Tema

ELT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS

Eine grosse pädagogische und politische Herausforderung besteht darin, sicherzustellen, dass die Rechte aller Schulkinder respektiert werden und die kulturellen, sprachlichen und wirtschaftlichen Ressourcen eine Nation maximiert werden. Dies ist heute in Indien umso relevanter, da trotz unseres Anspruchs auf Mehrsprachigkeit und Erhalt der Sprachen viele Sprachen in Gefahr oder sogar verschwunden sind – wobei der Verlust einer Sprache gleichbedeutend ist mit dem Verlust einer ganzen Kultur. Wünschenswert ist im schulischen Kontext eine engere Verbindung der Heimatsprachen mit der Schulsprache, um so mehr Sprachen im Unterricht zu berücksichtigen und zu fördern. Dabei soll Englisch nicht für eine 'westliche Perspektive' stehen, sondern den lokalen Kontext widerspiegeln.

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Context

Social justice in education is both a process and a goal which cannot be achieved unless there is equal participation of all groups in society. In the Indian context, multilinguality and diverse socio-economic contexts are realities that any English language classroom needs to accommodate to foster and maintain inclusion and consequently social justice. India has witnessed the suppression of many 'tongues' owing to colonial attitudes to education. Regional and indigenous languages were shunned in favour of the international lingua franca i.e. English. In fact, during the modern period most nations strove to become monolingual while regional or native languages were marginalized and neglected. Furthermore, the pervasiveness of monolingual instructional practices precipitated loss of many subcultures. Nested within this was the now demonized grammar/translation method (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 105) which aimed at bringing students' L1 into the classroom as a footstool to the L2. Till date, foreign language education skews away from modeling instruction after the organic, dynamic mix of languages that characterizes multilingual speakers since it "traces the language practices of a monolingual individual, simply by multiplying them by two," and fails to portray "the communicative complexity of the 21st century," within which "the concept of a first and a second language has also begun to unravel" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009, pp. 142-143).

It is in this context that educational policies play an important role in creating public awareness and consensus about the approach that English does not stand alone and needs to find its place among other Indian languages. In the following sections I will discuss how aspirational demands from stakeholders (parents and communities) and questions of upward mobility can be met while catering to diverse social structures. This will be done via a framework of policy analysis followed by discussion of primary research findings. The effectiveness of translanguaging as a pedagogical process to bolster social justice will also be examined.

Language Education Policies in India and the demands of the polity

With shrinking distances and opening up of global economies, there has been a consistent demand and political pressure to open English medium schools in India. English is undeniably seen as a language of mobility and upward movement. While newly independent India progressed under the shadow of a colonial hangover, postcolonial commentary and movements for social development reintroduced the importance of local language and expression. Communication for change initiatives often required policy makers, communication specialists, and non-governmental actors to tap into the diverse linguistic and social traditions of the country. For a country with over 19,500 dialects the promotion of English at the cost of other languages was deemed counterintuitive. The 21st century's clarion call for economic progress and social change also meant that classrooms had to become more representative and teachers/educators had to become more cognisant of the diverse contexts and needs of their learners. The national agenda of optimising national resources meant that cultural and linguistic assets were also revitalised. Rights of communities could be realised through education and this is where language-educators began to play a crucial and demanding role.

The education policy of 1968 examined the proposal of development of languages in the light of safeguarding regional and indigenous languages. The document states, "…the energetic development of Indian Languages and literature is a sine qua non for educational and cultural development. Unless this is done, the creative energies of the people will not be released, standards of education will not improve, knowledge will not spread to the people and the gulf between the intelligentsia and masses will remain if not widen further." (National Policy on Education, 1968, p. 3) This is followed by a directive that just as regional languages function as the media of education in school education, so should be the case at the collegiate and university levels. The 1968 policy also takes cognizance of the importance of learning English in a globalizing world. "World knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology. India must not only keep up this growth but should also make her own significant contribution to it. For this purpose, study of English deserves to be specially strengthened." (ibid.:4)

