copy of the subject after an appropriate modal auxiliary. A typical example is given in (1).

(1)   John said he'll work today, didn't he?

Tags have also been analyzed as expressing certain attitudes of the speaker toward what is being said in the main clause, and in terms of speech acts or performatives. Functionally, tags in English behave like epistemic adverbials, such as "probably", "presumably", and so forth, as shown in (2).

(2a)   It's still dark outside, isn't it?

(2b)   It's probably dark outside.

Undifferentiated tag questions, such as in (3a) and (3b), serve as one of the paradigm linguistic exponents of the Indianization of English, i.e. the Vernacular Indian English (Bhatt, 2000).

(3a)   You are going home soon, isn't it?

(3b)   You have taken my book, isn't it?

The undifferentiated tags play an important pragmatic role in the Indian English speech community. In most cases, the meaning of the tag is not the one appended to the meaning of the main proposition; it is usually the tag that

signals important social meaning (Bhatt, 1995). In fact, tags in Vernacular Indian English are a fascinating example of how linguistic form (e.g. of the tag) is constrained by cultural constraints of politeness and are in fact linguistic devices governed by the politeness principle of non-imposition: they serve positive politeness functions (Brown & Levinson, 1987), signalling deference and acquiescence. Notice, for example, the contrast in the tag expressions between Vernacular Indian English in (4) and Standard Indian, British, and American English in (5).

Unassertive and Mitigated *(*Vernacular Indian English*):*

(4a) You said you'll do the job, isn't it?

(4b) They said they will be here, isn't it?

Assertive and Intensified (Standard Indian English):

(5a) You said you'll do the job, didn't you?

(5b)They said they will be here, didn't they?

In contrast to the canonical tag expressions in (5a) and (5b), speakers of Indian Englishes find the undifferentiated tag expressions in (4a) and (4b) as nonimpositional and mitigating, as argued by Bhatt (1995). This claim is more clearly established when an adverb of intensification and assertion is used in conjunction with the undifferentiated tag; the result is predictably, unacceptable (shown as starred sentences, counterparts of 4a and 4b, above) to the speakers of Indian Englishes:

(4a') *Of course you said you'll do the job, isn't it?

(4b') *Of course they said they'll be here, isn't it?

In a culture where verbal behavior is severely constrained to a large extent by politeness regulations, where nonimposition is the essence of polite behaviour, it is not surprising that Vernacular Indian English has replaced Standard Indian English tags with undifferentiated tags. The explanation of this lies in the notion of "grammar of culture" (Bright, 1968; D'souza, 1988). According to Bright and D'souza, global grammatical norms are modified by local cultural conditions, engendering alternate systems of usage.

Undifferentiated tags are not exclusive instances in the grammar of Indian Englishes where one finds the linguistic form constrained by the grammar of culture: another exaample could be the modal auxiliary 'may'. 'May' in Vernacular Indian English is used to express obligation politely; see data in (6a) and (6b), which contrasts systematically with Standard British English (7a) and (7b); data taken from Trudgill & Hannah, 1985, p. 109):

(6) Vernacular Indian English:

(a) This furniture may be removed tomorrow.

(b) These mistakes may please be corrected.

(7) Standard Indian (British) English:

(a) This furniture is to be removed tomorrow.

(b) These mistakes should be corrected.

In sum, the linguistic form of localization appears in the choices offered by the grammar of English language variation in India.

The challenge of ELT practitioners is to acknowledge the empirical realities of English language use in India, and introduce those

linguistic realities into the curriculum. A revised curriculum based on authenticity, a socially realistic paradigm of teaching and learning, will of course, require variation to be an integral part of curriculum design and materials development, teacher training, and assessment models.

ELT Paradigms

A common error in teaching English in India has to do with the outdated models of error analysis. The error in error analysis, as Sridhar (1994) has pointed out, is that the target of English language learning is not Standard British/American English; it is functional competence in English. The 'error' is part of the Standard English Ideology, which implies that clarity and logic (and loyalty) depend on the adoption of a monoglot standard variety in institutional and public discourses. This dominant ideology, as I will discuss in the next section, misrepresents a bid for global hegemony as a benign, indeed altruistic, attempt towards linguistic empowerment for local communities (see Honey, 1997; Quirk, 1996 for examples of such discourse). The uncritical acceptance of native speakers of English as models of second language learning and teaching yields a framework of assumptions where difference is computed as deviance, as errors. A quick sampling of textbooks offered in English teaching markets in India points to this fact, as Chelliah (2001) has ably demonstrated. Here is a list of ELT textbooks she surveyed as part of her research (ibid, 162):

Braganza, Michael. (1998) *Common Errors in English.* New Delhi: Goodwill Publishing House.

Hashem, Abul (n.d.) *Common Errors in English.* New Delhi: Ramesh Publishing House.

