RESEARCH ARTICLE

Socio-Economic Factors in English Language Teaching[1]

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ABSTRACT

English is used as a passport for a guaranteed success in life. High proficiency in English is seen to be essential for socio-economic development in India. The impact of globalisation and economic development has made English the 'language of opportunity' and a vital means of improving prospects for well-paid employment. During the last two decades the use of English for communicative purposes has not been confined only to the elite group of the society. The social profile of the students in acquisition of second Language points to reconsider the focus given to different aspects of language and the methods and techniques adopted in language teaching. Although second language learning is a complex phenomenon with different variables concerning the psychological factors of the learner and the socio-cultural elements of the contexts, the interactional approach to second language learning still ensures a successful method which makes sense in the language classroom. It calls for an approach that is sensitive to learners' subjective needs of social psychological nature.

Key Words: English, Second Language, sociolinguistics, Gender, Discourse

It is hard for a woman to define her feelings in language which is
chiefly made by men to express theirs-*Thomas Hardy*

English is used as a passport for a guaranteed success in life. High proficiency in English is seen to be essential for socio-economic development in India. The impact of globalization and economic development has made English the 'language of opportunity' and a vital means of improving prospects for well-paid employment. During the last two decades the use of English for communicative purposes has not been confined only to the elite group of the society. People from the middle class and lower middle classes are equally keen on learning and using it effectively. The demand for English has been sweeping almost all the fields of national life like politics, international relations and media, communication, travel and education. The advancement in science and technology and their use of new terminology have been showing an immediate impact on the language. Improved English language skills will enable the student community to keep abreast with recent developments in their respective fields. This is important in a lifelong learning perspective as it may enable the students to

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develop their competences needed in new areas related to their subjects and for job opportunities in an international environment.

English as a common mode and tongue which one can communicate makes a standard for a person in the society. But, students' especially female students from rural background lack in their communication skills because of their economic set back and the illiteracy of their parents. Even if they are educated they couldn't help their children in developing their language skills because they themselves lack in communication skills. This problem originated from the classroom as the students especially female students were poor in their writing and speaking skills, due to lack of exposure and proper basics in school level.

English language skills are seen as a resource which will allow for participation in the financial, political and knowledge economies which, today, are increasingly being conducted at a global level, and which therefore rely on modes of international communication. The impact of globalization is felt in the organization of the economy and of employment. The English language teaching (ELT) industry has in the past several years become a major cross-cultural, trans-cultural, and worldwide enterprise. English, ceased to be reliable given the great changes in the physical, technological, economic and migratory trajectories of the present era and, above all, the permanent status of English as official and national language in post-colonial regions. These regions also have native speakers of their own varieties of English, who, as the case may be, contribute equally to the global evolution and spread of the language as well.

The language policy in school education emerged as a political and social consensus, though established equality among the languages in school education, is somehow heading for a competitive bi / multilingualism in which the English language is (perceived to be) over taking Indian languages. On the contrary the quality of English language education in majority of Indian schools presents a very appalling picture. Teacher's language proficiency, exposure to language and materials are major concerns for quality English language learning. An analysis had been done on 2009 of curricular statements and syllabi of the states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland reveals how planning for language in education is not looked at holistically in terms of basic assumptions about language learning / acquisition (how language learning takes place), learner profiles and the contexts in which learning takes place, and the recent developments in language learning-teaching. Most states refuse to move beyond the good old structural approach of the 1950s and the 60s, while they stress for communication skills to help the learner for an upward movement. This, in reality, reveals the paradoxical situations of an English language education which would further place the rural learner in a very disadvantaged situation.

The Second language learning, which is associated with Teaching, Development and Instructions, is complex socio-cultural phenomenon with different variables concerning the psychological factors of the learners and the socio-cultural elements of the contexts .An interactional approach to second language learning can ensure that a social perspective of second language development and instruction contributes having a positive effect on the nature and quality of language learning, which activates the autonomous learning motivation and creates diversity in the learning atmosphere. Recently research on developing socio-cultural and linguistic competence simultaneously in the language classroom is gaining increasing attention from English Foreign Language practitioners &curriculum designers. The understanding of language as a social phenomenon has increased greatly because of language teaching classrooms are diversified with learners, teachers, institutions, cultures, contexts and pedagogies.

