

The Globalization of English as a Threat to Local Minority Languages and its Implication for English Language Teaching

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Abstract: This paper aims to discuss the impacts of the globalization of English language on local minority languages, and its implications on the practice of English Language Teaching (ELT) conducted in non-English Speaking Countries. While the widespread of English is seen as posing the negative consequences on the existence of the indigenous languages, some of the implications and solutions to minimize the marginalization of the local languages through English Language Education are outlined in this paper. Local minority languages in this paper refer to languages spoken by the small or dominated indigenous population. Some of the solutions provided in this paper are the application of the new concept of the English language as teaching approach in the ELT instruction in the non-English speaking countries. Instead of English as International language, this paper proposes the new paradigm of World Englishes and English as Lingua Franca to be adopted in the ELT classes.

I. INTRODUCTION

The spread of English in the world has been inevitable and vast during these few decades. It has been realized by the increasing number of English speakers in all over the world during the fifteenth century and its remarkable incline during the nineteenth century. This large number of English speakers made up by native English speakers, speakers of English as second language, and speakers of English as foreign language in all over the world. Pennycook (1994) [10], provides an estimation made by Otto Jespersen (1938) that the speaker of English since 1500 to 1900 has been increased gradually. It reached about 116 to 123 million in 1900, and it is almost tenfold as we reach the end of the twentieth century. Moreover, English has now been taught at schools in almost all nations around the globe. It has been an official language in several countries such as India, Philippines, and South Africa. It has become the first foreign language taught in almost all nations in all over the world. It is a language in which science and other domain are instructed in schools in most nations. In Hong Kong, for example, there is a shift from

Chinese-medium elementary school to English-medium secondary school[10].

The emergence of a number of attributions of English such as an international language, a lingua franca, and a world language marks the importance of the spread of this language perceived by people in the current human civilization. It is this language, by which people are linked together in global communication, through which most of the information is conveyed, through which the knowledge and science are written down in most of textbook in the world.

The massive spread of English has been seen as beneficial in one way as it fulfills the need of a global language that allows people from all over the world to participate in a wider communication. A number of costs of its domination, however, have been inevitable. Crystal (2003, p. 14)[2] suggests that a global language 'perhaps will hasten the disappearance of minority languages, or-the ultimate threat-make all other language unnecessary.' Moreover, instead of perceiving it as an advantage, some researchers recently have seen the spread of English as a result of linguistic imperialism. Pennycook (1994)[10] asserts that the widespread of English have a number of cultural and political effects; one of them is a threat to other language. Once English has been widely spoken in one area, being more favored by people, or achieve the official status in a nation, it is very likely that the position and the existence of local minority languages have been threatened and marginalized.

Thus, it is the concern of this paper to highlight the impact the widespread of English poses to the local minority languages to a better English language teaching practice in non-English speaking countries.

II. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH

As noted above that most of the resources of information, knowledge, and technology are written down and broadcasted in English language, thus, it becomes a necessity for the non-English speaking countries to learn this language in order to get access to these resources as an attempt to move the country forward. It is for this reason that English language teaching is now become so profoundly emphasized in language Education in most countries whose mother tongue is not English. Teaching



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English as a Second or Foreign Language has become a huge industry all over the world in the last thirty years' [3]. Apart from this, some researchers have argued that the spread of English has something to do with colonialism. Many sociolinguists recently claim that the colonialism of Great Britain in the Eighteenth century is one factor responsible to the spread of English in the current day. Pennycook (1998, p. 2)[11], proposes 'the English language teaching enterprise was important not so much because it led to the current massive spread of English around the world, but because it is deeply interwoven with the discourse of colonialism.'

III. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LANGUAGE DEATH

Language death includes the phenomenon 'when the community shifts to a new language so totally that the old language is no longer used' [1] and when the speaker of the language of a small community die, the language also dies with them (Holmes, 2008). In sociolinguistic perspective, the study of language death focuses on 'the search for the set of factors that cause people to give up a language in favor of another' [1]. It has been said that the spread of English is one factors of the extinction of minority languages. 'Because English is such a dominant force in the world affairs (and the Bulwark of Western ideology), there is a danger that its spread dilutes (and corrupts) the distinguishing characteristics of other language and cultures.'

