

Reviews

Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching

A. Suresh Canagarajah
Oxford University Press 1999, 216pp., £19.95
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This highly political and thought-provoking book about post-colonial language education is a systematic investigation of the strategies employed by periphery students and teachers during everyday classroom interactions. Focusing on the Tamil community in Sri Lanka, the author highlights the complexities and the pedagogical challenges of English teaching in post-colonial communities (cf. Pennycook 1998). Most importantly, Canagarajah's conceptualization of the English language classroom as a cultural space where various agendas are negotiated and contested, and his proposal for a critical language pedagogy, disqualify views of ELT as technical and apolitical, and put forth the political complexity of language pedagogy.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first three outline theoretical, methodological, and historical concerns of the study. Positioning himself as a 'periphery subject', the author places his project within the tradition of resistance theories which aim 'to help subjects gain agency, conduct critical thinking, and initiate change' (p. 22). In the second chapter, there is a review of Phillipson's (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism*, the source of inspiration for the present book. However, in contrast with Phillipson's work, which follows a macro-social perspective, Canagarajah states that his emphasis is on the micro-social, everyday, encounters of the periphery classroom. Adopting a critical ethnographic approach, he foregrounds educational process as conflictual, and sets out to investigate relationships of contradiction, struggle, and resistance in periphery students' and teachers' discourse.

To this purpose, Chapter 3 provides an insightful account of the historical and sociocultural

conditions of colonial and post-colonial periods, and the role of English education within that context. Valuable and rare sources of vernacular texts embedded within the author's theoretical discourse and perspective reconstruct aspects of the colonial history and the locals' attitudes towards the English language. The author's detailed and significant description shows how the colonial experience, on the one hand, helped the development of the linguistic imperialism of English, while, on the other hand, it generated a tradition towards the resistance and appropriation of English.

The following four chapters deal primarily with analysis and interpretation of data. Chapter 4 focuses on periphery students' educational expectations and their ways of managing ideological tensions. Using the example of a widely-used textbook, the author shows how materials produced in the centre actually project centre ideologies, and are penetrated by views of language as an autonomous, value-free system that students should acquire in its standard forms. This chapter also includes an analysis of the comments students make in the margins of their books, which are suggested to provide insights into an 'underlife' in the classroom, since they 'symbolize the counter-discourses the students use to detach themselves from the ideologies of the textbook' (p. 91).

Chapter 5 presents the various coping and oppositional strategies employed by local teachers in their attempt to incorporate the task-based method in their teaching. Arguing that what teachers practise in the language classroom bears little resemblance to any specific method, as prescribed in manuals, the author connects the promotion of ELT instructional methods with the market of ELT publishing and the exportation of materials, programs, and teachers. Central to the author's frame of analysis is the notion of 'pedagogic appropriation'. Based on his research observation, Canagarajah argues that 'pedagogies are not received in their own terms, but

appropriated to different degrees in terms of the needs and values of the local communities' (pp.121–2).

The use of L1 in secondary-school ESL classrooms is the theme of Chapter 6. Following an illuminating presentation of contesting views on code-switching in SLA theories, the author brings examples from L1 use in the instructional process, in lesson content, and in student interaction, and concludes that—quite paradoxically—'accommodation of L1 in English classrooms does not hamper the acquisition of L2, but enhances it' (p. 143). Going against the monolingual fallacy of an anglocentric pedagogy and the local nationalist regime of a vernacular-only policy, both students and teachers are shown to construe, through their discursive practices, a hybrid plurilingual subjectivity, and to promote the development and legitimization of new 'Englishes'.

The negotiation of contrasting academic discourses in students' dissertations is explored in Chapter 7. According to the main argument developed in this chapter, students from multilingual and multicultural communities need a pedagogical strategy which goes beyond the mere exploration of features and forms of academic texts (cf. Christidis 1997). What is needed is a pedagogy which enables students to deal with conflicting academic discourses, raises their awareness of discursive tensions, and empowers them to negotiate effectively with competing discourses and to employ them creatively and critically.

