

profession as a whole has become socio-politically conscious is one of the outcomes of this shift. However, this change in orientation and concern with what is social and political does not mean that the individual is left out of the equation. Another characteristic of this paradigm shift is, in fact, a preoccupation with individual learners and what they are entitled to educationally, politically, and socially. Respect for the individual, and especially for those who were hitherto marginalized and neglected, is one of the outstanding features of the current viewpoint. This individuality is for both teachers and learners, and unlike the previous trends in which only the students were the focus of attention, this time both instructors and learners have been viewed as marginalized, worthy of more respect and attention.

Another feature of the current trend is assigning priority to practical knowledge vs. purely academic one. Instead of adopting a top-down perspective in which knowledge is generated somewhere else (in universities, not in classrooms, for example), the current trend regards classrooms as the focal points of knowledge generation, hypothesis formation and theory creation. This proximity of theory and practice is a welcome event which will undoubtedly result in some positive practical outcomes in the future.

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The main argument Widdowson makes is based on the fact that the reality of a language classroom is itself a composite of different sources of reality (a classroom is, in fact, a place where social, educational, psychological, pedagogical, as well as linguistic realities come into contact). In this composite reality, linguistics is just one source, and hence it has no supremacy over the other disciplines or realities which have also claims to what takes place in a classroom. The job of an applied linguist, therefore, is not the application of linguistic theories; an applied linguist will act as a mediator between the practicalities of classroom and different sources of reality which can contribute to the improvement of classroom practice. For Widdowson, in fact, the unthinking application of linguistic theories to classroom problems is "misapplied linguistics" (Widdowson, 2000a:6). To support this mediation argument, Widdowson (2000b) makes a distinction between language subject and language object. Widdowson argues that language for a linguist is the object he/she is investigating and studying, while for a language teacher or applied linguist, language is the subject which must be taught. These are two different perspectives which require the interpretive role of the applied linguist.

In this view, no matter how much linguistics has succeeded in getting closer to the reality of language use (and distancing itself from the sterile, decontextualized version of linguistics promoted by Chomsky and his followers), it is still a long way from the way language is perceived and used in the classroom. Many linguists, in recent years, have come to the conclusion that formal linguistics, in the way Chomsky is portraying it, neglects some basic communicative features of language which are of essential importance, if we are going to have a relatively better understanding of what it is and

how it operates. This realization has resulted in the rise of linguistic approaches which look at language in context and as instances of performance. However, in spite of the progress made in linguistics in adopting a more realistic view, the view of language in applied linguistics is different from the one advocated by linguists. To demonstrate the point, Widdowson refers to the concept of authenticity, arguing that authenticity is not a feature of the language we are dealing with; rather it is the ability of the users of language to see communicative significance in a piece of language produced. Sometimes an "inauthentic" piece of language seems more relevant to the educational task at hand since it can demonstrate the teaching objective more clearly and unambiguously.

The movement within applied linguistics, it seems, is placing it in its educational context rather than a linguistic one. Applied linguistics is now developing its own principles and guidelines which will help it to become an autonomous field of study. In addition, it is becoming more sophisticated by including more sources of data and reality in its scope.

## Conclusion

A quick look at the brief accounts provided in this short article shows that language teaching is now exploring some areas which were not approached in the past. Although it is still dealing with some recurrent problems (how to teach grammar, for instance), it has become socially and politically more responsible and conscious.

At the beginning of the article, reference was made to a paradigm shift in the sense used by Kuhn. The shift in paradigm is due to the change of scope observed in modern language teaching literature and a concern for disciplines and issues previously regarded as irrelevant by both practitioners and theoreticians. The fact that the

insights in matters related to their own teaching context.

Reflective teaching is not without its flaws, of course. To begin with, there is no substantial body of research to show that reflective teaching actually leads to better learning outcomes on the part of the learners. In addition, the fact that teachers are assigned the responsibility, as well as the authority, to solve their own practical problems means that they have to deal with some extra workload in addition to their classroom handling and preparation. Moreover, reflective teaching is impervious to the individual differences which exist among teachers with regards to their tendency or willingness to reflect on what has taken place in their classes.

### **A new view of applied linguistics**

Language teaching has always been viewed as one of the branches of applied linguistics. In fact, some universities name their teaching degrees at MA and PhD as degrees in applied linguistics, not language teaching.