Sociolinguistics, which concerns the field that studies the relation between language and society, between the uses of language and the social structures in which the users of language live examines how social issues affect language use in a particular society, how the same language varies from different variables as well as how particular cultures prefer some kinds of language over others. Sociolinguistics also explores how language is used in face-to-face communication and interaction.

Languages are learned in social contexts because language is a bonding component of the social mechanism. There is a strong influence from social aspects concerned with the special relation of culture, family background and learner. Recent theoretical research on second language learning of any kind taking place in a social context includes components of social integration and sufficient contacts with the second

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language group and of foundations in socio-cultural theory and ethnographic practice. Social factors are therefore, assumed to influence second language learning in two essential ways the social provision of language learning situations and opportunities as well as the consistent increasing of intrapersonal variation.

A social perspective of second language acquisition focuses on the learning process with the goal of exploring the kinds of classroom tasks that appear to facilitate second language learning. The purpose of these tasks is to take into account the interplay between the content of the curriculum and the process by which it is realized. Therefore, in the process of accomplishing instructional objectives, classroom interactive processes take place among the participants and lead to the creation of a whole range of learning opportunities which may cause many unexpected contributions, thus creating great advantages considered to be the realization of communicative competence as well as performance in relevant social situation.

According to the National Knowledge Commission 2006, an advisory body to the Prime Minister of India has the objective of transforming India into knowledge society. It addresses five focus areas of knowledge paradigm: Access- easy access to knowledge; concepts- all levels and forms of education; creation-effective creation of knowledge; application of knowledge systems; and services-like e-governance. The commission says:

> In a multilingual country like India language is relevant not only as a means of communication or a medium of instruction but also as a determinant of access. Increasingly an understanding of, and a command over the English language, is perhaps becoming the most important determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities. School leavers ho are not adequately trained in English as a language is always at a handicap in the world of higher education. And those who do not know English well enough, find it exceedingly difficult to compete for a place in our premier educational institutions. This disadvantage is accentuated further in the world of work, not only in professional occupations but also in white-collar occupations. (http//knowledgecommission.gov.in)

The Working Group on Language Policy in the Knowledge Commission says that for creating suitable ground conditions for India to become a knowledge society in the new millennium, it is essential to make the best possible school education available to all sections of society, bridging the gap between English medium and regional language medium instruction and that between the rural and the urban as well as the government school and privately run schools.

The urban context in India, the city metropolis are changing with blooming of a fast growing network of private colleges with hiked fee patterns with the promise of offering English medium education. However, the quality of experiences they provide to students at the tertiary level is far from satisfactory. Usha Prasad's study, focusing on "Learner Strategies in the Large Classroom at the Tertiary level" summarizes an important feature of the tertiary level classes in India. In the study the researcher's profile of the large classes reads like this:

> A small enclosed place, a large group of heterogeneous, unmotivated and passive learners numbering
from 50 on a lan day about 150-200 on a peak day…(Usha Prasad, 178)
The largeness of the class may be due to she says, lack of space or few teachers and also:
> …indifferent attitude toward English as compared to the greater importance given to scientific and technical subjects. As a result, English is sidelined and students who have opted for various subjects are herded together in the English class making it large and unmanageable for the teacher.(Usha Prasad, 178)
> The teacher in this situation is therefore reduced to the role of a performer and a classroom manager, and the learner is almost always passive. A further issue at this level is a lot of learners who have studied their schooling and Junior college in the vernacular or regional medium, suddenly encounter the problem of coping with English medium instruction for the first time , as a result of which they fall under the category of low achievers. (Eapen 1987)

The tertiary level is significant since it is a turning point which leads to job opportunities and higher education, and English becomes a qualification in itself, the proficiency in which takes them places in terms of

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working conditions, pay packages or in other words, a better condition of life itself. At third level a lot of students shift and try to cope up with English medium education for the first time because somebody's encouragement because of a new awareness of th predicament that glares at them at this point. The falling standards in the proficiency levels of English at both school and the undergraduate levels resulting in students being ill equipped for jobs which require knowledge of English, the English curriculum at these levels has been revised by experts.

