



Resisting the Hegemony of English in Indian Subcontinent

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The educational language policy of the British *Raj* undervalued the indigenous languages of Indian sub-continent and promoted English to construct ‘a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ (Macaulay, 1972) in the educational system of the sub-continent. This threatened our cultural and linguistic diversities by imposing cultural values and ideologies of the west. The *Raj* educational system constructed a distinct identity of peoples speaking diverse languages of the sub-continent devaluing these languages and promoting the English language. The English language was instrumental for linguistic and cultural assimilation of these people speaking diverse languages against the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the region. The *Raj* succeeded in instilling the western ideology intervening the educational system. Gradually, the peoples of the region have widely adopted the western values and created a gap between the English educated and non-English speaking masses.

Within the theoretical framework of linguistic and cultural hegemony (Woolard, 1985), I argue that the adaption of the English language by the people of the sub-continent was neither random nor accidental but planned and strategic. For the purpose of this study, I define the notion of hegemony as a cultural and intellectual domination in which the dominated people are convinced that they are better off because of the domination than they were before. In the context of this study the dominant group i.e., the *Raj* tends to liquidate or subjugate the dominated groups (i.e.,

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the general mass of the sub-continent). The dominant group achieves this liquidation or subjugation through coercive forces and the dominated groups get consented the existence and practices of coercion. Through coercion and consent, the dominant group establishes superior position over the dominated groups.

Colonial Elitedom

The *Raj* imposed the English language on the people of Indian sub-continent to invade their mental universe. The imposition was deliberate and instrumental to undervalue and destroy the cultural and intellectual practices of indigenous people as manifested in Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education of 1835. Macaulay undervalued the scholarship in the sub-continent, 'a single self of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia and all the historical information which has been collected in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England' (Macaulay, 1972). African scholar Ngugi wa Thiong'o conceptualizes this process of undervaluing peoples' culture to control their wealth as 'colonial elitedom' (Thiong'o, 1986).

'Colonial elitedom' controlled the mental and intellectual perception of people and they consented that their own cultural practices and intellectual horizons were not worth. Gradually, Macaulay's class of 'Indian in blood and English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' dominated the discourse of education, governance and economic aspects of civic life. This class served as the link between the colonial rulers and the ruled, i.e., general public. Because of the proximity with the colonial rulers, this class got ideologically influenced from its rulers. The western education enabled this class to serve in higher government positions during the *Raj*. The western ideology instilled through Macaulay's system of education made them construct a discourse that English education is instrumental for upward social mobility.

This was the unique practice of colonial rulers to control the colonized people. Ngugi wa Thiong'o discusses similar situation in Africa (Thiong'o, 1986). Reflecting his own experience as a boy, Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that colonials control the way the colonized people perceive themselves. When he was a boy he wrote in his mother tongue, Gĩkũyũ, and he was given an ovation. However, later the English regime took over his school and only English was acceptable, not his mother tongue, in his school.

He was not allowed to participate in the language of his people rather he had to behave in English way, the alien customs to him and his friends. Not only that children in Africa cannot graduate from an African university without English, no matter how good they are in African languages and way of life. Ngugi wa Thiong'o describes this situation very abnormal as the people who stripped the resources of his nation were asking him what to do and what not to do in his own country (Thiong'o, 1986).

The story of Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a representative of all colonized people irrespective of Indian sub-continent or Africa. Even after 70 years of political decolonization, students of majority of English medium schools in the sub-continent often get punished or tortured for speaking their mother tongues despite the fact that participating in the social interaction in child's mother tongue is constitutionally ensured in all the countries of the region. This domination of a people's language that began with the educational policy of the *Raj*, whose ultimate objective was to 'dominate the mental universe' (Thiong'o, 1986) of indigenous people, is still in practice through colonial elitedom. This domination of mental universe in its deeper level disables all human consciousness of post-colonial minds and forces them to remain faithful to the colonial ideology. To overcome this domination and lead our life to freedom, only way to resist is to alienate and reject the ideology of a people who abused our belief system, faith and our intellectual practices.

'Colonial elitedom' was the construct since the arrival of Europeans in Indian sub-continent. In the early stage of European colonization, they took over the land through coercive forces i.e., army and soldiers engaging in wars and battles. Once the empires were established, they intervened in the governance and education dismantling the existing system by creating 'colonial elitedom' through clerks and teachers appropriate and faithful to the ideology of colonizers. Although the *Raj* came to an end in 1947 politically, the 'colonial elitedom' perpetuated the colonial ideology by restricting the indigenous knowledge system in our educational system and social life.

