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Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching
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INTRODUCTION

Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching was written by A. Suresh Canagarajah, who comes from the Tamil-speaking northern region of Sri Lanka. In his book, he explores the post-colonial status of English beyond the stereotypical positions and reflects on the different interests and motivations of language learners with a specific focus on linguistic conflicts in community and classroom contexts. He also explores 'the challenges and possibilities facing ELT in the context of the relationships between the center and the periphery'. The main questions in his book, as indicated by Canagarajah, are:

- What discourses do local students and teachers confront in teaching materials produced by center agencies?
- Which discourses inform the teaching methods promoted by the mainstream professional circles?
- How do teachers and students negotiate the challenges posed to their identity, community membership, and values, by the vernacular and English?
- What assumptions motivate the dominant pedagogical approaches   for developing literacy skills in English?

Throughout the book, the terms *Critical Pedagogy, the Center*, *the Periphery* and *Hidden Agenda* are used. It would be best, first of all, to explain them briefly:

Critical pedagogy can be defined as a teaching approach which attempts to help students question and challenge the beliefs and practices that dominate. Shor (1992) defines critical pedagogy as

> Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (p. 129)

The Center refers to "technologically-advanced communities where English is the primary language." This term can also be used synonymously

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with 'Inner Circle', from Kachru (1986). *The Periphery* refers to communities where English is "of post-colonial currency such as Barbados and India". (Canagarajah, p. 4) Canagarajah states that he uses the term 'periphery' to accommodate Kachru's discussions on 'Outer Circle' – the countries that have been affected by the spread of English, often as colonies, and on 'Expanding Circle' - countries where English is accepted as the international language of communication and taught as a foreign language.

Hidden Agenda refers to the
Way that language, with its open, dynamic and fluid nature, is manipulated for political and ideological agendas, turning it into a closed, fixed, stagnated, pure, hegemonic, standard and oppressive system. This phenomenon is not known to the public … The term … also refers to affecting and perpetuating language politics through a variety of mechanisms … It is the effect of a mechanism such as a street sign or language test that delivers a direct message as to the real language policy, beyond declared statements (Shohamy, 2006, p. Xviii).

Resisting Linguistic Imperialism consists of eight chapters. In chapter 1, *Adopting a critical perspective on pedagogy*, the author provides the readers with a theoretical overview of critical pedagogy and pedagogy of the mainstream with a discussion on the differences and challenges lead by each. Chapter 2, *Challenges in researching resistance*, is devoted to a discussion of critical approaches to ELT in the periphery and the importance of context and critical ethnography in research. In chapter 3, *Resistance to English in historical perspective*, a historical account is given about the imposition of English for political and material reasons, resistance to it, and appropriation of English. In chapter 4, *Conflicting curricula: interrogation student opposition*, policy and practice pertaining to the ELT curriculum in periphery classrooms are discussed with reference to linguistic skills, competence, communicative situations, teaching material, and the social content informing the lessons. In chapter 5, *Competing pedagogies: understanding teacher opposition*, teachers' resistance to English is explained with emphasis on the inconsistencies between their teaching philosophies and their classroom implementation. In chapter 6, *Clashing codes: negotiating classroom interaction*, the author argues that the use of LI in English classes enhances the acquisition of L2. Chapter 7, *Contrasting literacies: appropriating academic texts*, deals with three case studies of graduate students who face the challenges of conflicting academic writing discourse traditions. In the last chapter, *The politics and pedagogy of appropriating discourses*, the ideological complexity of communicative and learning strategies is discussed and the author concludes his discussion by offering solutions to linguistic imperialism in periphery settings such as teaching other varieties/dialects and the use of LI in class to enhance L2.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE BOOK
In chapter 1, the author provides us with an account of a typical class

day in Sri Lanka where the teacher starts her lesson with a text which is about a student's life in Britain. The atmosphere of the class is rather distracting due to the civil war at that time. The teacher seems to ignore the environment the students live in and tries to involve the students in the activities knowingly or not following an explicit curriculum of grammar and communication skills. The teacher is, in a way, teaching the values and ideologies presented in the activities and reading materials. Later, the author links these conflicts to the discussion of pedagogical practices: Critical pedagogy and the pedagogy of the mainstream. The author compares these two choices in pedagogical orientation as:

- Learning as a detached cognitive activity vs. learning as personal
- Learning as transcendental vs. learning as situated
- Learning processes as universal vs. learning as cultural
- Knowledge as value-free vs. knowledge as ideological
- Knowledge as reconstructed vs. knowledge as negotiated
- Learning as instrumental vs. learning as political.

