

ELT IN PAKISTAN

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Of all the languages in the world today English deserves to be regarded as a world language. It is the world's most widely spoken language. It is the common means of communication between the peoples of different nations. One person out of every four on earth can be reached through English. Randolph Quirk points out: "There are now something like 250 million people for whom English is the mother tongue or 'first language'. If we add to this the number of people who have a working knowledge of English as a second or foreign language, we raise the total to about 350 million".

A very important reason for reading English as a world language is that the world's knowledge is enshrined in English. Countries in Asia and Africa that were till recently under the British rule get their scientific knowledge and technological know-how from English books. It is knowledge of English that helps these countries maintain the high level of their intellectual and scientific training and achievement.

Apart from the former British colonies there are other countries like Japan, Korea, etc., in Asia, and some of the European and Latin American countries where also English is taught as a second or third language purely out of utilitarian considerations. That is to say, almost the world over, whether as mother tongue or as a foreign language, English is being used one way or another. This fact, more than any other, makes English merit the status of a world language. Already English has been accorded this status by the world because it is the language used in international conferences and in the forums of the United Nations Organizations.

English is being learnt and used all over the world not out of any imposition but through the realization that it has certain inherent advantages. Today the compulsions of learning English are no longer merely political but scientific and technological. And no longer is English the language of Great Britain only; it is the language required by the world for greater understanding, "it is the most international of languages".

English exercises a great influence on the educated classes of the country. It continues to be the medium of instruction in technical, medical, law and other institutions. It is the language of the High Courts and the Supreme Court.

The English Press in the country is very powerful and enjoys not only more circulation but also better influence than the Vernacular Press. English has been rightly described as the language of opportunity. Knowledge of English is a successful passport for employment.

We can examine the importance of the study of English in Pakistan under the following heads:

- English as an international language
- English as a window on the world
- English as a library language
- English as a link language

THE STATUS OF ENGLISH IN PAKISTAN

The use of English in Indo-Pak Sub-continent started as a historico-political accident. But now it has become an economic-academic reality. The need for English as a language of "opportunity" and "development" has been pointed out by several educational commissions

and experts bodies constituted from time to time to examine and define the role of English in our country.

Unfortunately the status of English in our country has become a controversial one. There are people who favour the retention of English for its practical utility. On the contrary, there are certain sections/pockets who are inimical to English and want to do away with it. English is the language of administration and a compulsory subject at school/college level. It opens the door of employment. A person who does not know English is not considered educated in the true sense of the world. A knowledge of English is a must to climb the social ladder.

Speaking has become a fashion, if not a craze. The increasing awareness of the importance of in the world compels us to learn it for our specific purposes and for widening our intellectual horizon.

Our aim in teaching English to our student is to enable them to use English with ease and comfort i.e., to use it both instrumentally and integratively. They should be able to speak and write English effectively, and to have access to rich scientific and technical knowledge enshrined in the English language. It will enable them to maintain the high level of their intellectual and scientific/technological training and achievement.

CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH ENGLISH IS TAUGHT

English is taught in Pakistan under conditions which are far from satisfactory. Some of the weakness in our programme of teaching English are discussed below:

1.Lack of a clear-cut policy:

It is admitted on all hands that the standard of English has gone down in our school and colleges. One of the reasons for the decline in the standards is the lack of a clear-cut policy regarding the place of English in the school curriculum. Educationists, politicians and journalists express different views on the place that English should be given in Pakistan. As views expressed outside do have their impact in the classroom. It is time to lay down a clear-cut policy regarding the place of English in school and college curriculum for an effective study of the language.

2.Little understanding of Aims:

Unfortunately, the average teacher of English loses sight of the aims of teaching the language in his day-to-day work. All that he remembers is that his aim is to enable his pupils to get through the examinations. He enables them to master answers of some set questions important from the examination point of view. The result is that the language is not taught as a skill subject as it ought to be taught but as a knowledge subject. They acquire very little proficiency in the linguistic skills that really matter. They cannot express themselves in English. They are incapable of writing a few correct sentences. They acquire no love for reading books in English.