Mufwene (2002, p. 1) argues that 'languages are parasitic species whose vitality depends on the communicative behaviors of their speakers, who in turn respond adaptively to changes in their socio-economic ecologies. Language shift, attrition, endangerment and death, are all consequences of these adaptations'. This means that when speakers of a language are confronted with the new environment where his/her native language is no longer functioning and the new language is valued considerably, he/she needs to adapt to the environment in order to survive, and thus shift to the new language. This is perhaps what could happen when English becomes so important in a community that every language speaker will favor to use the language over the native language.

IV. SOME CASES OF THE MARGINALIZATION OF MINORITY LANGUAGE AS A RESULTS OF THE GLOBALIZATION OF ENGLISH.

In order to understand the impacts the globalization of English poses to the local minority language, it will be fruitful to see some cases in which the use of English has marginalized local minority language and results in the extinction of other languages.

A. The Extinction of Celtic Languages in EU

In the Europe, there have been evidences of the phenomena of language death and language attrition as the result of the

widely use of English. Modiono (2001, p. 343)[7] admits 'The British Isles have witnessed the spread of English across Scotland and Ireland, effectively reducing the Celtic languages thriving there to little more, in most places, than a curiosity. Traditional second language usage (for example Swedish in Finland) is also declining because of increased use of English.'

Celtic languages are the languages spoken by the people in the continent of Europe. It has been said that some of these languages has been declined and extinct due to the widespread of English. Gaulish, a continental Brythonic dialect which is one of the subgroup of Celtic languages, for example, is now no longer spoken [3]. Welsh, another Brythonic dialect spoken in Wales, has also been described in the history as being marginalized by the spread of English. In the fifteenth century, Welsh was a language which was dominated by English, a more powerful language. At that time in Wales, for the reason of unity, a policy named 'the Acts of Union' has been positioned English on top, serving as the official language of political and administration in the kingdom, and discriminating Welsh, another language spoken in that area as it blocks the speaker of this language from access of a greater opportunity in life. This caused the major shift to English.

B. The Aboriginal Languages in Australia

Australia has experienced a massive loss of its indigenous language. It has been reported in The 2001 Australian State of the Environment Technical paper that:

- There has been a decrease of 90% in number of the indigenous language spoken fluently and regularly by all age groups in Australia since 1800.
- There has been a decrease in the percentage of Indigenous people speaking Indigenous languages from 100% in 1800 to 13% in 1996.
- The number of Indigenous language and the percentage of people speaking these languages have continued to fall in the period 1986-1996, accelerating over the ten years.

Some literatures have shown that the Aboriginal languages, the languages of indigenous people of Australia, have been experiencing a huge decline since The British inhabited the land, giving way to the predominant language, English. Holmes (2008) describes how Aboriginal languages in Australia have been diminished by the domination of English. Holmes asserts that it is only 250-300 aboriginal languages can be maintained when the Europeans arrived, and the aboriginal younger generations only know no more than two dozen of their indigenous languages.

C. The Marginalization of Minority Languages in Philippines

In Philippines, language policy has been said to marginalize minority language of this region. The literature by Sugbo (2010) describes how language policy in Philippines which position English as the official language

and a medium of instruction along with the Filipino as the national language,

has increasingly threatened the Waray literature, a minority language literature. In the earlier years, the literature of Waray was initially received a great deal of acknowledgment and were highly appreciated by the people. The Waray written literature, poem and drama, were published in the local newspaper and were presented in the cultural celebration in this country. However, as English has spread very rapidly, and dominated all the controlling domains of society, such as government administration, education, science and technology, mass media, and international relations as suggested by Sibayan (1995, as cited by Sugbo, 2010), the Waray literature had suffered a setback. The writers started to write in English, and this English written literature began to replace the Waray literature in the newspapers.

V. THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH AS LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM

As we can see from the aforementioned cases of language death and language marginalization, it appears that English has restricted the opportunity of the non-English speakers to go ahead in the world unless they learn English. It lets other languages and cultures it dominated to become attributed to inferior, rural, powerless, and insignificant. Hence, it inevitably lets us to consider the spread of English as a linguistic imperialism. The notion of linguistic imperialism has been proposed by Phillipson (1996), and there has also been a perspective by Pennycook (1994)[10] which has similar view towards this language spread. The arguments mainly concern on the cultural and political impacts of the spread of English and the EIL teaching practice as a manifestation of linguistic Imperialism.

Phillipson and Pennycook are those who believed that the spread of English is not neutral. Pennycook, also make an argument about ELT practice that it is a practice of linguistic imperialism, trying to reveals the fact that from the beginning, the ELT was intentionally introduced by the British through the organizations such as The British Council to promote the British culture, language, and political system to the world which they assumed 'could counter the spread of European fascism' [10].

From their arguments, it can be inferred that sociologist such as Pennycook and Phillipson are departing from the social action perspective in viewing the social phenomena, as they see the society as a result of human meaning and action. A sociologists, Max Weber, who argues that 'ideas especially believe and values-have transforming power...., and the modern society as the product of, not just of new technology, and capitalism, but of a new way of thinking.'

VI. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Considering that the spread of English has also disadvantaged other languages and cultures, and that the ELT plays important role in accelerating the spread of the language, it seems important to rethink of what English teaching should look like. It is suggested that instead of perceiving English as International Language, it is preferable that ELT practitioner adopting the concept of English as lingua franca in which English is seen as a language of a world and language for communication, and thus, any other variants are acceptable. Jenkins (2007, p. 19) points out some differences of Global English Paradigm or English as International Language (EIL) paradigm and the World Englishes paradigm or English as Lingua Franca (ELF) paradigm. The former is attributed to 'assimilationist, monolingual orientation, "International" English assumes US/UK norms, World Standard spoken English, Anglo-American linguistic norms, Exonormative English, target norm the 'native speaker' and the teachers can be monolingual.' While the latter is said to 'celebrates and supports diversity, multilingual and multi-dialectical, "International": a cross-national linguistic common core, English as lingua franca, local linguistic norms, regional and national, endonormative Englishes, target norm the good ESL user, bilingual and bicultural teachers.' Therefore, by adopting this World English paradigm, it is expected to contribute a more supportive condition to the local language preservation.

VII. CONCLUSION

The Globalization of English has now been seen through a number of perspectives and point of views which reveals that it is not merely beneficial and neutral. It has social and political impacts including a threat to the existence of other languages especially the local minority language which it dominated. The extinction and the marginalization of other language has been shown to be the impacts of the rapid spread of English and its domination over the local minority language such as in the case of Celtic language in British Isles, Aboriginal language in Australia, and Waray literature in Philippines. In such cases, English serves an important role and is associated with a language of power, prestige, and modernization that any other language

speakers required to learn this language and shift to it in order to be included and counted in the social and economic development of the country.

Some sociologists and sociolinguists such as Phillipson and Pennycook, have perceived this as linguistic imperialism, arguing that the spread of English has cultural and political consequences that it benefits particular group of people, those whose mother tongue are English, but simultaneously disadvantages those whose mother tongue are not English and that the ELT is one manifestation of linguistic imperialism. It is said to have a hidden agenda of language

and cultural promotion of the British, which in consequence, threaten other languages and cultures.

As we can see in some cases above, the spread of English in some countries in the world contributes to the extinction and



marginalization of some minority language. However, it is not to over generalize that all language death are caused by the globalization of English. Rather, it is to show that in places such as Europe, Australia, and Philippines, the spread of English played important role in language attrition

and language death. Thus, the ELT practitioner needs to reconsider their teaching learning technique and methodology, and their paradigm towards the English in order to prepare students to a wider communication, simultaneously preserve their ethnic language and cultural identity.

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