

Cultural Hegemony and the Teaching of Global English Language: Indian Perspective

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ABSTRACT: *Globalization has manifold implications and importance. From Political to financial from trade and commerce to culture and social behaviour. The post globalized world has seen the cultural invasion of America and Europe in various ways. One of the prominent ways of this cultural invasion is the supreme importance of the English language. They have made the English language their medium of cultural dissemination resulting into the supremacy of the occidental culture in oriental countries. Through language culture is spread and through culture their literature, music, food, lifestyle everything is spread and makes room for billion-dollar business. This paper aims at finding the roots of Cultural Hegemony of the west through the teaching of American English in the guise of Global English.*

KEYWORDS: global English, culture, cultural hegemony, globalization, English language teaching, transnational English.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization of English language does not reflect a linguistic change only, but also and more prominently, it leaves significant socio-cultural implications on communities in general, and on presently colonized communities, such as Palestine, in particular. This thesis is intended to explore the perceptions of English language experts and students regarding the actual challenges that global English poses to Indian languages and national culture of India. Furthermore, it is intended to investigate, critically, the nature of the cultural context embedded in the new Indian English language curriculum, as perceived by English language experts and students. Throughout the study, I argue that, teaching and learning English in India, had started and continued to develop, not only as an educational necessity, but most importantly, as a dominant linguistic reality that has been imposed through culture of colonization and culture of globalization.

Prior to delving into the academic work and literature about language, it is essential to point out that the different articles and texts reviewed herein, present and discuss the concept of “global English” and the relationship between English language hegemony and local cultures and languages from different paradigmatic perspectives and schools of thought; namely liberal as well as socialist perspectives. Furthermore, the concept of “globalization” itself has been in the core of a wide variety of research and political debates tackling almost every level of its divergent political, economic and social implications.

The body of literature which is presented in this review explores a new level of globalization which is language globalization. The thread connecting this review pertains to such an issue when one language such as the English language becomes a global language and what type of ramifications this phenomenon holds in terms of national and international consequences. The light is shed also on the dialectical relationship between social changes and linguistic changes, and on the way by which different technological, economic, political and other social developments could facilitate and guide the linguistic changes that are marked by global English.

One common concurrence among authors of the studies and articles tackling the issue from both liberal and socialist traditions reviewed herein, is the fundamental assumption that global English is an American English. The term American English is used interchangeably with the term global English as a description of the dominant nature of American hegemony through the use of global English. This issue, I argue, deserves a serious critical discussion on the level of the Palestinian educational context, primarily because, the antagonist history of the USA imperialism towards Indian people and their national cause. This long history of imperialism should have already taught the Indian people to examine cautiously and critically anything which is American before they accept it, and especially, when we talk on the linguistic, cultural and national identity.

In order to understand the concept “global English”, it is important to place it within the context of the wider definition of the concept of “globalization”. For example, Block (2000), maintains that globalization, in its different forms, intensifies worldwide social relations and bond together distant localities in a way that local happenings can be directly affected and shaped by international events that are occurring many miles away from them.

Global English, in Block’s (2000) argument, and also in the work of a wide variety of scholars discussed in this review like (Crystal 2002, Wallace 2002, Kushner 2003 and Canagarajah 2005), is viewed as one level of the whole globalization; it is a linguistic level of the globalization. Globalization in general, lays the ground for hegemony and domination through it’s intervention and impact on distant localities.

The intended act of globalization, from the vantage point of the dominant power, is to re-shape the structure of world power and the centre - periphery relationships. This has been found to increase the conflicts between poles, such as international versus national, centre versus periphery, and more importantly for the purpose of the current research project, dominant language and culture versus dominated language and culture (Canagarajah, 2005).

But before we continue to discuss the threats embedded in global English, it is crucial that we tackle the question of “why English” is the global language and not any other language? Reflecting on this question will help us to understand in more details the diverse sides and threats of global English. People might ask the question: why English has happened to be global English? Why it is not any other language, such as Arabic, or French? This is an important question that requires to be asked and, its clarification will help set the context for the premise of the current research.