3.Dearth of competent Teachers:

Not all teachers of English are fully equipped to discharge their duties. Some people believe that no specialized training is needed to teach this language. By and large, teachers of English themselves are unaware of the latest techniques of teaching the language. their knowledge of the language is insufficient and their pronunciation is defective. "The foundational years for the teaching of English in schools are in the hands of teachers who neither know enough English nor are familiar with the latest and far-reaching developments in the pedagogy of English". There is a grave shortage of trained and fully qualified teachers

of English at almost all stages of the educational system. "The supervision of English teaching in schools has continued to be neglected, with hardly any trained specialists engaged in this task ". The result is that the teachers receive no guidance in their teaching. They go on following the traditional methods of teaching the language.

4.Sub-standard Textbooks:

English readers and textbooks are sub-standard. In their writing no attention has been paid to the selection and gradation of structures. Although vocabulary has been graded from year to year. Yet the authors of these books do not take pains to see that it is properly used in a manner to facilitate its grasp by the students. Some of the words which are sought to be taught appear only once in the text. In our textbooks we lay more stress on the subject-matter rather than on the teaching of the language. the author of a textbook is required to include chapters on the biographies of great men, on health and hygiene, road sense etc. As a result, he pays more attention to subject matter rather than to the language. The illustrations in these books, which are indeed few, leave much to be desired. There are no practice exercise to teach the language to the students. Rather there are testing exercises.

5.Inadequate Material Facilities:

Modern teaching lays emphasis on the use of audio-visual aids. These aids make the lesson interesting and easy. Our school are not equipped with audio-visual aids such as flashcards, charts, pictures, models, filmstrips, gramophone records, tape recorders, etc. which help in language learning. Even some classrooms function without a suitable blackboard or colored chalk. Unless these material facilities are provided, the quality of English teaching cannot be raised.

6.The Faulty Examination System:

Since the type of examination influences the methods of teaching to a large extent, examination in English is to be blamed for some of the defects that have crept in. Under the present system, a student can get through the examination if he cares to remember answers to certain stock questions. He need not even read the prescribed textbooks. The result is that although a student succeeds in the examination, yet he has no practical command of the language. He can neither speak correct English, nor write it. The standard of spoken English in schools is deplorably low and one of the reasons for this is that there are no oral tests. One of the things that may be suggested in this regard is the introduction of oral tests to raise the standard of the pupils.

7.Large Classes:

Thanks to population explosion, classes have become over-crowded leaving no scope for individual attention. It is not unusual to come across a class as large as sixty students. Besides many pupils come from families with no tradition of learning. The number of periods allotted to the teaching of English has been drastically curtailed to make room for the study of some other subjects that have been introduced at the school level.

8.The Psychology of changing Behaviour:

It is difficult to change behaviour; changing one's behaviour involves changing one's pattern of thinking. And this is not easy to discover. To change one's view of learning requires a

flexibility that everyone does not have. And authoritative tool of an English teacher mars the beauty of his new techniques of teaching. Mr. Ronald Mackin's paper on "the Teaching of English in Difficult Circumstances" is of special relevance to the teaching of English in Pakistan. He says, "The old-fashioned type of benches and desks which restrict movement; the bad light; the noise from neighboring classes which may be separated from them by nothing more than a bamboo screen; in sufficient provision for their subject in the time-table; lack of aids of all kinds; interference from parents or dominating conservative Headmaster; and finally, the requirements of an examination system which places a premium on the written language and consequently seems to favour the grammar-grinder of the old school".

METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH

The Translation Method which is most wasteful is still followed in a majority of schools. Oral work which is the soul of any good method is neglected. There is no oral practice on the part of the students as a result of which they cannot construct a few sentences of English of their own accord. All that they do is to cram answers to certain set questions and the teachers help them do so. The method to be followed is the aural-oral approach popularly known as Structural Approach in our country. There are some institutes like, Beacon House, Ali Institute, etc where Direct Method is adopted in teaching English. But the number of these institutes and the outcome is very less.