Pedagogy of the mainstream is defined as representing traditional teaching approaches whereas critical pedagogy is defined as personal and situated. The author argues strongly for critical pedagogy throughout the book. The author also discusses the competing models of critical pedagogy with reference to reproduction and resistance theories. The reproduction model is defined as the deterministic brands of structuralist and Marxist thinking trying to explain how students are conditioned mentally and behaviorally by the practices of schooling to serve the dominant while the resistance model tries to explain how there are sufficient contradictions within institutions to help subjects conduct critical thinking and initiate change.

In Chapter 2, two critical approaches to ELT in the periphery are discussed: Phillipson's Linguistic Imperialism (1992) and Holliday's approach. According to Canagarajah, Phillipson's frame of analysis is linguicism, which is defined as

> ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language. (Canagarajah, 1999: 47)

Phillipson also defines English linguistic imperialism as a specific type of linguicism whereby

> the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. (Phillipson, 1992:47)

Canagarajah claims that Phillipson does not take 'classroom' into consideration due to his macro-societal perspective, and the determinism and impersonality of his analytical models; however, the author considers

Holliday's approach, which explores the cultural conflicts that result from center-sponsored ELT pedagogy in the periphery, as corrective to Phillipson's approach since Holliday has a micro-level perspective emerging from instructional practices.

In chapter 3, Canagarajah provides us with a historical account of the imposition of English for political and material reasons, the resistance (resisting the reproductive functions - serving the dominant), and appropriation of English (appropriating the methods, content and materials to local conditions). While doing this, he cites Pennycook's book, Cultural Politics of English as an International Language, as "exceptional in grappling with the paradoxes and ironies in the status and functions of English in the periphery". Canagarajah also adds that Pennycook fails to explicate the complex sources of resistance in every day life.

In chapter 4, Canagarajah discusses policy and practice related to the ELT curriculum in periphery classrooms. He views classroom culture as a site where different groups have different agendas which are played out, negotiated and contested, and provides the reader with the attitudes of the Ski Lankan government towards ELT. While discussing classroom atmosphere and the facilities that are available to teachers, he states that "added to this is the inability of periphery teachers to readily print or photocopy their own material for classes. Due to limitations in time, funds, stationery, and printing facilities, teachers find it difficult to produce teaching material for the very language classes they teach. These practical difficulties drive teachers to an attitude of dependence on the prepackaged, ready-to-use material freely provided by the Western cultural agencies". He links the use of culturally inappropriate materials to the practical reasons and says that teachers continue to use these materials due to their having no alternatives for core texts. He also focuses on a course employing American Kernel Lessons: Intermediate, which, he says, includes situations which are very different from and alien to what the local students have or will have in their everyday life. He criticizes these materials since local students may feel alienated by such a curriculum in that it has little or no relevance to them, while others may be attracted by images of the lifestyle that is presented to them. Furthermore, Canagarajah puts forward that students are not indifferent to the ideological domination by the central curriculum and materials and they generate various ways of opposing and appropriating them such as glosses and visual symbols. Canagarajah says that he is benefiting from a critical ethnography while presenting us with examples from an ELT context (the Tamil community): "An ethnographic orientation will enable us to penetrate beneath the surface activities to discern the hidden agendas, interests, and values that shape ELT in the periphery" (p. 79). The problem here might be that the author is talking about a specific context, which is the Tamil community, rather than all periphery contexts. This may affect the validity of this critical ethnography. The question to ask is "whether we can generalize his results to other

periphery contexts, classrooms or countries". If each country has its own history and policy, what about the other contexts in which there is no 'clear' opposition or resistance? What about the classrooms in Turkey, for example? Can we apply the same results to our context?

Chapter 5 is devoted to the discussion of teacher opposition with specific reference to the inconsistencies between teaching philosophies and classroom implementation. He claims that methods are not value-free instruments and they are ideological regarding assumptions about social relations and cultural values. He provides an account of the classroom practices that two teachers are utilizing. Two confronting ideas are represented by these two teachers: "New methods are constructed with Western students in mind. Because our culture is different, they are irrelevant to our concerns" and "Adopting the new method". The author suggests here that educators appropriate the methods taking institutional, material, and cultural methods into consideration and empower periphery teachers with creative and critical instructional practices.

In chapter 6, the author comments on the insistence of English in the classroom. He is skeptical about the assumption that English should be the only medium for instruction in language classrooms and that teachers and students should be encouraged to avoid the use of L1. He refers to Cummin's linguistics interdependence principle which explains that proficiency in L1 can enhance competence in L2, activating a common proficiency that enables cognitive/academic and literacy-related skills to transfer across languages. He also states that according to research findings, one of the best predictors of second language proficiency is proficiency in the mother tongue. He is of the opinion that considering L1 to be detrimental to L2 means that local teachers are under the influence of center pedagogical thinking. Providing examples from the Tamil classes, he concludes that the use of LI, code-switching, and code alternation helps the teachers and students to manage their classroom interactions efficiently.