Some socio-linguists who had similarly raised the same question have presented number of interpretations that try to explain why English exclusively has become the global language of the world. To give an example of the evolution of English as a global language, Wallace (2002) has stated that:

There is nothing inherent in English as a language which makes it more suitable than any other language for this role, it is rather that English has developed extensive resources as a result of its' dominance across many domains of use (p.106).

In her interpretation of the phenomenon of global English, Wallace suggests that the high functionality of the English language in important life aspects as, science, agriculture, research, trading, economic, industry...etc, is what makes the English language a dominant language, rather than the innate nature of the language. Wallace's interpretation, I argue, can represent a good answer for the writers who try to sell people English as naturally superior language. But again, the question remains: why English is the highly functional language in different life domains? What about other languages such as Arabic, French, Spanish etc.? The answer to this question should lead us to factors of hegemony and domination behind the English language wide functionality and spread. The clarification presented by Crystal (2002) takes us undoubtedly into analysing capital states hegemony behind global English. Crystal (2002) argues that the turning point when the English language assumed very successful position is when it had existed in the right place and at the right time. By saying that, Crystal pinpoints the fact that English was the language of Britain during the seventeenth and into the nineteenth century when Britain was a giant colonial nation and the leader of the industrial revolution. Then, English was and still the language of the U.S.A during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the U.S.A became a leading economic and military power in the world. These factors played chief role in the widespread and globalization of the English language as a language of imperialistic and authoritative states.

The world-wide spread of English language, and consequently, the spread of its culture, has been viewed by many thinkers a cultural invasion of the west through the process of westernization and, more particularly, Americanization of the world. As the most dominant among the Western nations, American culture and way of life, assumes a "leading" role in the Western domination of the world. This domination is first and foremost facilitated by the U.S.A being politically and economically the most powerful state in the world. Thus, to reiterate, language globalization, when one language assumes hegemony over others, creates cultural hegemony and domination. What does hegemony mean and how can it be crystallized through language globalization? The concept "hegemony" is defined by McLaren (1994, p.182) as "a cultural encasement of meaning, a prison – house of language and ideas, that is "freely" entered into by both dominators and dominated". In the following section, I will discuss Bates's (1975) interpretation of the Gramscian conceptualization of "hegemony". The discussion of the concept will help us to comprehend more deeply the point made by McLaren; that is why dominated people enter "freely" into the cultural prison of the dominant language.

Language hegemony in light of Gramsci's notion of hegemony re-creates an "ideological unity of a whole social bloc" (Bates, 1975). The unity of ideology can stand behind successfulness and survival of world different cultures and civilizations. It can also stand behind stability of governments and ruling systems and classes. For example, spreading the capitalist ideology can maintain permanence of ruling capitalist class inside Britain, U.S.A and other capitalist ruling systems. Gramsci has introduced the concept "hegemony" to explain how human beings can be ruled not only by force, but also, by ideas. Language bears, in addition to other things, ideas. From Gramscian viewpoint, the economic power or military force alone are not enough for the ruling class in order to rule the world or the dominated classes.

Ruling others requires the dominant class to spread and popularize its' own ideology and its' own viewpoint in order to gain the consent and the approval of the dominated classes. Consequently, Gramsci has uncovered the role of the intellectuals in societies. He breaks down the superstructure of a state into two main components, the "political society" which represents the military state versus the "civil society" which includes the rest of the private institutions, such as, schools, churches, clubs, and journals. Civil society, in particular, exists as the "market place of ideas, where intellectuals enter as salesmen of contending cultures" (Bate, 1975, p.353). Therefore, for Gramsci, civil society is the sphere of cultural organizations and of the "organic intellectuals" to create hegemony through extending the rulers viewpoint to the ruled, and subsequently to create, inside the ruled class, a "false consciousness", which mixes their priorities and confuses their real goals and interests. Gramsci coined the concept "organic intellectuals" which includes professionals, leaders, economists and state employees who owe allegiance to the capitalists and work with them very closely to produce a new culture.

