

Language as a Vehicle of Power: Catalysing English Teaching as Means of Evolution, Power, and Sound Specialized Learning



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Summary:

The current modern world implies one to adapt to its unprecedented changes and structures and above all the rapid pace of convert. Throughout recent decades, countless alterations have dogged information technology and English for more than a century which went hand in glove with the development of teaching techniques, that eventually gained unprecedented prominence. This has led English to prosper as an international language that inflicts its teaching around the world thanks to its chief role as the language of research and innovation. The main objective of this paper is to understand the various parameters that empower English along with the changes brought by the contemporary world and invest such understanding in the field of specialized and competency-based language research, teaching methods design, and language planning. Thus, it appears crucial, in this paper, to adopt a theoretical over a purely empirical focus as the main aim revolves around discussing and developing ideas and theories to enrich and update understanding in this area. This is to say that the current paper adopts a descriptive, explanatory and remedial-based research strategy in a theoretical framework that addresses crucial questions regarding language policy and planning in EFL in the current age.

Keywords: Competency-based teaching, English Language Teaching, intercultural communicative competence, innovation, specialized learning

1. INTRODUCTION

English has been reported to be breaking many records in linguistic sovereignty in different fields in life ; economic, social, educational, professional and political. Thus, it has become the language of research,

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development, and exchange at many levels. The vitality of English ignited an urgent need to learn this language for different purposes, potentially personal and professional. This paper targets the status of English at the international scale and the way it functions as a governing means of communication and linguistic domination which led research in the field of English language studies to prosper. *De facto*, language planning remains

central to such language research issues as it is of paramount importance in the distribution of power and resources in societies. Therefore, language teaching and planning shall be seen from a modern lens ; that of the contemporary world with its implications and the language users' accommodating and transmutational interests and needs. Therefore, it has become essential to address some questions that arise from the very heart of teaching contexts and at the same time represent the ground for novel theories to boost teaching quality and learning outcomes. To begin with, what change variables have been the language teaching pedagogy ? to what extent do these variables affect methodologies and practices to shape or reshape English language learning ? and what measures need to be adopted to adjust learning to meets the changing needs and the world's requirements ? Potential answers may suggest that Research in the field of language policy and planning in the current times has been subject to the recent changes that characterize the modern world; cultural hybridity and cultural independence, technological advancement, the influence of (social) media, world fragmentation, mass migration, international citizenship, the portfolio worker ...etc. This led the understanding and theorizing about language teaching and learning to undergo shifts in convictions and philosophies. What is more, is that any actions or measures may initially depend on the adaptation and exploration of this understanding within a comprehensible theoretical framework which would be of great value to empirically study and reshape modern foreign language pedagogy following the latter phases of curriculum development; reviewing, feedback, evaluation.

2. THE PEDAGOGY OF ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE: LANGUAGE PLANNING AND LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION

Dealing with the pedagogy of English as an international language in the current age requires deeper understanding of this latter. Not only the status of English is the subject matter but characteristics of the current century are of paramount importance as well. Coming to this end, globalisation remains at the heart of the shaping factors of the processes involved in pedagogy. To define it, one needs to probe the literature about it as it seems to cause much controversy. (Steger 2009) offers to see globalization from different perspectives as illustrated in the metaphor of a joke portraying an old tale in which different blind scholars described an elephant based on kinesthetic exploration of the animal. The first held the elephant's trunk and described the animal as lively snake; the second explored its

tusks and compared the elephant to a pointed spear; another touched the massive leg and said the elephant could look like a large column; the fourth one inspected the tail that he thought resembled a bristly brush.

In a nutshell, globalisation, being a leading factor in shaping language planning and policy, is itself a tottering concept which reflects on the way it is contemplated when dealing with language pedagogy in general and that of English in particular. Therefore, there is scant consensus on the route, outcomes, scale, reasons and even chronology of globalisation. (Wright 2016). Too boot, before getting any further with other pedagogical implications, a closer glance at the post-modern world characteristics is needed to provide better and fluent understanding reading further.

