



ARE WE DECOLONIZING OR RE-COLONIZING COLONIAL ENGLISH EDUCATION POLICY?

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Background to the study

Departments of English were started world-wide to uphold British cultural standards that included the dominance of the monologic form of English and the universal standards of literary excellence of English literature. This was done by subordinating the local languages and literatures to the presumed superiority of English writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton as model writers. While the primary aims of colonial educational policies are evidenced in the report of Charles Grant and the Minute of Lord Macaulay, the reports of the various educational commissions and committees seem to uphold the same. Thus, they have failed to perceive the dynamism of the English language that has changed its nature and function by acquiring the rarest distinction of being the only denationalized language in the known human history. This failure has led to the retention of English literary studies as an academic discipline and the English language as a medium and a colonial language by teaching it through English literature. While Indian students of English literature treat English Studies as an alien and alienating discipline, students of General English find it as a foreign

language. The colonial mode of imparting literary and linguistic knowledge through 'lectures' does not suit the needs of the present day generation who need English as a means of modernization and not even as the medium. If teaching methods and materials are suitable, needs-based, customized, the craze for English medium education can be dispensed with and the Indian languages can be developed both as the mediums of education at all levels and as the language of innovation and invention.

Research questions

1. What is the Indian Postcolonial reaction to the continuance of English?
2. What is the role of English Departments in the process of decolonization?

Research Design & Results

The Report of Charles Grant and Lord Macaulay and the Reports of Educational Committees and Commissions set up in post-colonial India starting from the University Education Commission (1952) up to the Acharya Ramamurti Commission (1990) were critically studied, compared, and contrasted with the sole aim of discovering if there is any postcolonial response to the colonial



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policies. Besides, an informal consultation on the *raison detre* of the continuance of English studies as an academic discipline, as a language, and as a medium of education was held with both senior and young teachers of English working in city colleges of Madurai.

Almost all the reports of free India seem to uphold the colonial policies and practices, many teachers were at pains to justify the retention of English studies now. They were unable to respond critically to the following questions:

1. Have you ever consulted any document to find out the origins of English Studies in India?
2. Could you please cite one or two reasons for the continuance of English Studies in post-colonial India?
3. Can we afford to continue to patronize the old colonial reading practices now? Shouldn't we read the canonical English literary texts as postcolonials?
4. Does English Studies still represent the literary excellence? Shouldn't we study English texts along Indian literary texts?
5. How should postcolonial literary readers respond to the imported Ideological State Apparatus like legal, religious, educational, military, political, and aesthetic ideas from the West?

On the latest position of English as the 'globish' or 'a denationalized language,' many teachers seem to be unaware of sea changes in the attitude of its users around the world. Two pertinent questions posed to them are:

1. Is it not enough if English is learnt as a skill subject instead of using it as the medium of education?
2. Shouldn't the mother tongue be used as the natural medium of education at all levels so that students can develop thinking skills for innovation and invention?

The twenty-first century Indian learners are tech-savvy and multi-tasking. Their learning methods are at variance with lecturing as the sole teaching method. They wish to have quick results for their labour. Though they are interested in contemporary English and texts, they are least interested in listening to lectures on them. Instead, they seem to learn from doing activities with technological tools and watching.

Discussion

As the origins of English departments have been historically rooted with the definite colonial agenda and missionary motives, the present day teachers of English ought to locate their vocation against such a historical background. They should also be aware of the extent to which the aims and objectives of learning English world-wide have been perceived. Otherwise, they cannot effect any change in teaching methods or learning materials or their attitudes toward the learners. Each one of them ought to decolonize English Studies because this discipline produces workforce for the teaching of English in India. Unqualified workforce in the field of English language teaching is a major hurdle for the large-scale failure of English language teaching in India. Two major colonial documents help the present day teachers of English



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historically understand the background to the teaching of English as a discipline, as a language, and as a medium.