The strategic plan for the perpetuation of western ideology through 'colonial elitedom' was the intervention into the educational system of colonized people. In the context of Indian sub-continent the education system that Macaulay's Minute established in the *Raj* imposed alien way of knowing to the general public of the sub-continent detaching them from their histories, cultures and needs (Rodney, 2018). This

detachment ontologically deformed perception of self of indigenous identity further accelerating process of dehumanizing exploitation. The exploitation of mental universe of indigenous community did not come to an end with the political decolonization in 1947, but the ‘colonial elitedom’ continued it further.

The ‘colonial elitedom’ produced ‘organic intellectuals’ (Gramsci, 1971), to borrow a term from Gramsci. In the context of the present study, ‘organic intellectuals’ is a similar concept that Macaulay proposed to create a class of western educated Indians. Gramsci’s concept of organic intellectuals includes members of civil society representing teachers, professors, managers, bureaucrats, etc. These intellectuals inherited the *Raj* ideology that Macaulay’s class established and strengthened during the *Raj*. These intellectuals further extended the *Raj* ideology and created a false consciousness of superiority of western cultural values over the indigenous ones. This discourse of false consciousness convinced the ordinary people of the sub-continent with the hegemonic ideology of western values. An attachment of organic intellectuals to the hegemonic ideology benefitted them with higher social status and additional economic security. The organic intellectuals i.e., professors, social leaders and activists continued instilling the values of the *Raj* on students and general public granting superior status to these values over indigenous value systems. Finally the discourse of the superiority of the values of the *Raj* became dominant and the discourse of locals subjugated.

Constructing Cultural Hybridity

In the previous section, I explored how the hegemonic values of the *Raj* were established during the *Raj* intervening educational system and perpetuated these values after decolonization in 1947 through ‘colonial elitedom’. In this section, taking the notion of Bhabha’s cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), I explore how these hegemonic values interacted with the indigenous value system. Hybridity represents a third space between the organic intellectuals and general people who do not have exposure to western education system and suffered economic and social marginalization. The third space incorporates the shared cultural values acquired over generations. In the context of Indian sub-continent, organic intellectuals’ inheritance of western values through the prolonged interaction with their colonial masters and strategic legitimization of these values instilling in the general public.

What the organic intellectuals inherited from their colonial masters, they transferred these values to the next generations by intervening in the educational system. I still remember the content of my English curriculum in my school days in late 1970s. In our textbook, we used to have a picture of a man dressed in western attire for a 'gentleman' and a 'lady' with a picture of a woman dressed in western style. I used to search for such a 'gentleman' and a 'lady' as the picture in my textbook at home, in my neighborhood but found none. Further, the 'gentleman' and the 'lady' in my textbook were different in terms of professions from my parents or people of my neighborhood. My father was a farmer and I never saw him in a tie and coat and I never saw my mother in a skirt as shown in the picture of a lady in my textbook. My child psyche began to understand that my rustic father and mother are not eligible to be a 'gentleman' and a 'lady'. I began to long for a 'gentleman' as described in my textbook and gradually I began to search for the superior being like the gentleman of my textbook.

As I grew up and promoted to higher classes, I was introduced more pictures and texts. I still remember that every year on my birthday my mother used to give a bath early morning and take me to the village temple. We used to return home with the *tika* on my forehead and I used to share the delicacies that my mother prepared with my friends. In my textbooks I read celebrating birthday with a cake and lighting candles and putting them off but I never read the practices of celebrating someone's birthday the way my mother had a practice of celebrating my birthday.

The contents—pictures and reading texts—of the textbooks put me in a cultural space, different from value system of cultural practices that I used to encounter in my community. In the educational setting, my cultural capital got merged with the content of the curriculum creating a third space in my classroom (Maniotes, 2005). These values that I inculcated through iterative processes of classroom interactions gradually distanced me from the cultural value systems of my cultural practices forcing me to accept the cultural space of hybridity.

This sort of shift from indigenous cultural value system to the third space of cultural hybridity leads to the state of hegemony of hegemony (Day, 2005). My experience described in the foregoing paragraphs represents the hegemonization of cultural practices that organic intellectuals controlled the public spaces and

manipulated social organizations to fit in their ideology. In the context of the present study, the social organizations include local universities, judicial systems, government machinery, etc. By controlling and manipulating the functioning the policies of governance, particularly the educational ones, the organic intellectuals i.e., professors, bureaucrats and the professionals from governmental and non-governmental organizations, serve as agents to create a class of local elites to further manipulate the ideologies of general public.