Finally, Chapter 8 pulls together issues raised in the preceding chapters, and develops the author's proposal for a 'pedagogy of appropriation'. Arguing against the uncritical use of English which leads to accommodation or domination, and against the rejection of English which leads to marginalization, the author strongly supports the 'third way' of critical negotiation, which leads to empowerment. In this way, 'periphery students will become insiders and use the language in their own terms according to their own aspirations, needs, and values ... not as slaves, but as agents ... creatively and critically' (p. 176). To this end, students should be taught how to personally and communally appropriate centre and vernacular discourses to varying degrees in a way which is meaningful and relevant to their various needs.

Canagarajah suggests that all teachers need to become ethnographers, and start paying attention to their students' negotiation of texts, discourses, and codes inside the classroom, as well as to

'classroom underlife'. He argues in favour of a reflexive approach which demythologizes the hidden values and curricula, develops a metalinguistic awareness of the conflicting values and grammars behind English and the vernacular, encourages a reflexivity of classroom relations and subjectivities, and enables students 'to cross cultural and discursive borders' (p. 190).

What I particularly enjoyed while reading this book was the author's own appropriation of discourses. Moving away from the stiffness that academic language often entails, he creatively appropriates conventions and discourses, and develops a fresh and personal narrative of his ethnography. Several narrations of everyday classroom interactions found in different parts of the book provide the reader with insights of the Tamil community situation. Here the author's subjectivity as an insider to the local community, a point of critique in traditional ethnographic research, is appropriated in a way which proves to be advantageous to the purposes of the study, and to the overall aim of the book. Furthermore, the inclusion of a reply to a critique that the author has conducted at the end of Chapter 4, by the author of the textbook in question, constitutes another example of the author's appropriation of academic conventions.

In this book, the author develops a much needed inter-disciplinary approach in language education. He draws on various theories and on a wealth of sources. For the purposes of each individual chapter, there are informed uses of background reading and good documentation, drawing on ESL and SLA theories, critical pedagogy, academic literacy, periphery literature, and language study, to name just a few. Although generally rather successful, the connection between the theoretical review of ESL writing pedagogy approaches used to contextualize research findings and the author's ethnographic narration in Chapter 7 is less obvious than it has been in other parts of the book. Moreover, the author's interdisciplinary perspective, and his project to reveal different aspects of classroom interactions, have resulted in the presentation of diverse yet fragmentary data. For instance, generalizations concerning ELT materials in Chapter 4, although valuable, are drawn from one textbook only, and the use of students' comments in textbooks as oppositional strategies, although novel as a research project, is limited in its scope. It is perhaps a paradox for a book which focuses on classroom interaction not to include systematic and detailed analysis of classroom discourse. However, whatever this book

loses from fragmentary data, it earns back from its excellent and thorough analysis of social background, which situates the reader exactly in the atmosphere of a particular educational context.

In order to appreciate the theoretical and practical implications of this study, we have to put it in its wider theoretical framework. In the Introduction to the book, the author claims that 'the aim of the book [is] to develop *grounded theory* ... a thinking on language, culture, and pedagogy that is motivated by the lived reality and everyday experience of periphery subjects' (p. 5). Indeed, the author has built up his theory gradually from careful observation of the periphery ELT classroom. The final research which has been produced has been, among others, the effect of a reflexive interplay between diverse data (field notes, interviews, audio-recorded data, texts, and questionnaires), and the researcher's theoretical framework and literature review of related fields of study. Although valuable as a research method, grounded theory has been criticized for its overemphasis on empirical data to generate theory building. This claim, however, according to critical theorists, assumes an unproblematic relationship between the field and the researcher's theoretical stance, and underemphasizes the role of theory in knowledge production and the relationships between the data and the theoretical frameworks guiding the research (Chouliaraki 1995). Perhaps attributed to the above point is a noted unproblematic move from the micro-linguistic event in the language classroom to the social realm. By contextualizing discussion with specific references to aspects of the surrounding culture, the author moves from the linguistic to the social as if this were a transparent relationship filtered by contextual, historical, and sociocultural conditions. At a theoretical level, what is missing is a social theory of discourse which will provide a solution to the problem of connecting Discourse to discourses and to larger social processes and relations (Lemke 1995: 22).

Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in Language Teaching is not an easy book to read. It is disturbing at points, and challenges you to consider your own teaching practices. It is analytic, but also condensed, devoid of unnecessary words and redundant repetitions. It is excellent reading for all those involved in ELT from different capacities, such as applied linguists, language policy-makers, material developers, and, above all, teachers of English throughout the world. In the beginning of the book, the author clearly defines his use of the

term 'periphery' as including former British colonies and other communities belonging to the neo-imperialist thrusts of English-speaking centre communities. However, I would like to suggest that this book will also be a valuable reading for scholars and teachers in other parts of the world which constitute periphery communities, at least in the context of ELT, and where English is taught as a foreign language (Dendrinis 1997, 2001; Mitsikopoulou 1999, 2000).

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The reviewer

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An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching

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This is the 18th book in the *Learning about Language* series. The series editors, Professors Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, had dealt with many facets of language before they arrived at foreign language education. At last! But how does *An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching* fit into the academic climate of its predecessors in the series? Very well, I'm glad to say, making good the promise in the blurb, that '*An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching* presents an engaging, student-friendly guide to the fields of foreign language learning and teaching'.

Speaking of student friendliness, it is not always easy to achieve. In my experience, there are two types of bad textbooks. At one end of the spectrum is the textbook which is as difficult to digest as a Persian carpet. At the opposite end, we find texts written in such simple language that they seem to regard the readership as a bunch of mentally (and linguistically) retarded infants. However, Keith Johnson knows the ropes, and the result is a very fine book.

Another yardstick for classification is whether it is an edited or a single-author volume. Edited textbooks are motivated, I suspect, by the desire to evade responsibility: 'Look, our field has too many ramifications to tackle single-handedly', runs the editor's apologia. The trouble is that such textbooks, despite painstaking editorial work, tend to be uneven in terms of discourse, style, and content, and beset with gaps and overlaps. Single-author textbooks, on the other hand, are usually more coherent, and thus more apt to give a homogeneous picture of the intricate relationships between the components of TESOL. To be sure, Johnson's book is both well-informed and coherent.

An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching consists of three parts, which literally follow the constituent words of the title. Whereas

Part 1 is concerned with setting the scene, Parts 2 and 3 respectively deal with aspects of learning and teaching the foreign language. Each part is roughly 50 pages longer than the previous one, indicating, as it were, that the author's main focus is on teaching.

Part 1 illustrates the complexities of the teaching/learning operation by introducing five differently motivated learners, and five well-known teaching methods. 'OK, but what is there to learn?' the author then asks, and in reply provides a framework built around three competencies: systemic, sociolinguistic, and strategic. He goes on to clarify the conceptual dichotomy between behaviourism and mentalism, and the effect this conflict has on the practice of language teaching. Part 1 concludes with a brief description of the 'sociolinguistic revolution', which paved the way for the spread of communicative language teaching.

The pivotal theme of Part 2 is a comparative analysis of acquisition and learning. Using learners' errors as a springboard, the author presents Krashen's acquisition model and the critiques thereof, and Schumann's acculturation theory, and then examines the distinctive features of acquisition versus formal learning. Shifting the focus from the learning process to the learner's personality, the last two chapters of Part 2 respectively examine individual differences between learners, both cognitive and affective, and the issue of what being a 'good language learner' entails.

In Part 3, various aspects of language teaching are highlighted. First, we are taken on 'a brisk walk through recent times', from the grammar translation method to task-based teaching. After a brief examination of the political level of decision-making, issues of syllabus design are discussed, with the pride of place granted to the structural and the notional/functional syllabus. While the main concerns of the methodology chapter are the three Ps (the presentation, practice, and production of new language items), the skills chapter separately discusses comprehension and production skills, paying special attention to the development of the writing skill. Closing the teaching loop, as it were, the last chapter describes basic types and concepts of language testing, and ways of testing each specific language skill.

One laudable feature of the book is the author's balanced judgement of the role that theories and methods have played during the history of