The earlier curriculum, which was characterized by a heavily content based syllabus, Has been complimented by a text dealing with listening and speaking, and thus aims at enabling students acquire the communicative use of English. The traditional anthologies of English pots, playwrights, and short story writers, specially prepared to introduce the learners to the best literature, have been complemented with contemporary authentic texts of different kind suitable texts of different kind suitable for functional language teaching.

The social perspective of second language development encourages interactive learning. By learning interactively or collaboratively，learners are assigned to learn by group or pair work, in which they participate and support each other. This increases opportunities for the learners to talk. Hence, the learner is an active part of the classroom planning rather than just an inactive passively fed receiver a social perspective of second language development contributes to setting up a climate of mutual learning both for the teacher and the learners, which activates the autonomous learning motivation and creates diversity in the learning atmosphere. This is determined by learners' individual differences such as aptitude, attitudes, and motivation. Though undeniably psychological phenomena, these differences cannot be explained on purely mental grounds.

> "The original impetus in L2 motivation research comes from the social psychology since learning the language of another community simply cannot be separated from the learners' social dispositions towards the speech community in question (Moiinvaziri, 2008, p.126)".

This is because an ESL/EFL learner's motivation in language learning is affected by his/her attitudes towards learning the language. The relation between motivation and attitudes has been considered a prime concern in language learning research.

The attitudes play an eminent role in determining one's behavior, as the attitude has animpetus act which stimulates the behavior and directs it in a particular direction. Attitudes are somewhat indirectly related to second language achievement. Improving the positive attitude of the students towards a particular academic subject may increase their desire to learn it, and an ability to apply what they have been taught, as well as an improvement in remembrance. Baker (1992, p.10) defines attitude "a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behaviour". Karahan (2007, p.84) avers that "positive language attitudes let learner have positive orientation towards learning English". Researchers, teachers and learners agree that a high motivation and a positive attitude towardsa second language and its community help second language learning. In other words, all who are concerned, agree that high motivation and positive attitudes towards a language, its culture and people help to achieve a certain goal.

As such, attitudes may play a very crucial role in language learning as they would appear to influence students' success or failure in their learning, but the question is how they could be measured. Gardner and Lambert (1972) in *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning* postulate the theory in brief: This theory, maintains that the successful learner of a second language must be psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behavior which characterize members of another linguistic-cultural group. The learner's ethnocentric tendencies and his attitudes toward the members of the other group are believed to determine how successful he will be, relatively learning the language. His motivation to learn is thought to be determined by his attitudes toward the other group in particular and toward the learning task itself. Social networks the speakers form, tends to influence their language choices. This in turn facilitates language change. Power relation also plays a major role in the influence and change in the language. Therefore language can be powerful in one domain and less powerful in the other. The influence of language on each other should not be ignored. There is a need to highlight those divergences and place them under close scrutiny. It has been said

that Indians have made English a native language with its own linguistic and cultural ecologies and socio-cultural contexts. This language change is dictated by the social and pragmatic factors but other factors such as power, identity, age, and gender play a major role.

Men and Women use language in a wider sense, that is, in social interaction and to achieve certain ends, clues are found for possible explanations for the differences encountered . Kramer's analysis of how women are presented in a set of cartoons produced some interesting findings. The cartoons were taken from thirteen issues of *The New Yorker* magazine published between February 17 and May 12, 1973. The analysis showed that, when both genders were represented in the cartoon, men spoke twice as much as women. In the cartoons men and women also spoke on different topics, with men holding forth on such topics as business, politics, legal matters, taxes, and sports, and women on social life, books, food and drink, life's troubles, and lifestyle. Women spoke less forcefully than men, and men swore much more than women. Men were also more blunt and to the point in their speaking. There was also some evidence that the use of words like *nice* and *pretty* was gender-linked. Although such cartoons are not actual records of what happens in speech, they must be based on what people think happens if they are to be effective. They make use of the stereotypes we have about the speech of men and women.