Charles Grant's **Observations on the state of the society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to morals and the means of improving it** (1792) is the first document on English education in India. Grant firmly believed that English studies alone could bring about changes in the moral, social, and mental outlook of Indian society, which "long sunk in darkness, vice and misery." His main focus was to introduce Christianity through English, which was then described as the 'Christian tongue'. Grant declared that "the true curse of darkness is the introduction of light [Christianity].... The communication of light and knowledge [English studies] to them [Indians] would prove the best remedy for their children." The introduction of English as medium of instruction and content subjects that included English literature and natural sciences, and he fondly hoped that it would enlighten the superstitious Indians. He was emphatic about the possible impact of English literature on superstitions-ridden Indian society:

Wherever this knowledge would be received, idolatry, with the rabble of its impure deities, its monsters of wood and stone, its false principles and corrupt practices, its delusive hopes and vain fears, its ridiculous ceremonies and degrading superstitions, its lying

legends and fraudulent impositions would fall.

Hence, the ultimate objective in introducing English literature in India, according to Grant, who is hailed as the 'father of modern education in India,' was to create a cultural and religious conquest that would establish commercial and political hegemony of his country. Wilberforce also reiterated the same commitment of the British legislature on the religious and moral improvement of the Indian subjects through a resolution in 1793. Missionaries took these views as articles of faith and set their agenda of their education and school for religious propaganda and conversion.

Two divergent and diametrically opposite postcolonial responses can be discerned from the introduction of English studies in India: one, it was an imposition on Indians for cultural, proselytizing, and political purposes, and two, it was demanded by Indians for social, economic, and educational uplift. Those who argue that it was a demand from Indians themselves cite the starting of the Hindu College (1817) in Calcutta, and the letter of Raja Rammohum Roy to Lord Amherst in 1823. **Viswhwanathan (1989: 43)** discusses the demand of the Calcutta citizens to Sir Edward Hyde, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court for a classical knowledge of English language and literature.

Macaulay's **Minute** (1835) is another important document that favoured the introduction of English language and literature as a means of religious conversion. Soon after his Minute was



accepted, he further exuded hopes of his education plan:

It is my firm belief that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolator among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence. And this will be affected without any effort to proselytise; without the smallest interference in their religious liberty; merely by the operation of knowledge and reflection. (Mayhew 1928: 15-16)

The colonial design in his Minute unfolds when he disclosed in clear terms the avowed educational policy of the colonial government that “we must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.” He gives an economic and commercial twist to the colonial educational policy when he reasons that “to trade with civilized men is definitely more profitable than to govern savages.” The impact of Macaulay’s Minute on the post-colonial colonial educational policies in India is that English became the possession of not only educated Indians but also millions of uneducated Indians who are ready to buy this precious possession for their children. Policy makers in independent India forget the dictum that a country’s education must be native in character and rooted in its own culture and traditions.

The literature-dominant western curriculum of mid-nineteenth century was poetical selections that included Goldsmith, Gray, Addison, and Shakespeare; Milton’s **Paradise Lost** (the first four books); Pope’s **Iliad** by Homer; Shakespeare’s **Hamlet**, **Othello**, and **Macbeth**; Addison’s Essays; Johnson’s **Lives of Poets**, Goldsmith’s **History of England**, Bacon’s **Essays**, and prose readers compiled by Macaulay. According to **Bose (1896: 180-1)**, the objective of English education was that

the students were expected to acquire a critical acquaintance with the works of Bacon, Johnson, Milton, and Shakespeare, a knowledge of ancient and modern history, and of the higher branches of mathematical science, some insight into the elements of natural history, and the principles of moral philosophy and political economy, together with considerable facility of composition, and the power of writing in fluent and idiomatic language an impromptu essay on any given subject of history, moral or political economy.

The acquisition of English was considered the sole objective of education. Today’s ‘education-sans-English-is-no-education’ syndrome has its roots firmly established during the colonial period. A section of middle class and upper class people expressed their readiness to switch over



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from the indigenous, native educational system to the new system of education. Of course, there was some feeble resistance to English as medium and as education from some quarters, but in reality Sanskrit and Persian which were the official languages used in legal and administrative domains for a long period were abandoned in favour of English. Besides, Muslims by and large opposed English when it replaced Persian as the official language of the government in 1837. By the time Wood's **Despatch** recommended that English be taught where there was a demand for it, demand for English grew as if it were a rare commodity that would go out of stock soon because English had already become the language of the administration.