What is more challenging in the scope of English language planning is the process of this latter itself. According to Halliday (2001):

Language planning is a highly complex set of activities involving the intersection of two very different and potentially conflicting themes: one that of 'meaning' common to all our activities with language, and other semiotics as well; the other theme that of 'design'. If we start from the broad distinction between designed systems and evolved systems, then language planning means introducing design processes and design features into a system (namely language) which is naturally evolving. (Halliday 2001: 177)

Indeed, weaving between 'designed systems' and 'evolved systems' as suggested by Halliday, and given the dominant global language status as well as the fluctuation resulted from globalisation, English can be said to be subject to its own norms of language planning and policy that revolve around the nature of its concentric status represented by many scholars in various models such as English as an international language (McKay, 2002, 2012), World Englishes (Kachru 1992, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2007) and English as a lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2004, 2011; Jenkins, 2009, 2011). Therefore, using specific norms to reach particular ends would be too restricted as a view in this field especially that nowadays, not only English is no longer possessed by its native speakers but it also obeys to different rules or rather shapes the rules of its use. This is to say that language planning and language policy serve one of the main global goals; building international citizens through education.

2.1 LANGUAGE AS A VEHICLE OF POWER: WORLD ENGLISHES

Given the special status that English enjoys across the world (over 70 countries), Kachru (1986) suggested a categorization founded on types of spread and patterns of acquisition that, from first glance, appear to have a great impact on language planning and syllabus design as it identifies and defines the nature of the language status and the various purposes of its use. These circles are represented as follows :

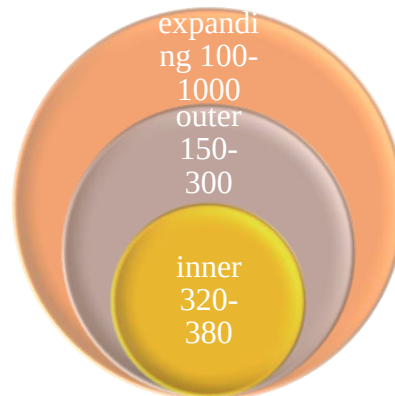


Figure 1 Kachru's inner, outer, and expanding circles

Kachru's categorization is founded on three main factors; types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the roles of English. Inner Circle countries (where English is formally recognized as a national language), Outer Circle countries (former British and American colonies where English is used as an additional institutionalized language and in conjunction with other official local languages), and Expanding Circle countries (where English does not have any official status and yet is often mandated for study as a foreign language).

In today's world, the applicability of Kachru's model of circles in the field of applied linguistics is prone to questioning as it does no longer respond to the aforementioned characteristics of the rapidly changing world ; the language users' accommodating and transmuting interests and needs in the globalized era. To illustrate Clyne and Sharifian (2008) explain that the growing human mobility around the world such as mass migration has permitted speakers of different varieties of English to shift and roam through the circles and permanently acclimatize and find feet in different circles. This is to say that voyaging and settling across the circles has become flexible due to globalization effects, therefore, the privilege of mastering English in the contemporary world has led to raise awareness that it represents a key feature of immersing in the converting world.

2.2 LANGUAGE AS A VEHICLE OF POWER: ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

The teaching of English undergoes quite a distinguished pedagogy given the international status that the language enjoys. Nowadays, English learning is no longer limited to the understanding and the teaching of the native cultural values, it transcends to being used as means of global communication and exchange in different fields such as commerce, transportation, banking, tourism, technology, diplomacy, research, entertainment, and information exchange on the internet (Kachru, 2010 ; McKay, 2012). Inevitably, the English language pedagogy operates singularly, or at least differently, as compared to other language pedagogies. It

functions to fulfill the distinct purposes that different communities of learners have across contexts. Kachru (2010) and McKay (2012) again point out that most teachers of English around the world happen to be nonnative English speakers which proves that the norm in the teaching/learning of this language is rather multilingualism than monolingualism with all the luggage that comes along.

Crystal (1997) advocates that it is thanks to technological innovation that escorted new linguistic opportunities that English started to gain recognition as a first-rank language in different fields affecting various life facets such as broadcasting, the press, advertising, communication...etc. It has also become the sovereign language in distinct arenas both economic and cultural such as the motion picture industry and popular music, the language of international structures and international travel, publications, and inevitably education (McKay 2002, 2010, 2012a; Crystal 1997; Graddol 1997). Furthermore, Fishman (1982) highlights that recognition could rather be centred around non-English-mother-tongue countries for the international status that the language enjoys as they have been conspicuously engaged in using and spreading the language leading to its prosperity in different fields of life.