Applied linguistics is defined by Davis (1999:1) as “ameliorat [ion of] social problems involving language”, that is, whenever there is a problem in which language plays the central role, applied linguistics would be called upon to address the issue. Since teaching a foreign language takes place in a social setting, then applied linguistics has the authority to deal with issues ranging from errors to the type of tests used for assessing learners’ progress or proficiency.

A common misunderstanding which has afflicted language teaching is the assumption that since applied linguistics includes the term “linguistics”, then linguistics is the parent and the sole discipline which must be consulted

whenever there is a learning/teaching difficulty. This faulty assumption has resulted in the unjustified dominance of linguistics in language teacher training programs and related discussions.

Some voices of dissent are heard, however. Widdowson (2000a) and De Beaugrande (1997) can be cited as two examples of opposition to the dominance of linguistics in language teaching circles.

De Beaugrande deals with the plight of theoretical linguistics in language teaching, regarding the validity of linguistic claims of little value in the teaching profession. He is dissatisfied with the leading role theory has assumed in language teaching, due to the fact that such a purely theoretical approach is undemocratic and invalid:

...theory has typically taken over the leading role and at times has been disconnected from practice altogether. This tactic allows a society or its institutions, especially education, to maintain an official theory of humanity, equality, and efficiency, while also maintaining practices that are symptomatically inhumane, unequal, and inefficient and which consistently favor elite groups. (1997:279)

In his viewpoint, theoretical linguistics, which is also the kind of linguistics emphasized and promoted in our country (the best example of which is Chomskian linguistics) is having serious problems of validity since the measure of validity for a theory is “how far it is applicable to practice” (ibid.). Since linguistics is helpless in matters of practice, related to what is taking place in the classroom, it can no longer claim leadership as the parent discipline in language teacher preparation programs.



quoted in Griffith, 2000:540). In this process, according to Dewey, two skills of observation and reasoning play a vital role.

Another thinker who can be given credit for the concept of reflective teaching is Donald Schon. For Schon, reflective practice in education is the process by means of which newcomers to the teaching profession can recognize consonance between their own practice and that of successful practitioners (Schon, 1996). In this process, novice teachers carefully consider their own practice in applying knowledge while being supervised and coached by the professionals of the field (Ferraro, 2000).

The tools of reflection are journals and recordings of the classroom procedures (Richards and Lockhart, 1996). Journals are narratives and commentaries prepared by the teachers dealing with what has taken place in the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to record all problematic incidents they have encountered in the class, reflect upon those events, and try to find the solutions to the problems. Teachers can also use audio or video recording of their

activities in the class for reflective purposes.

Reflective teaching is believed to be a more democratic approach to teacher training compared to the available traditional methods (Halliday 1998). Teachers would be able to rely upon their own professional knowledge and this reliance will develop their sense of autonomy. Teachers will no longer be slaves to theories which might not have any immediate application in their classes, they will be able to practice what they theorize and theorize what they practice (Johnson 1996). In this approach, teachers will perform the role of both instructors and researchers; they would pay attention to hot spots in their teaching and through action research (a simplified, practical form of research in which teachers identify the problem in the immediate context in which they work, hypothesize a solution to that problem, and try out the solution in practice to see whether it works or not) decide on the best course of practice. As it is evident here, teachers will no longer be dependent on academics for finding solutions to their own practical problems; reflective teaching will give them the confidence to rely on their practical

headquarters in Britain and the USA, countries which are renowned for their backwardness in foreign language learning” (p.5). Linguistic imperialism, simply put, deals with exposing the absurdity behind such premises.

One of the mechanisms by means of which countries of the center (center countries are those which form the core of native English speakers nations, such as the USA, England, Australia, and Canada) have been able to maintain this preposterous dominance and leadership has been through the creation of the sense of professionalism in the field, which is based on pure academic speculations and in many cases devoid of empirical support. Since ELT scholars had no real knowledge of what was actually taking place in other countries in which English was taught as a foreign language, they had to resort to the invention and promotion of theoretical knowledge which is basically of a linguistic nature. Through the creation and application of theories which were thousands of miles away from the realities of EFL classroom, center scholars could secure leadership in the profession, making big publishers their economic allies. The result of this center dominance, among many other negative consequences, is “the refusal to grant an active role to the students” first language in the learning and acquisition of English, the marginalization of ‘non-native’ English teachers, and the insensitive negativity shown by the pedagogies and discourses towards indigenous cultural traditions” (Canagarajah, 1999:3).