English as a course of study was first introduced on trial basis in India in 1828 when such an idea had not existed in the minds of academics in England. The newly started University College in London introduced English as language in 1826, and only in 1831 English literature as a course was introduced at King's College, London. Oxford and Cambridge universities refused to offer English literature as a course of study till the end of the nineteenth century and until then they favoured Greek and Latin literatures. English was contemptuously regarded only as a vernacular, and therefore not worthy of any serious study at the university level. It is an irony that while Oxford and Cambridge permitted English as a subject only in 1894 and 1911 respectively, the Universities of Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay were chosen as guinea pigs for experiment on the British cultural

hegemony in 1857. Devising the methods of teaching and testing English language and literature, according to **Pennycook (1998)** and **Spolsky (1995)**, and modes of establishing literary canons, according to **Viswanathan (1989)** were first tried in India before they were imported to England.

A cursory glance at the reports of Education Commissions and Committees set up after independence reveals the attitude of the postcolonial Indian mind. Prior to 1937, English was both the medium of instruction and a compulsory subject in secondary schools. Students studied two languages: English and mother tongue/regional language/classical regional language. After the cut off year, mother tongue/regional language became the medium of instruction, but English continued to be a compulsory subject. In some schools, English was the medium of instruction as well as a subject of study.

Report of the University Education Commission (1952-53)

There are lots of epistemological gaps in the report on its recording of the views for and against the continuance of English in independent India and its conclusions. It is symptomatic of colonial hangover manifesting a kind of love-hate relationship toward English. It is also a manifestation of *yet-to or never-to-decolonize-the-Indian-mind syndrome*. On the one hand, English is viewed as an alien language that occupies a dominant position in the field of national culture and it hurts national pride. It also causes negation of democracy since it divides the nation into two: a few English-knowing rulers and the many not-English-knowing



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governed. It is unsound to keep it as the means of acquiring knowledge since it affects the originality of thought & development of literature in the mother tongue and leads to memorising instead of thinking and reasoning. On the other hand, it is seen as the first language of world diplomacy, an international language that will shortly become **THE** world language, a second language in all European countries, a unifying force without which the national would revert to the old world of differences and divisions, a key to modern civilization, science and technology, philosophy, and a means of contact with the outside world. It declares that “*English is the only means of preventing our isolation from the world*” (283). Finally, it comes to a conclusion that is incompatible with the foregoing for and against the proposition when it states:

Our students who are undergoing training at schools which will admit them either to a university or to a vocation must acquire a sufficient mastery of English to give them access to the treasures of knowledge, and in the universities no student should be allowed to take a degree who does not acquire the ability to read with facility and understanding the works of English authors. (284)

While it is true that reading ability ought to be acquired by every college student, there is no strong prima facie to read only the works of English authors. It has

created a lot of pedagogical problems during the following half-a-decade.

Secondary Education Commission (1952-3)

The Commission has recorded the arguments for and against the continuance of English in free India. Those who support English advocated the development and expansion of English language study for the following reasons. One, English is the most widely known language among the educated. Two, national unity in the political sphere has been brought about through the study of English language and literature. Three, the image and position of India at the international level is very bright and conducive because of its command over English. The following are the reasons for its opposition. One, it is unnatural and inconsistency with the ideals of India being a sovereign nation to prescribe the foreign language—English as a compulsory subject. Two, importance given to English in the past led to a situation where Indian languages have been neglected. Three, it is ideal for children to begin their education in their own mother tongue for better comprehension and development of original thinking. However, the Commission recommended that it is inevitable that students will need to have a good knowledge of English to study the subjects in the books available in that language.

Conference of English Professors on 23 & 24 Jan 1953

This was the first conclave of English teachers where the following recommendations were made:



1. English shall continue to occupy an important position in the secondary school curriculum
2. The objective of English study shall be to attain a good working knowledge of English
3. The contents of English study shall be the *detailed study of simple modern English prose* with the aim to acquire rapid reading and simple composition
4. English shall be a compulsory subject taught for six periods of 50 minutes each a week for six years.
5. Students can opt for additional courses in English
6. English teachers should possess an *additional diploma in teaching English* wherein they should have acquired a knowledge of English Phonetics, spoken English, English life and institutions.
7. They should periodically undergo refresher courses on methods of teaching.