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To address these needs, the 1968 policy recommended the *Three-Language Formula* wherein ELT was aligned with teaching of Indian languages. Students would learn English as well as two other languages (regional and mother tongue or regional and foreign/non-English like French, German, etc.). While this seemed good on paper, the formula soon ran into practical issues such as lack of teacher preparedness and proficiency in all chosen languages. In some cases where students opted for indigenous languages no teachers could be found! The three-language formula was a strategy to promote multilingualism and national harmony but could not be followed both in letter and spirit. Interim policies like the National Policy on Education of 1986 had also reiterated the need to provide language education in local tongues. "The Constitution of India recognizes, in respect of linguistic minorities, the desirability of providing instruction through the mother tongue for the first five years of education (Article 350-A). Every effort is, therefore, required to implement this obligation, although a number of difficulties are likely to be encountered - administrative and financial feasibility of providing instructional facilities through a variety of mother tongues, difficulty to use some tribal languages as media of education etc. in the context of these difficulties, switch over to a modern Indian/regional language has to be ensured as early as possible. (National Policy on Education, 1986, p. 94)

The Programme of Action (1992) elaborated upon this focus by emphasizing relevance, flexibility and quality. According to article 350A of our Constitution, "it shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the

primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups" (National Curriculum Framework, 2005: 37). The 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution uses the general designation – 'Languages'. The fact that its number has grown from 14 to 22 in about fifty years bears testimony to its open nature. It appears that any language spoken in this country could legitimately be a part of the 8th Schedule and has to be the medium of instruction in that region. It is the provision under article 350A that has enabled the number to grow to the current figure of 47. In many cases the script may be common (like Hindi, Haryanvi, Rajasthani are written in the Devanagiri script) but the expression and grammar are unique. The Constitution of India viewed linguistic diversity as a reflection of the 'composite nature' of Indian culture and of its pluralism. Keeping the multilingual situation in view, Hindi was not declared as a national language but as an official language with the idea that it will be further enriched by other Indian languages and vice-versa; English was designated an associate official language because it was a window to the world.

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As a result, the National Curriculum Framework 2005 called for a renewed effort to implement the three-language formula, emphasizing the recognition of children's home language(s) or mother tongue(s) including indigenous languages. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also states, "teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching-learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction. All languages will be taught with high quality to all students; a language does not need to be the medium of instruction for it to be taught and learned well. (NEP, 2020: 4.11) However, implementation continues to be a thorny issue.

Multilingualism as a resource for social justice

The National Focus Group on Teaching of Indian Languages 2006 observed that merely 47 languages are used as the medium of instruction in India at the time despite claims to multilingualism and maintenance. According to the 2001 Language Census, "the 6,661 raw returns [of mother tongues] were subjected to thorough linguistic scrutiny, edit and rationalization. This resulted in 1635 rationalized mother tongues and 1957 names which were treated as 'unclassified' and relegated to 'other' mother tongue category. The 1635 rationalized mother tongues were further classified following the usual linguistic methods for rational grouping based on available linguistic information. Thus, an inventory of classified mother tongues returned by 10,000 or more speakers are grouped under appropriate languages at the all- India level, wherever possible, has been prepared for final presentation of the 2001 mother tongue data. The total number of languages arrived at is 122." (Census of India, 2001) In spite of this enormous diversity, several linguistic and cultural elements bind India into one linguistic and sociolinguistic area. Indeed, very often genetically unrelated and geographically separated languages share a common grammar of culture articulated through language.

Our education system has not been able to take advantage of grassroots multilingualism i.e. to be able to use the indigenous languages as the medium of instruction and bring in the context and experiences of the learners as part of the schooling. Children from indigenous communities often face difficulties as they have to start schooling in the dominant language of the region. Speakers of variants of a major language also do not find representation in the classroom. There are also regions like the North-East of India where the State has had to adopt English as the language of instruction in the absence of a regional language. This is because the many indigenous tribes have their own languages but no script. The loss of a language is equivalent to the loss of an entire culture in itself. For example, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands off mainland India are home to speakers of near extinct Great Andamanese languages. Among these the last speaker of

the Bo tribe, a woman named Boa died in 2010. So, even though the language has been archived by way of interviews with her none speaks the original language. Researchers have shown that we need to understand the potential of multilingualism in an English classroom by building on the ways that local communities use multilingualism to address power relationships inherent in local-global configurations. Krashen (1985) observes that "the use of languages in the classroom can be done in such a way language, using the first language to provide background information [...] the mother tongue need not be an interloper but a resource" (21). The Position Paper on Teaching of Indian Languages (2006) states that languages, in fact, flourish in each other's company and inclusion in an ELT classroom can provide impetus to endangered speech communities to consciously strive toward maintaining and advocating for their linguistic heritage. Minor, minority, and indigenous languages can be accorded due space when, "...the aim of English language teaching is the creation of multilinguals who can enrich all our languages" (NCF, 2005, p. 39)

The pedagogical shift toward multilingualism as a resource also emerges from the empathic understanding that, "English language does not stand alone and needs to find its place along with other Indian languages. Every possible effort should be made to build bridges between the languages of home, peer group and neighborhood languages on the one hand and school on the other" (National Focus Group on Teaching of English, 2005, p. 3). Therefore, English is not to be contextualized in a Western ambience but is to be taught through a contextually-rich, local perspective.