In conversations involving both men and women many researchers agree that men speak more than women do. One also found that when men talked to men, the content categories of such talk focused on competition and teasing, sports, aggression, and doing things. On the other hand, when women talked to women, the equivalent categories were the self, feelings, affiliation with others, home, and family. Women are also reported to use more polite forms and more compliments than men. In doing so, they are said to be seeking to develop solidarity with others in order to maintain social relationships. On the other hand, men are likely to use talk to get things done. However, these are tendencies only; men also try to bond and women also try to move others to action.

When the two genders interacted, men tended to take the initiative in conversation, but there seemed to be a desire to achieve some kind of accommodation so far as topics were concerned: the men spoke less aggressively and competitively and the women reduced their amount of talk about home and family. Language behavior reflects male dominance. Men use what power they have to dominate each other and, of course, women, and, if women are to succeed in such a system, they must learn to dominate others too, women included. Men constantly try to take control, to specify topics, to interrupt, and so on. They do it with each other and they do it with women, who, feeling powerless, let them get away with it, preferring instead to seek support from other women. Consequently, since women are relatively powerless they opt for more prestigious language forms to protect themselves in dealing with the more powerful. At the same time the use of such forms serves to mark them off from equally powerless males of the same social class. Women may also have weaker social networks than men but they show a greater sensitivity to language forms, especially standard ones. men's and women's speech differ because boys and girls are brought up differently and men and women often fill different roles in society. Moreover, most men and women know this and behave accordingly. If such is the case, we might expect changes that make a language less sexist to result from child-rearing practices and role differentiations which are less sexist.

Language behavior is largely learned behavior. Men learn to be men and women learn to be women, linguistically speaking. Society subjects them to different life experiences. This is often referred to as the *difference* view as opposed to the *dominance* view just mentioned. Maltz and Borker (1982) propose that, in North America at least, men and women come from different sociolinguistic sub-cultures. They have learned to do different things with language, particularly in conversation, and when the two genders try to communicate with each other, the result may be miscommunication. The *mhmm* a woman uses quite frequently means only 'I'm listening,' whereas the *mhmm* a man uses, but much less frequently, tends to mean 'I'm agreeing. 'Consequently, men often believe that 'women are always agreeing with them and then conclude that it's impossible to tell what a woman really thinks,' whereas 'women . . . get upset with men who never seem to be listening' (p. 202).They conclude that women and men observe different rules in conversing and that in cross-gender talk the rules often conflict. The genders have different views of what questioning is

all about, women viewing questions as part of conversational maintenance and men primarily as requests for information; different conventions for linking; different views of what is or is not 'aggressive' linguistic behavior, with women regarding any sign of aggression as personally directed, negative, and disruptive, and men as just one way of organizing a conversation In various interesting and entertaining accounts, Tannen has tried to show how girls and boys are brought up differently. Part of the socialization process is learning not only gender-related activities and attitudes but gender related language behavior. Gender differences in language become established early and are then used to support the kinds of social behavior males and females exhibit. It is mainly when males and females interact that the behavior each uses separately becomes noticeable. As Holmes (1992, p. 330) says, the differences between women and men in ways of interacting may be the result of different socialization and acculturation patterns.

Some gender discourses closely linked English have great potential to influence learners' investments and decisions. These discourses shape learners' desires as well as their images of themselves; their futures; and their social educational and economic opportunities. Several recent studies indicate that many young women around the world consider English to be intrinsically linked to feminism and are motivated to learn it as a language of empowerment. At present many women than men appear to be interested in learning English training English language-related professions, and travelling to English –speaking countries. For these women, English offers an entry into the job market as well as possible way of liberating themselves from the confines of patriarchy. These women state that English is much better suited to express their personal motions, views, and newly acquired critical consciousness.

The social profile of the students in acquisition of second Language points to reconsider the focus given to different aspects of language and the methods and techniques adopted in language teaching. Although second language learning is a complex phenomenon with different variables concerning the psychological factors of the learner and the socio-cultural elements of the contexts, the interactional approach to second language learning still ensures a successful method which makes sense in the language classroom. It calls for an approach that is sensitive to learners' subjective needs of social psychological nature.

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