Official Language Commission (1956)

English would be *replaced by Hindi after 1965* and English would continue only as a *subsidiary* language.

National Integration Conference (1961)

It endorsed three-language formula: mother tongue/regional language, English, and Hindi, federal language

Kothari Commission Report 1964-66

The medium of education in both school and higher education should be the same; mother tongue has a pre-eminent claim as medium. All India institutions should continue to use English as medium for the time being and *eventually Hindi should take over English* Teaching and

study of English should continue to be studied right from school stage. English will serve as a link language in higher education for academic work and intellectual intercommunication; however it *cannot serve as a link language* for the vast majority of people; Hindi alone can do it

National Policy on Education (1968)

Though it recommended the development of *Indian languages* for the *creative energies* of the students to *be released*, standards of education to be improved, fruits of knowledge to be percolated to the people, and the gulf between the intelligentsia and the masses to be minimized, it advocated that special emphasis be laid on the study of English and other international languages. It also noted that for India to make her own significant contribution to science and technology, the *study of English* deserved to be specially *strengthened*.

Study Group Report on the Teaching of English (1969-71)

The most comprehensive and detailed report on the teaching of English in India is the Report of the Study Group. It recognized that there was a grave *shortage of trained and fully qualified teachers of English* at almost all stages of the educational system; that men, materials, and methods were the main factors for the success or failure of teaching/learning; and that there should be two programmes of study: English for *literary appreciation* and English for *practical purposes*.

National Policy on education (1986)

It reiterates the 1968 policy.



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Acharya Ramamurti Commission (1990)

It was appointed to review the 1986 NEP and POA. It insisted on two issues: i) efforts to make Hindi a link language, and ii) strengthening of the study of English for specific purposes.

Curriculum Development Centre (1989)

The CDC was set up by the UGC in 1987. It recommended a more learner-oriented or enquiry-oriented teaching method that would promote higher order thinking skills, problem solving, self-learning and to explore new avenues of communication, productive work as well as innovation through such methods as simulation, games, and project work. It raises a pertinent question: If education was to be viewed as an instrument of human resources development, then why was an MA programme in English literature only?

Knowledge Commission (2007)

The Commission suggests that English should be taught as a language in schools so that it will facilitate the creation of knowledge society through higher education. It strongly recommends the inclusion of English as a language subject from Standard I “without disproportionate emphasis on grammar and rules.” An important recommendation is the integration of language and content subjects from Standard III.

Postcolonial Responses

Politically, many academics and teachers of English language and literatures are post-colonials as any other citizen of India is supposed to be, but intellectually, they fail to be postcolonials in the sense that they have failed to

problematize the continuance of English as an academic discipline. This is mainly because they have internalized the colonial objectives of English education. They have not perceived the paradigm shift in the character and function of English as a language. It was the language of westernization, but now it has become the language of modernization; it was the national language of an island nation, but it has become the ‘globish’ (**Robert McCrum, 2011**); it was a literary language, but now it has become the technical language of international subjects like science and technology; it was the language of ‘this’ physical world, but now it has become the language of the virtual world; it was the language of communication, but it has now become the language of innovation and invention; it was the language of literatures of the English-speaking world, but now it is the language of artistic expressions in the non-English-speaking world; it was the language of colonizers, but it has become the language of the subalterns (subordinated non-White & non-Westerns).

There is no need for English-medium education in the country at all levels if there is political and cultural commitment to developing Indian languages which can be used as mediums of instruction while English can be learnt as a language sans its geo-cultural package that is perpetuated through the study of English literature. Referring to the continued dependence on English for knowledge production and dissemination as a cultural bomb, **Thiago (1981/2011: 3)** asserts that “the effect of a cultural bomb



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is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves." He stresses the need for the departments of English to decolonize the mind of educated postcolonials through deconstruction. As long as the English Studies continues in Indian academia, the present day youths can never empower them with English as an international language and the Indian languages will never be developed as the medium of study. English imperialism will continue through its literature for ever.