Multilingualism mandates that ELT caters to students from diverse social structures by creating space for the coexistence of languages. Classrooms are microcosms of larger social structures and ensure greater participation for minority voices and cultures helps pave the way for social justice. The primary goals of ELT are that learners are able to use language for meaningful communication and for higher knowledge i.e. literacy. A multilingual perspective also addresses concerns of language and culture, using the pedagogical principle of moving from the known to the unknown, local to global, familiar to unfamiliar. An input rich communicational curriculum helps lay a strong foundation for second language learning. In this regard the question of accommodating oral literature alongside the framework of canonized written texts has also been taken up. Orality cannot be dismissed as a casual utterance. "A vast number of Indian languages have yet remained only spoken, with the result that literary compositions in these languages are not considered literature. They are a feat for the folklorist, anthropologist and linguist, but, to a literary critic, they generally mean nothing [...] The wealth and variety of these works is so enormous that one discovers their neglect with a sense of pure shame." (Devy, 2005, p. 12) As a national level coordinator/ member textbook writing team, I have been able to witness firsthand the emphatic shift away from the canon in textual materials for ELT. Efforts have been made to represent different genres and registers across the various stages of ELT by way of translated texts as well as Indian writing in English. There is also a fair representation of Indian authors and translated texts. For example, poetry and prose by Bengali and English writer Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, modern Hindi writer Premchand, Urdu film writer and novelist A. K. Abbas, Tamil poet and journalist Subramania Bharati, Indian English poet and Malayalam writer Kamala Das to name a few. Even the illustrations accompanying the texts represent the India's multicultural ethos and art heritage.
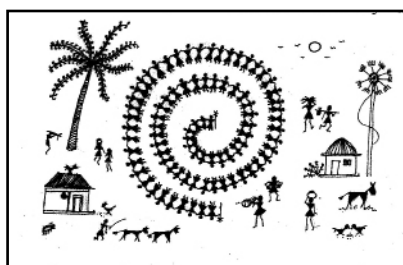

Figure 1: *Illustrations from 'Tribal Verse' from Woven Words* (Class XI), NCERT, New Delhi

Figure 2: *Illustration from 'Bholi' from Footprints Without Feet* (Class X), NCERT, New Delhi

The pieces themselves are based on broad themes listed in the national syllabus. Taken from the immediate environment of the learners to convey concepts such as family, neighbourhood, environment, sports, transport, food, books, the pieces are relatable for the learners. Some even use colloquial language like that used by the students in their day-to-day life. The heterogeneous character of Indian culture is also amply reflected.

Translanguaging: Newer practices and processes

Having conducted two studies titled 'Study on the Teaching of English in Govt. Schools at the Primary Level in India' (2011) in 1 Union Territory and 7 states[1] and 'Pedagogical Processes in English Language Teaching and Learning at Primary Stage in Nigam Pratibha Girls' Primary School'[2] (2014) in Delhi, I found that teachers used translation as a method of taking the students from L1 to L2. There was no usage of L2 in the entire interaction and all inputs in English were only displayed for rote learning purposes. This process was not proving to be very productive and learning outcomes did not meet curricular or student goals either. On the other hand, translingual practices "take us beyond the ugly and simplistic labels of grammar-translation versus communicative language teaching that have reduced English to a language used and taught only in its own presence" (Pennycook, 2008, p. 30.7). The research intervention of introducing bilingual materials (Hindi-English), trilingual dictionaries (local language-Hindi-English/Urdu-Hindi-English) and suggesting that instructions and/or rubrics be explained in the learners' first language to enable them to understand an activity before it is conducted in English were carried out. Classroom observation and teacher feedback showed that once learners began understanding English, use of their mother tongue could gradually be reduced by the teachers too (Position Paper on Teaching of English, 2006:12).