In chapter 7, the author discusses academic writing, considering three graduate students who are writing their theses. He states that language learners have to acquire the preferred values, discourse conventions, and knowledge content of the academy as well as certain linguistic skills. He focuses on the conflict that students face, and the pressure or temptation to adopt academic discourses having power and prestige. He talks about the form-focused, writer-focused, content-focused, and reader-focus approaches and stresses that these approaches do not incorporate different local contexts having many social, cultural, cognitive and affective variables. He suggests that students should attain enough critical awareness and independence to use these conflicts for their own advantage in order to avoid impairing their own communication.

Chapter 8 is devoted to suggestions on the politics and pedagogy of appropriating discourses. Canagarajah talks about teaching different variants

to students to "flatten the status of traditional standard dialects". He also talks about activities that can be used by the periphery teachers: "Small group discussions, peer reviews/interactions, collaborative writing, and paired assignments are simple ways in which students can be provided scope for experimentation and independence. Collaborative projects, guided fieldwork, and research activities (in libraries, dormitories, or off campus) enable students to construct safe houses outside classrooms". He also suggests ways to benefit from LI to assist the learning process:

- Setting up small groups for tasks and discussion with students from similar language groups
- Pairing more proficient students with less proficient students of the same language group
- Encouraging the use of bilingual dictionaries and provision of native language reference books
- Maintaining journals

Regarding the conception of linguistic systematization and the status of traditional standard dialects, Canagarajah says that

> My position, then, is that while we must recognize the contextual appropriacy of different Englishes and teach students as many variants as possible (including more formal, public, and institutionalized variants - some of which are presently 'owned' by the center-based communities), it is equally important to teach students that any dialect has to be personally and communally appropriated to varying degrees in order to be meaningful and relevant for its users. This would lead to the pluralization of standards and democratization of access to English. (Canagarajah, 1999: 181)

In my opinion, what Canagarajah says here does not seem to be feasible. That is, teaching our students as many variants as possible. We can help our students to be aware of other variants and appreciate that each dialect is personal and appropriate for its users, but when it comes to teaching these variants, more questions appear such as: Where can we find teachers of these variants? (Can we expect our language teachers to be knowledgeable of other variants?) Which variants are we going to focus on? What about the teaching materials for these variants? In a review at *amazon.com,* Gilmour (2005) states that "Additionally, the author assumes that it is the responsibility of those same Western (or "Center") curricula designers to accommodate the needs of Periphery English as a Foreign Language learning communities when constructing their materials. It is the responsibility of the Periphery to create Periphery-relevant curricula and materials." As Gilmour states, Canagarajah would like to see Periphery scholars (and why not teachers?) to create Periphery-relevant materials; but he does not provide anything practical or his own periphery-relevant materials.

Canagarajah also talks about the difficulties that teachers are having in the periphery context:

> Added to this is the inability of periphery teachers to readily print or photocopy their own material for classes. Due to limitations in time, funds, stationery, and printing facilities, teachers find it difficult to produce teaching material for the very language classes they teach. These practical difficulties drive teachers to an attitude of dependence on the prepackaged, ready-to-use material freely provided by the Western cultural agencies. (Canagarajah, 1992: 84)

However, in this chapter, the author offers some solutions regarding developing 'safe houses' for language learners:

> Small group discussions, peer reviews/interactions, collaborative writing, and paired assignments are simple ways in which students can be provided scope for experimentation and independence. Collaborative projects, guided fieldwork, and research activities (in libraries, dormitories, or off campus) enable students to construct safe houses outside classrooms. (Canagarajah, 1992: 192)

If teachers lack even copying facilities in this context and are limited in time and money, how are they going to apply the strategies/activities that are suggested by the author? How can we expect students to benefit from projects and research activities when the teachers do not have the basic material preparation facilities?

Despite these comments and criticisms, the book provides an invaluable insight into students' and teachers' reactions to English, their views on the materials and methods proposed by the 'Center', the challenges posed to their identity and values, and means to handle these issues.

CONCLUSION

Resisting Linguistic Imperialism does contribute to foreign language teaching and especially ELT methodology and language planning, in that it makes language teachers, who generally accept whatever is provided/given by the pedagogy of the mainstream and authorities in the inner circle, be aware of the ignorance of the political aspects of the profession and the hidden agenda of the materials, activities and the strategies they are using.

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