Though Knowledge Commission is the only Commission that sees the changed role of English in the contemporary world and doesn't see any need for the teaching of English grammar and literature, it stresses the importance of English as the medium of acquiring subject knowledge. It amounts to perpetuation of imperialism that is a suicidal attempt. Both educated and uneducated Indians continue to be colonial in the sense that they are ready to assume that English is the natural language of development and empowerment. **Thiogo (4)** declares that "the choice of languages and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe." The introduction of English literature as a means of teaching the English language by the English helped them retain their cultural and linguistic identity, but its aping by the Indian English teachers is illogical and unacceptable unless they buy the theory of English literature being *transcendental*

signifier. Adherence to such a theory amounts to perpetuation

English has travelled breadth and length of India and grown to an incredible extent from the colonial times to the present day, from the upper class to the marginalized communities, from the urban to the rural areas, from the university to the village schools; from the government to the private sector, and from the literary world to the computer world. It has taken a new avatar as the *language of modernization* ending its earlier role as the *language of Westernization*. It now empowers the common man economically and socially; it gives prestige to the common man who wants to use it; it enables linguistically diverse groups of people living in different states to meaningfully communicate with each other; it is the medium of business and trade at the national level; it binds the Federal government; it carries the every day news across the country breaking all linguistic boundaries; it facilitates space and satellite explorations; it ushers in revolutions in agriculture, technology, and industries.

The twenty first century Indian learners of English demand this literal, prose English and *NOT* literary English. It is unwise to take students to the 16th century English literature, be it Shakespeare or Milton. The universality of literary excellence of English Studies, hegemony of colonial English, principles of humanism, and colonial reading practices have long been deconstructed and made problematic. Students are not interested in studying the texts which treat them as the subject; on the other hand,



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they want to be producers of knowledge and discourse. They must be exposed to postcolonial discourses that interrogate colonial discourses and counter discourses. Instead of teaching English that propagates the colonial Standard English in terms of accuracy, say, for example, Received Pronunciation or Standard English, international English must be targeted for the 21st century learners. Twenty first century international English doesn't recognize geopolitical and specific cultural borders that define a national language. Twenty first century learners are global citizens who celebrate multiculturalism. Hence, an English that recognizes pluralist culture.

Teaching/learning English should also undergo a radical change from classroom teaching/listening or summarising/memorising to facilitating/learning or collaborating/cooperating English-using classroom. Online teaching/learning in virtual classroom must replace chalk and board traditional classroom. E-contents must be developed so that learner autonomy can be inculcated in learners. Learning contents should be unitized so that learning can be made time-bound. Technology is the mantra for the present day students. It must be employed wherever it is possible and desirable. There is an acute dearth of competent teachers who are otherwise technically qualified to handle English classes and it is the main reason for the deterioration of standards of English. Many students who join BA/MA/MPhil English without working knowledge of English 'successfully' complete these academic programmes and become

'English teachers' and subsequently they acquire PhDs in English literature. The experience of teaching English helps them improve their English! Students are able to 'see through' such teachers who innocently act as the force and source of de-motivation.

Suggestions

1. History of English language education in India must form part of ELT course at the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in English.
2. Technology must replace outdated methods of teaching that form part of diploma and degree programmes in teaching.
3. In-service programmes on the interface between teaching of English language and literature and technology should be conducted.
4. Creative and critical thinking must be viewed as the extension skill of LSRW for innovation and invention and it should be the ultimate target of English language teaching at the degree level.
5. Denationalized international English should be the object of teaching in the place of a culture-bound English like American or British English.
6. MA English can have more courses on New Literatures and Indian Literatures in English and Translation than British or American literature. An intellectually honest attempt must be made to decolonize the superstructure that has been 'imported' during the colonial



period. This super-structure includes legal, religious, educational, military, political, and aesthetic ideas.

Conclusions

The study of English should be made a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The means is language and thinking skills through communication and the end is employment through innovation and invention. Technology must be made use of teaching/learning English that is seen as a language of modernization and not colonization or neo-imperialization. The effective use of English in terms of spoken and written form by learners should be the ultimate aim of English language classes. Consequently, there ought to be re-orientation of teaching methods that would match with learning styles and strategies of the twenty first century learners. In other words, teachers' tendency to cram learners with the rules of English Grammar should be replaced by the tendency to facilitate the use of English immediately lest it should create aversion in them for English. Unless learners realize both immediate and in-life use of English, learning will not take place.

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