Phillips, Sam (n.d.) *Common Mistakes in English.* New Delhi: Goodwill Publishing House.

Prasad, Sidhnath and Thakur, K. P. (1991) *Common Errors in English.* Patna: Bharati Bhawan.

Puri G. K. and Puri, Saroj (1998) *Common Errors in English. For All Competitive Exams.* New Delhi:

Indian Institute of Management Studies Publications.

Sharma, R. N. and Kumar, Mahendra (n.d.) *Common Errors in English.* Agra: M.I. Publications.

Smith-Pearse, T. L. H. (1959) *The English Errors of Indian Students.* Chennai: Oxford University Press. (First published as *English Errors in Indian Schools*, 1934.)

Sood, K. S. and Bright, P. S. (n.d.) *Bright's Handbook of Common Errors in English and How to Avoid Them.* New Delhi: Bright Careers Institute.

Sudha Publications (anonymous) (n.d) *Common Errors in English.* New Delhi: Sudha Publications.

Star Discs (anonymous) (n.d.) *Star Discs: Common Errors in English.* Madurai: Abinaya Publishers.

Vas, Gratian (1994) *The Sterling Book of Common Errors in English.* New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.

The local 'experts', listed above, follow the mainstream ELT experts who assume 'ambilingualism' to be the goal of second language acquisition, 'fossilization' as the ultimate fate of second language learners, and 'interlanguage' as the variety spoken by non-native speakers. These constructs—ambilingualism, interlanguage, and fossilization—provide a habit of thought: soon after being introduced, they are understood as mathematical axioms, above debate. The assumptions shared are not propositions to be defended or attacked and form part of the 'tacit dimension' of scholarly understanding. In reality, however, these assumptions consecrate linguistic and cultural privilege (Kachru, 1986; Sridhar, 1994; Pennycook, 1998; Bhatt, 2002). Even where learners meet the criteria of functional bilingualism, trivial dichotomies such as proficiency/competence, standard/non-standard are created by the ELT professionals and then used as alibis for maintaining linguistic ethnocentrism disguised as concerns over intelligibility among English-using populations. The learners are thus confined to life-long

apprenticeship in the second language, without any hope for socio-linguistic emancipation. This is a rather unfortunate development, especially at a time when we find ourselves in the age of another English renaissance reminiscent of a renaissance attitude that we saw among creative writers such as Raja Rao and Anita Desai, and now in the works of new Indian English writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Firdaus Kanga, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, and Rohinton Mistry. Implicitly and explicitly, the non-native users of English are increasingly challenging the authenticating/ power-structures located in the UK and the USA; the local ELT paradigms have to respond by incorporating local models of English language use in their practice of ELT in the classrooms.

English Language Politics

In the context of varieties of Indian English, the expert discourse is obligated to maintain the native/non-native distinction. The codification of this distinction in standard textbooks universalizes its legitimacy and contributes to the success of the Standard English Ideology. At the same time, this codification excludes the oppositional discourse, the rival forms of thought (Kachru, 1983; Sridhar, 1994; Cook 1999). The reproduction of Standard English Ideology is then managed by continued production of expert pronouncements which further corroborates and consolidates the native/non-native distinction in the field of second language acquisition research. In this section, briefly, I would like to alert the local ELT experts regarding how the politics of knowledge production works, especially in terms of the teaching of English. I will analyse the 'expert' discourse of one of the leading scholars of ELT that we are all familiar with, Randolph Quirk, to show how the

ideological sleight of hand works (see Bhatt, 2002, for a full critique of his work).

Quirk (1990) uses Coppieters' (1987) study, published in the journal *Language*, to validate fossilization and to give flesh and blood to the native/non-native, standard/non-standard, target/ fossilized, etc., distinction. What we find in Quirk's paper is the use of a series of ideological strategies that draw the connection between authority and language use. He begins by using the 'obscuring' strategy, where reality is presented in ways that are convenient for the reproduction of the dominant discourse. He writes thus:

In a range of interesting and sophisticated elicitation tests, the success rate of the non-natives fell not merely *below* but *outside* the range of native success ... (his emphasis) (Coppieters, 1987, p. 6)

The 'interesting' and 'sophisticated' tasks of Coppieters' turn out to be flawed in several respects, as Birdsong's (1992) study, also published in the journal *Language*, has subsequently shown. Birdsong's study replicated Coppieters' study, but his results did not show any significant difference between the performance of native and fluent non-native speakers. Such expert promulgations contribute to 'régimes of truth' and regulatory practices which further obscure the hidden agenda and the systematic distortions necessitated by the dominant 'Standard English' ideology. The valorization of this ideology appears unsuspectingly in different forms of attitudinal internalizations. I will present two sets of attitudes of ELT professionals to illustrate this point. First, Helen Johnson's (1992) paper in the ELT journal entitled, "Defossilizing", which is a critique of communicative approaches in ELT, begins like this (1992, p. 180):