In my understanding, originally, the real revolutionary organic intellectuals stick to their own country's national interests, defend it and mobilize ordinary people around it. The rule of the hired "organic intellectuals", I understand, is to try to convince the ordinary people in the targeted countries with the agenda embedded in the new hegemonic ideology. The so called intellectuals do, in most cases, benefit from their attachment to the new hegemonic ideology and hegemonic powers. They might be given additional motivations, higher positions or higher salaries...etc, so as to keep them strongly tied to and interested in the new hegemonic structure. Thus, they start immediately and willingly to diffuse and justify the actions of the dominators. Generation after generation, when the educational system, the media and cultural organizations are totally converted and changed in accordance with the dominators agenda, we might find some of miss-led professors, students or even political and social activists who start to repeat and teach the new ideology of the colonizer without having any direct benefits from doing so. They might become, unintentionally, self-destructive to their own national interests. Practically speaking, I strongly believe, that Gramsci's analysis is very applicable in today's world. For instance, the imperialist ruling system inside the U.S.A is relentlessly involved in the creation and support of some of the intellectuals in third world countries into a group of mercenaries whose role is to try to convince their poor nations, that the capitalist system in the U.S is democratic and stands for the protection of human rights. We watch on a daily basis many of those "intellectuals" on satellite channels while they endeavour not only to defend the U.S.A massacres in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also to explain it as sacrifices for the U.S.A promised democracy and justice.

Applying Gramsci's notion of "organic intellectuals" to global English would mean that the English language hegemony does not realize its' domination automatically. It requires organic intellectuals or agents to adopt and defend the language. It needs cultural organizations, schools, language clubs and centres that are directed by the organic intellectuals who absolutely believe in the language and who believe in the language native culture and native speakers' ideology. Put simply, it needs to build "false consciousness" about other languages and cultures as well. For example, to motivate a group of university professors, students or other professionals to merge English into their Hindi or Bengali, Marathi while speaking to Indians, or to push them to use complete English sentences and terminology, whether the conversational context requires that or not, the targeted group should feel the superiority of the English language first. They should be convinced that talking in English, for instance, can be more impressive than talking in their first language and so on. This theme was among the emerging findings of the current research, and more details will be discussed in latter sections. What is important here is to notice that without some "organic intellectuals" who could spread the English language, talk about its magical benefits over and over again, administer some centres to teach the language for people or include it heavily into the school curriculum, it would become near impossible for English to emerge as a dominant language. In other words, without "internal agents" whose main role is to facilitate the hegemonic domination of English as an invading language, or any other invading language for that matter, this domination would have been extremely difficult if not impossible.

At the outset, it is important to clarify that what is intended by the concept "Americanization", is spreading American culture and values throughout the world, so as to facilitate American global hegemony and domination, rather than making people American as such. Many studies have observed the planned tendency to westernize and more specifically to Americanize the world through the spread of global English. The issue of westernizing and Americanising the world through global English has received different reactions amongst language researchers. Some wrote to defend trend and others wrote to argue against it. For instance, Crystal (2002) and Wallace (2002) have observed that global English sounds vividly American English, while the U.S.A is not the only country who is native speaker of the language, and so they concluded the existing of American hegemony through language and cultural domination. Other writers, such as Haneline (2001) or even before him Anderson (1982), have defended the idea of Americanizing the world through spreading American globalized English. Centring most current educational reforms among non-English speaking nations on the integration of English into national curriculum is another important issue that deserves a special attention and discussion. Literature review showed that most educational reforms, particularly in the third world and Arab countries, are dedicated to integrate teaching English into the curriculum on the expenses of other social and human sciences (Judy, 1999). Furthermore, these educational reforms have been found to be imposed by an international body or agency. They are heavily funded, pre-planned, and have very little, if at all, to do with the countries' educational needs and requirements.

The attempt towards the re-creation of culture beyond the borders of nation states is one of the major characteristics of globalization. For instance, Jay (2001, p.32) suggests that

globalization, regardless of whether modern or postmodern phenomenon, has reformulated culture to include not only national interests, "but also shared set of global interests". Jay's (2001) notion of "global interests" suggests that the educational institutions as cultural institutions are no longer linked only to the development and needs of nation states. His argument proposes also that literary studies, especially English literature, are now post-national phenomenon rather than a national one. The world is exchanging, through literature, not only systems of commodity, but also sets of symbols, language and culture. Thus, cultural forms like for example literary narratives, cinema, and films are dealt with as commodities, that can be bought, sold and exchanged. Cultural forms are no longer encountered as aesthetic or spiritual forms that have nothing to do with reality.