Thanks to this international prestigious status that English started enjoying, countries are reported to be including English as an essential subject in their curriculum being a century skill not merely a foreign language. This said, it takes us back to the starting point ; its pedagogy; quite a different and special educational process of organization and decision making due the fact that this language possesses more than the common motives that impose its teachings in different countries. In this matter, Graddol (1997) and Jenkins (2009) point out that it due to awareness of being a skillful user of English, which Kachru (1986, p. 1), describes as “possessing the fabled Aladdin’s lamp”, certain expanding circle countries have gradually and willingly traveled to the outer circle countries

English encompasses those common parameters that represent the basis of its planning and the flexibility it enjoys thanks to the way it exists and operates in various context In other words, it might be believed that native speakers may claim possession of the language, but in fact, its worldwide popularity is acknowledged and credited to its non-native as much as or even more than (at some occasions) native speakers. Widdowson (1998) argues that :

How English develops in the world is no business whatever of native-speakers in England, the United States or anywhere else... The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it... But the point is that it is only international to the extent that it is not their language. It is not a possession which they lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it. (Widdowson 1998 : 244-5)

Jenkins (2006) points out that even though non-native speakers of English are conforming to a native English standard, they seem to be getting along well with the language being successful communicators. In this sense, she considers them expert speakers and urges to abandon the native speaker legacy that she described as « the yardstick » to empirically found other perceptions of expert or less expert speakers of the language regardless of their native language.

In a nutshell, given the pace of change and fragmentation as some of the main aspects of the current world, teaching in general and language teaching in particular impose the connection to context given the vitality of learning as related to real-life objectives. The teaching of English, thus, makes not exception. On the contrary, being the lingua franca makes it submissive to such parameters of flexibility and context to make more use of it. This is to say that teaching English as an international language goes beyond restricting it to a given context and or culture. It would be too greedy to think that such a popular widely used language for different purposes of communication operates in a single or limited ways that are necessarily appealing to native-speakerism.

2.3 ENGLISH LANGUAGE ERRATIC: ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

Advocating that English is an international language means it appears legitimate to think that its status surpasses that of “the native speaker”. Indeed, English, and more particularly ESOL, enjoy a flexible nature in terms of property and identity; aspects that have become, nowadays, crucial in the planning and teaching of the language in different settings. Jenkins (2000) and Seidlhofer (2002) focus on the importance of acknowledging the way English operates as a lingua franca. This can be interpreted as raising awareness about being more tolerant with the use of English by non-native speakers and thus not expecting them to idolize native-speakerism. It actually also thrusts the line of thought somehow further to the ground of language teaching and planning in the current era with all its fragments. Therefore, beside the world’s underlying factors (development, communication, research, globalization ...etc) the language users’ purposes appear to be one of the essential ingredients in language planning with consideration of context requirements.

Wright (2016), supporting Halliday (1997) and bounding his definition of LPLP (language planning and language policy) to the global era, suggests that viewing LPLP as status, corpus and acquisition planning would be limited in the light of the current influencing factors resulting from the global age. It would be more comprehensible to perceive planning as an arena of scrutiny in which meaning is created and conveyed in the human course of life. Saraceni (2009) and Sharifian (2009) further discuss the post-colonial spread of English leading to a more complex sociolinguistic reality of the language. In this respect, they argue that this fluctuating reality, perceived by 1599 minor poet Samuel Daniel as the « strange shores », has fostered and thrust the status of English as an international language resulting in a paradigm shift in Applied Linguistics and ELT.

3. THE NEED TO SEE BEYOND IDEOLOGY : INTERNATIONAL CITIZENSHIP

Michael Byram (1998) suggests that there are five stages any language policy needs to be sifted through during the planning of its teaching and curriculum design. According to him, teaching a second and or a foreign language implies developing ICC (Intercultural Communicative Competence), which is indeed one of the requirements of the century given the modern and globalized world in which we live currently. ICC has become an undeniable skill that language learners need to develop to become intercultural speakers; the ultimate objective of sound language learning for the main aim would be to facilitate communication across geographical boundaries. This latter matches very well with modernity and globalization for both have made the world an open place where all communities meet in a way or another. If it is not for cultural reasons it would be for life reasons such as the notion of the portfolio worker, which has taken the place of “a job for life” concept to facilitate moving across geographical boundaries thanks, again, to modernity and globalization. Therefore, even the sense of belonging seems not to be exclusive to a given community, but rather a feeling of playing a bigger role; that of the international citizen. In doing so, education would be the means as it is one of the institutions responsible for preparing human beings for life roles and tasks and thus, need to be directly serving real-life objectives. One way of facilitating this would be the integration of English as a pedagogical solution to facilitate the transition in the modern social structure and mindset; the integration of a sociological perspective in the study of pedagogy. English in this case, considered the lingua franca that soothes countless types of communication and life survival skills, facilitates the shift from a national to an international citizen role opening more career opportunities for individuals.