We have all come across them at one time or another. Easily *recognizable* by their inability

to move in any direction except sideways and *by the glazing of their eyes* when you mention the present perfect tense, I am, of course, referring to students *suffering from chronic 'intermediate-itis',* students whose fluent and extensive output consists almost entirely of communication strategies and very little grammar—*the 'fluent-but-fossilized'.* (emphasis added)

She continues further attempting to make a rhetorical case against communicative approaches, but is successful only in demonizing the learner:

> Every method has its *Frankenstein's monsters, grotesque parodies* of whatever it is the teaching has emphasized, and these *tediously inaccurate chatterers* are the *unfortunate creations* of the communicative approach. (emphasis added)

The second set of attitudes is manifest in the following form (Medgyes, 1992, p. 340):

I argue, however, that a *non-native cannot aspire* to acquire a native-speaker's language competence. (emphasis added)

The prominence of native speakers in traditional (ELT) methodologies has not only obscured the distinctive nature of successful second language users, but has also defined the latter, as failed native speakers, by focusing on what they are not (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; Cook, 1999). The standard language ideology requires such internalizations so that the power-structure of English speech community remains intact.

After establishing the acquisitional deficit among learners, the non-native teacher must also be implicated in the reproduction of the deficit discourse so that the key players in learning and teaching—the tutor and the tutee—share equally the native speaker's burden. The evidence of this implication is found in the rhetorical methods employed by Quirk (1990), as seen in the following quote (ibid:8):

No one should underestimate the *problem* of teaching English in such countries as India and Nigeria, where the English of the teachers themselves inevitably bears the stamp of *locally acquired deviations from the standard language.* (emphasis added) (Quirk, 1990, p.8)

The standard language Quirk has in mind is standard British English. While an interesting rhetorical image, Quirk has provided a false description of the fact (see Ferguson, 1982; Sridhar, 1994). The ideological strategy of the demonization of the 'other' glosses over the explicit empirical sociolinguistic realities of the nonnative contexts of acquisition and use (cf. Sridhar, 1994). While he may be correct that the teachers 'bear' a 'stamp', this is, in fact not really a 'problem' at all. On the contrary, only a minority of the 2 per cent of the entire English speaking population in India has a favourable attitude toward Standard (British) English (cf. Kachru, 1997). Several works on the grammar of Indian English, such as those of Kachru (1983), Sridhar (1994), and Bhatt (1995, 2000) complicate the whole conceptualization of the 'problem'. Clearly, the problem is not really a linguistic one, but rather that of vested interests being poached upon. However, the real problem by the 'experts' is disguised, predictably, by denigrating the 'other'.

Conclusions

To conclude, I believe the ELT profession in India needs to move towards reconfiguring our disciplinary discourses, and in so doing we have to consider the following:

- 'Standard language' has to be treated as endonormatively evolving from within each community according to its own histories and cultures of usage. Standards cannot be imposed exonormatively from outside one community.

- Appropriated forms of local English are perhaps not transitory and incomplete 'interlanguages'. If they manifest a stable system over time, with a rule-governed usage in the local community, they have to be treated as legitimate languages. Similarly, fossilization should be reserved for individual manifestations of idiolects of speakers who are new to a language. It should not be used to label sociolects which display collectively accepted norms of usage in a community.

- We have to abandon the use of the label 'non-native speaker' for multilingual subjects from postcolonial contexts. In the case of communities which have appropriated English and localized its usage, the members should be treated as 'native speakers'. We have to explore new terms to classify speakers based purely on relative levels of proficiency, without employing markers of ethnicity, nationality, or race, and overtones of ownership over the language.

- We have to encourage a mutual negotiation of dialectal differences by communities in interpersonal linguistic communication, without judging intelligibility purely according to 'native' speaker norms. Both parties in a communicative situation have to adopt strategies of speech accommodation and negotiation to achieve intelligibility.

The beginnings of such a socially-realistic linguistic framework will find a place in a model of ELT that is based on the assumptions of plurality and multiple standards (Smith & Nelson, 1985; Quirk, 1985; Bhatt, 1995; Canagarajah, 1999). The guiding slogan for ELT should be as follows: local standards for local contexts. The norms for learning and teaching in such a plural model must be endonormative so that the learning content is in communicative and sociolinguistic harmony with the new contexts of use. This pedagogical shift carries the empirical advantage of making the 'available'

Englishes 'accessible' to the potential consumers, thus enabling expressions of local identities in the use of these norms. The creative use of language variation representing plural identities must find a space in the local pedagogical practices in the English teaching curriculum generally, and more specifically in the construction of instructional materials.

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