With this pedagogical design, not only did the learners' rich and diverse linguistic skills become part of what was earlier an alienating and intimidating classroom, but the teachers were effectively able to capture the idea that languages are not dissimilar. Rather, we see an intermeshing of languages in authentic contexts.

Translanguaging encourages empathy and understanding toward differences in languages and communicative repertoires. Some other exemplar material included activities designed to bridge the gap between the mother/ home tongue of the child and English. For example:

- Asking learners to think of/collect songs or poems in their language that talks of the theme of the lesson being taught. Understanding the idea and vocabulary from there and thereafter moving to English.
- Organizing learners into groups and asking them to find equivalent words or phrases to a given phrase from their: home language, neighbourhood language, town/city language and school language.
- Asking learners to give examples from their context and appreciating that these examples extend the scope of the curriculum.

So, while multilingualism helped establish the necessity of dialoguing with languages, translanguaging becomes the via media. All teachers need to work together for an integrative approach to language and linguistic terms; words to be used in other subject areas for reinforcement can be worked out.

Translanguaging is then a "responsible communicative practice that offers communicative and educational possibilities to all [...] speakers are seen to occupy different points in the bilingual continua instead of starting from a monolingual totality" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009, p. 148). It accommodates multiple socio-cultural contexts, issues pertaining to gender equality, linguistic competencies, and fosters critical inquiry. English is, therefore, no longer a colonial language per se but a global language in a multilingual milieu. "In fact, ELT relates easily and fruitfully to developing social justice because it has the scope to foster independence of thought, sensitivity to others' well-being and feelings, and creativity and flexibility in responding to new situations, besides ensuring language acquisition. Further, language in itself cuts across the curriculum and is a means for expression of self, maintaining culture, and providing context" (Kapur, 2015, p. 180).

1   A Study on the Teaching of English in Government Schools at the Primary Level in India was a research under the aegis of the Ministry of Human Resource and Development. The aim of the study was to find out how English is taught in classes where it has been introduced in grade 1 as opposed to later classes like grade 3 in the states of Gujarat, Nagaland, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jammu & Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, and Chandigarh. The study involved content analysis (structure, vocabulary, design, diversity) of locally prescribed curriculum, syllabi, textbooks and teacher manuals. The study concluded that training and development support by way of more workshops, training, and best practice archives would help bolster ELT across India.

2   The case study followed the principles of action research to identify gaps in translating curricular goals in English language classrooms. Pedagogical practices were mapped using classroom observation and in-depth interviews of teachers and students. In the final phase of the study interventions were designed to demonstrate the effectiveness of translanguaging. Improvement in classroom talk and learning outcomes were observed as a result of this.

Summing up

Social justice in education is concerned with providing equitable and quality education for all students. Creating space for learners' own languages in the process of English language teaching increases the scope for wider communication. At the same time, the growing interest in the maintenance and revival of many minority languages among their speakers provides an additional impetus for making ELT classrooms inclusive. A language classroom can be an excellent reference point for familiarizing students with our rich culture and heritage as well as aspects of contemporary life. There lies a lot of scope in making students sensitive towards their surroundings, their neighbors, and their nation. I would like to leave the reader with some food for thought – from your perspective what might speak in favor of including multilingual/regional texts in the classroom? What challenges might you have to overcome? How would you negotiate for greater representation in the classroom? In the words of Lella Gandini, "All children have preparedness, potential, curiosity and interest in constructing their learning, in engaging in social interaction and in negotiating with everything the environment brings to them" (1993, p. 5). We only need to harness this to make the world kinder and just.

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Questions for thought

1. The author states that "English is not to be contextualized in a Western ambience but is to be taught through a contextually-rich, local perspective." From your perspective or the perspective of the country you are in, what might speak in favor of including local contexts in ELT? What conflicts might you see in doing this? What are the advantages of doing a reader's theater with a class? Discuss what a good choice of theater can bring, how you would organize the work, and what you could imagine some conversations would look like during practice sessions.
2. Often, an "English-only" or "local language for grammar" approach is promoted in Swiss schools. Can the research from India, e.g. "The research intervention of introducing bilingual materials (Hindi-English), trilingual dictionaries (local language-Hindi-English/Urdu-Hindi-English) and suggesting that instructions and/or rubrics be explained in the learners' first language to enable them to understand an activity before it is conducted in English were carried out" be applied to the central-European situation?