One of the manipulative strategies of constructing cultural hybridity is bringing the native variety of the English language to our classrooms. The organic intellectuals frame the curriculum and decide the contents to be included in the curricula that meet the goals of curriculum designers. The teachers function as the active agents to achieve the educational objectives of curricula as envisioned by the designers, one of the sections of the organic intellectuals. Teachers, both from schools and universities, are left without choice to reproduce the texts assigned by the curricula to their students. For example, in majority of departments of English in the universities of the sub-continent, a rigorous emphasis is given in practicing British Received Pronunciation or Standard American English. However, the situation is that neither the teachers nor their students speak these varieties of English. After the graduation of the program, the students never encounter these varieties of English in their work life.

My own experience is the representative of majority of the people of the sub-continent. In early 1990s, my professor at the Department of English at Manipur University used to take us to the language lab, a sound proof room equipped with audio cassettes recordings, particularly of British and American politicians, scientists, professors and celebrities. We were asked to listen to these audio recordings carefully and record our own speaking following the accent of the native speakers. The professor evaluated our recordings and graded us. This was the academic part of the issue, however, it has other social concerns as well. We all developed a different accent from our other friends of other departments with whom we shared the public life. Most of our friends felt that we were pretending to be different from them and we often felt very awkward situations. As soon as we recorded for the grades, we came back to common accent of Indian English because we did not have to encounter with the people speaking with the accent of RP variety of English.

Such a practice of giving priority to the content that is not appropriate to the social practices of the learners' community devalues the social practices of the community in which students grow. In the Department of English at Manipur University we were motivated to learn the accent of native speakers. This motivation was guided by the general perception of being educated. In Indian sub-continent, the native like accent is equated with the high quality of education. If one speaks English with the accent of Indian regionalism, he/she is considered to have attended a sub-standard rural school, hence, lower quality of education. Therefore, being in the university, especially in the department of English, is a matter of prestige if we graduate with the English accent of Indian regionalism. However, we all students we spent hours in the language lab listening to the recordings and rigorous teaching of our professor did not bring much fruit. Today after 30 years, my training in British accent did not make me different from my colleagues those who did not have that training. We, both students and the professor, endeavored something not achievable and useful.

I take prescribing native variety of English in teaching English pronunciation at the Department of English in Manipur University to be an example of hegemony, a state of superiority over the pronunciation system of English spoken in the sub-continent. As English spoken in the sub-continent is not yet recognized as standard variety of English, our curricula rarely consider the inclusion of teaching English pronunciation as spoken in the sub-continent. Giving priority to native variety over English spoken in the sub-continent limits us with the ownership to English and continues our colonial legacy of master and slave dichotomy. Attempting to speak the language of master and not able to do so puts us in the similar relationship of Crusoe and Friday or Prospero and Caliban i.e., continuation of colonial legacy. In our educational system, we, university teachers, still do not have a choice of teaching the contents that we like to teach and we think our students need but to teach the prescribed texts. Bourdieu (1986, as cited in Philipson, 2014) argues that academics have three choices: performing the duty as commissioned by authorities or remaining mysteriously hidden from all practicalities of real world or maintaining academic freedom and autonomy addressing social issues effectively. In today's context, majority of university teachers fall under the first and the second categories. How many of us have the academic freedom?

Let's take a journal article written by a scholar from the sub-continent on social or educational issues of the region; we find the majority of the references cited are from

Western Europe or North America. We, university teachers, reproduce the theories from the West in our classrooms but we rarely ask ourselves the relevance of these theories to our issues that we are facing. Our scholars never contemplated on our actual needs for research and we never attempt to theorize our issues. This is simply because we, all teaching in universities of the sub-continent belong to Macaulay's 'class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'. The *Raj* indirectly imposed its language, culture and ideology that sustained the hegemony till today. For scholars like Fanon (1967), speaking a language means to assume the culture of its speakers and support the weight of the civilization of its speaker; it is just not putting sounds and words in the morphological and syntactic structures of that language. Fernando (1986) fears that the people of South East Asia would develop the Western habits of thinking infused through the English language. What Pattanayak wrote on English and educational policy in India 50 years ago is still relevant today. Pattanayak (1969) argued that the language planners, in spite of multilingual and multicultural diversity of Indian society, opted for the reduction of variation, arguing for the neutral position of English, creating confrontation among speakers speaking different languages. English in Indian education perpetuates intellectual aristocracy as it is geared to acquire position, wealth and power.