The hierarchy of curriculum development suggest by Byram offers a comprehensible framework for language planning; one that respects and adopts the recent changes. This framework, not only it offers a better understanding for the ultimate objective of learning a foreign language (English) as related to educational objectives, but also illustrates in details the process that leads to successful learning based on current trends and considerations: stage 1 the geo-political context, stage 2 the learning context, stage 3 the developmental factor, stage 4 identification of objectives, and stage 5 ICC threshold

This process appears to be intelligible and lucid for it provides more perspicuous explanations that make sense of the learning process than its rivals. It covers many language facets, and entails modern language learning requirements such as culture and political education. In the first stage, it is suggested that the teaching of other languages than the first language involves geo-political reasons that shape the language pedagogy in a given country. Such reasons may range from personal to societal or political entity objectives. In other words, personal or societal objectives may differ from a community in which there is predictable face-

to-face contact with native speakers of the language learned to a community where there is frequent contact or another where the language is limited to its use as a lingua franca. Again, all this is different from the political entity's objective behind the teaching of a language for future purposes.

	SKILLS interpret and relate (savoir comprendre)	
KNOWLEDGE of self and other; of interaction : individual and societal (les savoirs)	EDUCATION Political education critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager)	ATTITUDES relativising self valuing others (savoir être)
	SKILLS discover and/or interact (savoir apprendre/faire)	

Figure 2 : intercultural communicative competence: locations of learning

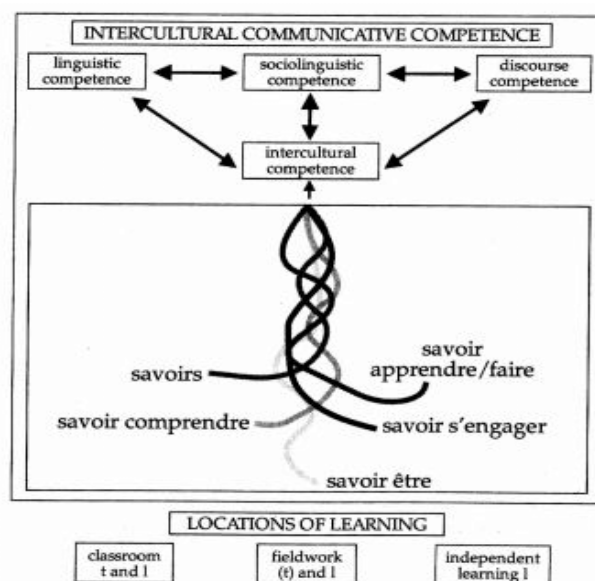


Figure 2: Factors in intercultural communication

These illustrations ultimately lead us to a specific spot where language learning, identity and thus learner-centredness are inseparable aspects in the course of effective language policy and language planning for they serve the same objective of (inter)national education which settles in building good (inter)national

citizens able to communicate effectively and contribute positively to the development and stability of this world.

4 LINGUISTIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION AND CONCEPTUALIZATION OF IDENTITY

Identity is a too powerful word to be limited to a single definition. It can be conceptualized from different perspectives and evenly context-bounded at most times. In fact, identity can be said to mean self-concept; the thing that goes much beyond knowing who we are. Reis (2011) describes identity as a key concept in the contemporary world that has been influenced, since WWII, by many aspects such as colonialism, globalization and the development of fresh social movements. Jenkins (2004) puts it as follows *"Identity, it seems, is bound up with everything from political asylum to credit card theft. And the talk is about change, too; about new identities, the return of old ones, the transformation of existing ones"* Attempts to define identity lead us inevitably to talk about the sense of belonging which, being an evenly broader concept, has various definitions. Bonnie et.al (1996) defined sense of belonging as *"the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment"*.

Maslow (1954) gave *"Love and belongingness needs"* the third place in the hierarchy of his theory of motivation for they are important as psychological and safety needs. Identity and/or sense of belonging, if the two terms may be used interchangeably, are most of the time said to be social as we are referred to as members of a particular ethnic/social group. Bucholts and Hall (2005) have the same view of identity as being *"the social positioning of self and other"* According to Byram (1997) social identity plays a crucial role in the process of foreign language learning. He further advocates in criticizing VAN EK's model of *"communicative ability"* that one's first language and cultural heritage (main components of social identity) are the basis of his identity that should not necessarily be abandoned to dive into the foreign language, and if it happens to be the case, learners will be prone to **"linguistic schizophrenia"** as well as **"cultural shock"**.

Since culture is the hand that goes in the glove -language- we should expect the latter to have influence on identity as much as culture does. Gumperz (1982) made a collection on language and social identity in which the main focus was on social identification through language production. From the display of different views if not visions of identity, we may say that it is not approachable from only one perspective for its richness as a concept puts us in an interdisciplinary approach to find ourselves dealing with, at least, politics, culture and language and how they relate and influence the construction of identity which is the main focus of this paper.

