



ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND PROTECTION OF LOCAL LANGUAGES AND CULTURES IN INDIA

DR. K. HARIKISHAN

Assistant Professor (C)

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University

Srikakulam, Etcherla,

Andhra Pradesh, **INDIA.**

ABSTRACT

Language and culture exists together and they are interdependant. If language emerges from culture, culture is strengthened by language. Our beliefs, customs and conventions fundamental principles of life, moral values and so on are cultivated by culture. If we want to know about any culture it is possible only through language. Hantrias (1989) defines that culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of society for which a particular language the vehicle of expression. Culture influences us from brith. Unless and until a child is exposed to the surroundings the child cannot acquire anything. Brooks (1986) also observes that physically, mentally everyone is the same, while the intractions between the persons and groups patterns which emerge from these group behaviours and intractions will be approved of, or disapproved of. Behaviour which are acceptable will vary from location to location thus forming the basis of different cultures. Studying a laguage means understanding its culture as part of its learning. India occupies a unique position in the world because of its rich diversity of cultures and languges.

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to say that any particular culture in India alone can represent the rich cultural diversity in India. Because Indian culture is an amalgamation of various cultures, languages, religions and communities. Every language in india has its uniqueness and so also every culture. We should always owe very much to the native writers, artists, intellectuals and the languists of the past who safeguarded our local languages while colonial rule of the British was shaking India and the other parts of the world through their literary outputs. We should

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also owe the same for the contributions of the native writers, artists, intellectuals and the linguists at present for promotion and protection of local languages.

Our native languages remained strong and continued to spread our unity and integrity all over the world in spite of the impact of Mecauly's English education as well as colonial rule. Though there were some writers and intellectuals like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Aurobindo who welcomed English education, they had used it as an instrument to understand the revolutions, movements, new forms of art and literature, new ideologies that existed outside India. They conveyed this spirit through literary writing in native languages. They also reflected our concerns through writing in English. In order to promote cultural harmony, human understanding and universal outlook among Indians the writers and intellectuals were simultaneously writing in English as well as in their mother tongue, but they were not drifted by the flow of English.

English, which was once having been called as a language of the uncivilized and rustic masses by the Romans and Normans, now have attained the status of being the language of intellectuals and the civilized. It has acquired the status of being an international or a global language. I do not have any prejudice against its development. Though many intellectuals attribute the flexible nature of English language to its development, I believe that it is the language of the ruling class and a colonist country. Therefore its dominance is continuing even today. The British had introduced English Education in every colonial country where they ruled. With the expansion of their empire they spread English into almost every part of the world. English which had grown out of accumulating its vocabulary much from Latin, French and Germanic languages and other European languages had reduced the position of those languages that they had to be confined themselves to their national boundaries. Sanskrit also had contributed something for the development of the English.

At present, English has become a big question for the existence of local languages in India under the influence of globalization. The world has entered the age of globalisation of the English language, in which most observers see a tendency toward homogeneity of values and norms; others see an opportunity to rescue local identities (Stromquist & Monkman 2000). The implications for language policy makers are that policies must be formed which not only include but celebrate local languages. Policies must not degrade other languages by placing them on a level of lower importance. Policies should incorporate the learner's language, the usage, and complexities as a means to create better linguistic comprehension as well as cultural understanding, the role of translators is very important here. Policies for language teaching must encompass and include cultural values from the societies from which the languages are derived as well as being taught. In other words, when making policies regarding language teaching, one must consider the cultural ideologies of all and every



student, the teacher, as well as the culture in which the target language is being taught. Under the influence of globalization, the governments themselves are encouraging English language in place of local languages and propagating the importance of English language and English education. The impact of English and English education have gone in India to such an extent that the strength of students in local medium schools are decreasing day by day. Parents do not show interest to join their children in native medium schools. Because of the untruthful propagations like - "If you do not know English, you can not live or you can not even exist" the position of local languages or native languages are reduced to the second or even less. Many parents, today, feel proud about the poor performance of their children at schools in their mother tongue and their high performance in English. The children are encouraged to speak in English both by parents and teachers. Children also develop sense of pride while using English at schools as well as outside. Whereas the students in local medium schools undergo an unexplainable strain that they feel themselves low and inferior to the students in English medium schools. English is taught as first language and local language or native language as the second at English medium schools. This very division itself creates the sense of superiority of one language over the other. It increases the gap between English and local languages. Hence the makers of policies of English teaching must be sensitive to the local languages and not to make them seem inferior to English. We can ignore the impact of medium in the instruction of subjects like mathematics, physics and chemistry because they do not deal with cultures but as far as language is concerned, it is different. The medium of instruction certainly creates some serious implications in teaching. As language is always rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next (Emmitt & Pollock 1997). We are learning English means we are learning its culture. Unless we are aware of those implications, unless we take certain measures to prevent such implications there will be a serious threat to the existence of local languages as well as local cultures. As mother tongue of the students in English medium schools is studied as second language its importance will also be relatively secondary, the whole attention of the students will be on English the first language, then the English language and its culture will gain currency. This will have detrimental impact on local languages.

These extreme trends can erase our languages, cultures and identity. A language how popular and how important it may be, it should be a platform for understanding a new culture. It should not be an instrument to bury the local language and culture. As the policy makers are not serious about this issue now the responsibility of protecting local languages and cultures should be taken up by the intellectuals and educationists because they are responsible from designing English text books to implementing the policies of English teaching at schools and colleges. It is not the responsibility of the writers and artists and linguists of the local languages alone. Even the English teachers must come forward to take up the responsibility of protection of native languages, cultures and do it as a movement, because teachers of



language are also teachers of culture (Byram 1989). Language teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage, choose culturally appropriate teaching styles, and explore culturally based linguistic differences to promote understanding instead of misconceptions or prejudices.

The attempt of balancing local languages, cultures and English language and culture should begin from school education. If we observe the English Readers in English medium schools, all the lessons prescribed in the English Readers are from the writers of the English, it means the reflection of English culture alone. At school or college language is the only domain which allows to discuss many things related to the life, society and culture. As local languages occupy the second position in English medium schools in India, English plays a dominant role in imparting cultural values to the students, besides teaching them language skills. When the students are exposed to the texts that reflect one dominant culture, English, what way they can balance between the native culture and the culture they cultivate from the text books of English. In order to bridge the gap and bring balance, the English Readers at school should have the English translations of the works of the native writers in India. As native languages are reduced to second position, the works which describe the impact of mother tongue, native culture and its importance should be incorporated into the text books of English in schools through translations. The works from Indian writing in English must be prescribed in the text books of English. The works of writers which were written in English across the world must also be incorporated into the English Readers. Suppose there is an English reader containing short stories, it should contain the works of the major writers of English like G.K. Chesterton, A.G. Gardener, Somerset Maugham as well as the works of the writers from India like Subrahmanya Bharati (Tamil), Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao (English), Rabindranath Tagore (Bengali), Prem Chand (Hindi), Haribabu Apte (Marati). Amrita pritam, K S Duggal (Punjabi), Sadal Hussain Manto, Kishan Chand (Urdu), it can also include the works of English Writers of international repute from the other cultural background like Guy de Mapassant, Edger Allen Poe, Mark Twain, Anton Chekhov and others. Though the works are written by the writers other than the English it is still English. Thus by incorporating the works of various writers from the English, native and other cultures into the English text, cultural balance can be maintained. Instead of thinking English to be the dominant language and therefore a dominant culture the learners of English will understand English is a language as any other language and the culture of English also the same like any other culture in the world. Then English becomes a meeting ground for understanding various cultures as well as exchanging new ideas.



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