Jay (2001) has viewed globalization as another synonym for westernization and Americanization, and that global literature is exclusively English literature. As a result, he called upon the writers of the world to develop a "transnational approach to English that avoids colonizing literature of others" (p. 34). Transnational English is expected, from Jay's viewpoint, to help writers all over the world to express their voices equally as a substitute to American and British writers' domination. Therefore, the main problem for Jay is for the people of the world to be extensively introduced to British and American literature and the solution is to develop transnational English which belongs to all people.

However, the point that merits reemphasis from my viewpoint, is that the rest of the world's writers who write in English cannot freely and equally compete with the British and American writers, who not only write in their mother tongue, but who also write under the umbrella of their politically and economically dominating states. They will continue to control, using Jay's terminology, the world exchange of symbols. I argue that, English literature intensifies possibilities for homogenization and colonization of weak country's cultures and languages. Thus, the symbolic exchange, which is accelerated by globalization and global English literature, is tied to stand for the west, the Americans and the British, as agents for modernity, innovation, democracy, human rights and justice, while the rest of world's nations are breathless trying to follow up with the presented role model. Thus, even though, Jay's attempt to free English literature from the British and American control through "transnational English" is a legible dream, but I think, this conflict can not be completely resolved on the level of literary studies alone without winning the economic and political war against capital world powers. Literature is only one component, albeit very important component, which materializes the capital system colonization and hegemony over the rest of the world.

Critically and frankly speaking, I find myself in a strong disagreement with Jay's (2001) "transnational English" as a fundamental solution for globalizing equally the English literary studies which are developed by non-native writers. From cultural and language-based perspective, I believe that defending the right of the world authors to think and write in their native languages, while protecting their equal chances to internationally compete and globalize their own literary studies should become the natural solution which respect the world's diverse cultures and languages. Moreover, it is the natural solution which guarantees genuine creation in different arts including literary studies. World languages, I assume, should have the same access not only as languages that have the right to compete with English, but also, and more

importantly, as holders of cultures. Otherwise, it will be impossible to escape the ramifications of the project which aims to homogenize cultures through killing the spirit in diversity among the world's cultures. Translation of literature as one possible solution for transcending the borders of languages is a very challenging practice, especially on the cultural level, since "the real challenge partly stems from the fact that literary translation is not solely a linguistic enterprise, but a cultural and moral one as well" (Jabr, 2000, p.1).

Therefore, literary creation in the writer's foreign or second language can never reach the level of creation in his or her first language. From this point alone, it is not difficult to imagine the roots of inequality that could be embedded in the transnational English.

The above discussions have raised many key issues and questions to be deeply considered. English is observed as global and hegemonic language which dominates other world languages. This fact necessitates thinking critically about teaching English as a foreign language or a second language. The interaction between the foreign dominant language and the national language of learners is going to subjugate the later if balance is not created between both, at least in local and national curriculum. Languages that are already subjugated as a result of past and or present colonization will be more cruelly damaged by the hegemonic language. English language hegemony also raises central questions about cultures, dominant and dominated cultures. The dominant language is found to generate dominant culture, a matter which threatens learners' cultural identity. Therefore, this calls upon language teachers and curriculum planners to question the nature of the language content. The political and economic power of one state leads to its language and cultural hegemony. Consequently, the current global English marks the power of the U.S.A and intends to Americanize the world through the hegemony of English.

Findings of previous studies have assured that the language content which is culturally relevant to learners can enhance the targeted language acquisition. On the other hand, even defenders of global English have recognized that access to world intellectual and global involvement is not possible within the frame of extremely westernized and Americanized version of global English. Radical researches have vigorously invited us to oppose and resist global English. Global English is viewed as a device to spread hegemonic ideology which intends to re-shape learners' self-consciousness so as to become imitators for the language's native speakers. Global English is a device to marginalize learners' national language and culture. Implementation of integrative approaches, which do not overlook learners' first language and culture, into teaching English as a foreign language, is strongly recommended. Learners' national culture and language should be fully incorporated into foreign language curriculum to form a relevant context for learners. This will enhance learners' aptitudes and motivation to learn the language.

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