CULTURAL IMPACTS OF ENGLISH

English introduces to us the civilization of other foreign countries, especially the Western culture. It is through this language that we have shared the wisdom of the West. In the struggle for independence, English played a significant role in bringing together our national leaders from various regions of the country by enabling them to share their thoughts in it. As movements for the preservation of minor (or weaker) languages in Europe tell us, if a child is told that his or her language is inferior, the message being conveyed is that he/she is inferior. In short, one is giving a negative image to children by telling them that the 'cultural capital' they possess is not capital at all but a stigma and a handicap. This makes children reject an aspect—and an essential one at that—of their legacy, history, culture and identity. What is created is 'culture shame'—being ashamed of one's own true identity.

Incidentally, the poor and less powerful classes, gender and communities have always been ashamed of aspects of their identity. It is the fact that the lower castes not only accept lower social status but look down upon people lower in the social scale and even upon themselves. That is why when people became literate and rose in affluence and power, they left their communities and even started using names of groups with higher social respect. Here, 'the number of Shaikhs and the other categories'—Syed, Mughal and Pathan—increased phenomenally, while the occupational "caste" groups registered a sharp decline'. Moreover, there are many literary works in Urdu and other languages—not to mention one's own observation—that show how embarrassed the poor are by their houses, their clothes, their food, their means of transportation and, of course, their languages. In short, the reality constructed by the rich and the poor alike conspires to degrade, embarrass and oppress the less powerful, the less affluent, the less 'gifted' of the human race. This relates to language-shame—being embarrassed about one's language—and hence to possible language death. Either the speakers die or, which is more often the case, they voluntarily shift to a powerful language which helps them survive but as members of another human group rather than their own.

In Pakistan, as brought out earlier, the linguistic hierarchy is as follows: English, Urdu and local language. In the N.W.F.P and Sindh, however, Pashto and Sindhi are seen as identity markers and are spoken informally. In Punjab, unfortunately, there is widespread culture-shame about Punjabi. Parents, teachers and the peer group combine to embarrass students

about Punjabi. In all of the elitist English-medium schools the author visited there were policies forbidding students from speaking Punjabi. If anyone spoke it he or she was called 'Paendu' (rustic, village yokel) and made fun of. Many educated parents speak Urdu rather than Punjabi with their children.

Pakistan TV plays use the term 'Urdu-medium' for lack of sophistication. The children of elitist English-medium schools are indifferent to Urdu and claim to be completely bored by its literature. They are proud to claim lack of competence in the subject even when they get 'A' grades in the O' and A' level examination. They read only English books and not Urdu ones nor those in other languages. These attitudes are having a squeezing effect on Pakistani languages. Urdu is safe because of the huge pool of people very proficient in it and especially because it is used in lower level jobs, the media, education, courts, commerce and other domains in Pakistan. Punjabi is a huge language and will survive despite culture shame and neglect. It is used in the Indian Punjab in many domains of power and, what is even more significant, it is the language of songs, jokes, intimacy and informality in both Pakistan and India. This makes it the language of private pleasure and if so many people use it in this manner, it is not in real danger. We have seen that the language policies of Pakistan, declared and undeclared, have increased both ethnic and class conflict in the country. Moreover, our Westernized elites, in their own interests, are helping the forces of globalization and threatening cultural and linguistic diversity. In this process they are impoverishing the already poor and creating much resentment against the oppression and injustice of the system.

English highlights its own culture which is doing great harm to our own. The purity of our national is losing its status. Students know more about Halloween, Bonfire, Balls, Valentine day etc., than their own festivals.

CONCLUSION

Both globalization and the continuation of colonial language policies by the governments of Pakistan have increased the pressure of English on all other languages. While this has also created an increased awareness of language rights and movements to preserve languages, it has generally resulted in more people learning English. In Pakistan this means that the poor are under more pressure than before because they cannot afford expensive schools that 'sell' English at exorbitant rates. As such, linguistic globalization is anti-poor, pro-elitist and exploitative. While it may not be possible to reverse the trend of globalization, it is possible to promote the concept of additive bilingualism rather than subtractive bilingualism. This means that we should add to our repertoire of languages to gain power while retaining skills and pride in our own languages. In order to do this the state and our education system should promote the concept of linguistic rights.