4.1 LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND LEARNER-CENTREDNESS

As explained earlier in the different stages of curriculum design, stages 3 and 4 urge one to consider any variables and/or tendency of differences in classrooms. Therefore, cognition and objectives represent the most common and important factors underlying differences in the language classroom, especially regarding English teaching in the 21st century. One of the modern and extremely effective teaching techniques, not only in the field of languages, is learner-centredness. Novel teaching that is flexible with the requirements of the century is founded on many principles both modern and traditional. One of the principles is focusing on competences in the classroom making of the departure of any successful learning. It appears to be very effective and enjoys much popularity since its emergence with the CBA in the 70's. indeed, learner-centredness was proved to be effective in different learning fields and was adapted to various teaching approaches and methods given its vitality to learning. It brought ground breaking changes especially for the roles of the participants (teacher/student).

Such changes involve the learner more in their learning and makes them take responsibility which fosters autonomous learning and creativity; two essential ingredients in successful learning in the 21st century where language is not only meant to be learned to be reproduced, but rather to be reused creatively, according to the learners' changing needs and interests to deal with everyday issues.

4.2 IDENTITY AND LEARNER-CENTREDNESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

As conceived in bridging identity and language learning/acquisition, the former represents a crucial factor that underlines the learning of a foreign language. Therefore, it is necessary to consider identities in the classroom for they reflect profiles, personalities, and social and cultural backgrounds of the learner; which all interfere, in a way or another, in the process of learning a given language. As a matter of fact, identity helps fostering a very modern teaching principle brought with the popular communicative teaching method CBA, that is learner-centredness. The term implies focusing on learners by first place as an effective teaching technique to make successful learning happen. This implies learners' competencies, which in return reflect much about learners themselves. A competency in the language field, at least, involves learners' styles and strategies which happen to have been developed through stages that involve psychological, social and cultural differences. All that occur to be explicitly and heartily associated with identity.

Based on such analysis, course design should not only revolve around learners' linguistic needs, but also consider their differences and tackle themes that make them feel engaged and raise their awareness about "otherness" by first place. Doing so enables even young learners to become intercultural speakers which appears to be one of the requirements of the century. As the world is becoming more and more modern, we tend to witness a world of fragments rather than communities, a world rich in differences rather than commonalities. It is becoming

more likely to see and meet people from other nationalities and therefore different experiences, backgrounds and thus savoirs. Respecting these factors, that have long affected the construction of identities, would happen to be novel to competency development and learner-centredness.

5 CONCLUSION

Meeting the century requirements in the field of education is initially founded on digital literacy and teaching English in proper ways that enable its use effectively. Such ways surpass the traditional teaching methods that put both the learner and the teacher in the box of method design depriving them from their natural rights of decision making resulting in erasing any sign of difference or personal purpose. In fact, the world in which we live nowadays has exploded the boundaries of specific standards that restrict innovation in general, which does not exclude education and more particularly ELT. Thus, the field of Applied Linguistics and ELT have witnessed crucial and ground-breaking changing events that have been shaping the teaching of English; the language of hybrid and unsteady nature that is governing the world at many levels. Coping with this world entails adjusting to its requirements to boot. Henceforth, it has become vital to break the shell and why not eradicate traditional norms to ensure sound teaching of the language of the universe through linguistic, cultural, political and social equity in language planning and language policy. It is henceforth legitimate to suggest that intercultural, sociological, and political perspectives are much needed in developing understanding about the modern language classrooms, especially English being a key language. In doing so, it has become urgent to consider the aforementioned changes to ensure bridging the gap between real-life objectives and educational objectives. Adopting modern parameters such as intercultural understanding, involving modern identity traits (digital skills, modern jobs, international citizenship and further openness on the world), potential movement or communication across geographical and cultural boundaries, as well as political and sociological implications can highly serve shaping the design of modern and effective curricula that appeal to the world in which we live. Such adaptations can significantly benefit the teaching philosophy and understanding, nevertheless, one should still bear that given the rapid pace of change and implications of context and time as well as rapidly changing generations, are factors that make theories and research in the field of language policy and planning prone to the resulting outcomes of this rapid development. In other words, what is seemingly very effective today, might turn out to be inadequate in the future. A flexible thought and application of it open the door for further research and investigation to achieve better understanding of the rising generations. A good example would be studying generation gaps and possible ways of shaping a comprehensible pedagogy that ensures learning continuity through different stages of life.

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