Today in the sub-continent, English is the language of all intellectual discourse. English always got favor from all sections of civic society. For example, speaking in the constituent assembly in 1949, T. T. Krishnamachari opposed the status of Hindi as official language of Indian federal. He called it 'Hindi imperialism' (Guha, 2004). The framers of the constitution of India defined English as a neutral language as opposed to Hindi belonging to north Indians. In post independent period, there were linguistic riots in non-Hindi speaking states, particularly in Tamil Nadu and Bengal. These riots gave a superior and legitimate status to English. The pressure of technology and globalization projected English as 21st century 'basic skill'. One of the reasons for such a great popularity of English is the discourse of neutrality. However, the truth is no language remains culturally neutral from the national cultures. Discourse of this kind elides the impact of English in the cultural space of Indian society, particularly of indigenous communities. In this way English was imposed on the indigenous communities of the region as if no other languages existed i.e., *lingua nullius*.

Imposition of master's language invades our mental universe and it determines the way we think i.e., linguistic determinism (Whorf, 1956).

Resisting the Cultural Hegemony

English has been in the sub-continent for more than four hundred years now. In these four hundred years English enjoyed a very special status by influencing the cultural, linguistic and intellectual practices of the sub-continent. Initially, because of the language of rulers, English displaced the indigenous languages in the discourse of intellectual practices in academia, governance and trade. The interaction of English with indigenous languages led the English language itself to develop a distinct variety to be used in the sub-continent. However, in the present context, for the people of South Asia, English is the choice to remember the narratives of the colonial legacy, the charm of the language, the power of narratives, not simply a construct of domination and hegemony (Gupto, 2022).

Today, the English language is not a single entity but we talk of Englishes, spoken in different parts of the world, as an additional language to their mother tongues. Today the number of speakers of English as an additional language is far more than the English language spoken by the native speakers. These non-native varieties of English have been culturally nativized (Schneider, 2007) in the new cultural contexts. Indian English, a conglomeration of regional varieties, embeds the local cultures to give expression to the experiences of local communities. Distinct from the native varieties of English in terms of phonological, morphological and syntactic patterns, these varieties link the multicultural contexts in diverse linguistic and cultural space.

These local varieties of English are more distinctly different from native ones in terms of phonological than in morphological and syntactic features. Unlike in the past, the linguistic corpus of a language or its variety is not limited to written form but easy access of technology enabled us to document the spoken forms in the form of films, speeches on Youtube, Blogs, etc. Exploiting these resources could be valuable resources for making use in intellectual discourse. One of the urgent need of today is to bring these resources to our classrooms.

Bringing the local/national varieties of English to our classrooms has several advantages to teachers and students as well. Inclusion of national varieties of English in the curriculum gives the feeling of ownership to our students as we are not

imposing the alien culture through the native varieties in the name of authentic teaching materials (Poudel, 2021). Our students study the contents that they are already familiar with the cultural practices of their communities. This practice resists the cultural hegemony of western culture and encourages learning about their own religious beliefs, their way of life and environment. By minimizing the inequalities imposed by the superiority of native varieties, our students learn English in the same way as an Assamese student learns Bangla or Meithei.

One of the most important advantages of bringing national varieties of English to our classroom is to prepare our students to resist the colonial orthodoxy as envisioned by Macaulay's Minute of 1835. Teaching native variety of English excludes our students from the process of learning about their own self. In the name of authenticity of the teaching materials, the framers of the curriculum tend to include the texts from the native writers detaching the learners from their cultural beliefs from very early age (Canagarajah, 1999). Instead, bringing the texts from learners' environment that discuss the belief systems and cultural practices of learners' community, he/she finds himself/herself familiar with the text and learning the language gets facilitated. Integrating the texts that reflect the belief system and cultural practices embedded in learners' community enables the learners to think superiority of his/her cultural practices and reflect on the glorious past of his/her community. Going the other way round i.e., insistence on the integration of foreign materials in the curriculum excludes the child from his/her self and prepares for the process of othering. Gradually the child conceives the idea that the belief systems and cultural practices of his community are wrong, terrible and dangerous.

Conclusion

Integrating the content from the national variety of English equips the learners with their needs. In classroom interaction they discuss these issues with the peers and teachers enhancing their critical thinking. Such interactions in learners' variety discussing the issues that they experience give a special space to their voices. These voices construct their identities representing the values of belief systems and cultural practices of semiotic system of their communities. This sort of change celebrates the local knowledge. In this study, local knowledge simply does not represent the accumulation of beliefs and practices of the past but a process of understanding these beliefs and practices from the perspectives of the members of the community

respecting the survival practices of the community. Academic engagement in local knowledge creates a discourse of local intellectuals generating new knowledge in the history and social practices of indigenous communities. This newly generated knowledge resist the hegemony of dominant discourse and shapes indigenous intellectual practice to interpret their own knowledge system (Day, 2005).

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