Some voices of resistance are heard, nevertheless. Some people have started to question the validity of the ownership claim made by the center countries (Kachru and Nelson, 1996) and it is not now uncommon to hear the term “world Englishes”, a phrase which

acknowledges the geographical diversity of the language. And even in countries where no overt resistance is shown to this dominance of the center (such as our own), some modifications in syllabus or textbook structures can be viewed as measures to counter this silent hegemony.

In a nutshell, linguistic imperialism deals with the ways the spread of English is serving the economic and political interests of the center countries, as well as the role English language teachers play as the foot soldiers of this conquest. Language teachers must be aware of the fact that in addition to teaching grammar, vocabulary, and learning strategies, they are also teaching “a hidden curriculum of values, ideologies, and thinking which can mold alternate identities... among the students” (Canagarajah, 1999:14).

### **Reflective teaching**

Reflective teaching is a term frequently used by teacher trainers in education for referring to thinking about one’s knowledge in practice and ways to improve teaching in the classroom. The idea is supposed to make teachers more autonomous in what they do in their classes; making them more confident in addressing the learning/teaching difficulties they experience while teaching (Ferraro, 2000).

The roots of reflective teaching go back to John Dewey, and his classification of behavior into three groups of impulsive, routine, and reflective (Griffiths, 2000). Impulsive action is one which is based on trial and error and without any thinking, this is the kind of behavior that will also help us to biologically survive; routine action is based on authority and tradition, and reflective action is one which is based on “the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it” (Dewey, 1933:9,

the everyday lives of the students exposed to that education. In simple terms, we can say that critical pedagogy is the rejection of the current order of things in favor of a potentially more democratic and humane one.

The question might arise now as to how this new educational trend or philosophy is of relevance to foreign language teaching in general and to the situation of our country in particular. The answer is quite obvious: the same unfair practices which are observed in mainstream education are also at work in language teaching circles. In other words, the same forces of conformity, subjugation, and unfair advantage for the middle classes are at work in EFL as well. If language teachers do some retrospection, they will realize that there are many instances in which they have been perpetuating the gap between the rich and the poor by providing education which is useful and relevant to the middle class members of the society and of no real practical application to the disadvantaged and marginalized groups. These are usually the kids from middle and upper class families who can afford to learn an additional language, and our educational system is designed in such a way to guarantee that these kids will get the best jobs (in which knowledge of an additional language is an asset) and at the same time to make sure that kids in the working class segment of the society remain where they are and get the least relevant form of education of benefit in their immediate and future life.

### **Linguistic imperialism**

A discerning reader will notice, based on what has been presented so far, that language teaching is becoming more socially and politically conscious in its dealing with the curriculum and what takes place in the classroom. A very good proof of this claim is the concept of linguistic

imperialism, which tries to sensitize language teachers to the political complications of what they do in the classroom.

A systematic treatment of the concept of linguistic imperialism, or the politics of exploitation which is behind the promotion of English as the world lingua franca, was presented by Phillipson (1992). One of the most recent treatments of the topic in language teaching is the book by Canagarajah (1999).

There are two simple premises behind linguistic imperialism. The first is the fact that the rise of English as the world's number one international language is not just a matter of accident or due to the inherent merits of English. Lots of political and financial mechanisms have been at work in the promotion of English as the language of science, international trade, and world politics. Many international organizations which have their headquarters in Anglophone countries have contributed to this rise (such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund). In addition, one must not forget the colonial history of English in countries such as India, New Guinea, Jamaica, Nigeria, etc... as well as the aid packages, parts of which are spent on ELT education in recipient countries. The second premise in linguistic imperialism is related to the apparent leadership of USA, England, and some other English speaking countries in ELT profession. The countries which are now the home of many ELT scholars and produce the biggest amount of literature on the subject are basically monolingual, with little or no experience in additional language learning (save for Canada, which is a bilingual country), and almost all of these countries have been following a repressive monolingual policy. In words of Phillipson (1992), "it is... ironic that this transnational business [that is, ELT] has its

to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society” (p.9). More specifically, “...critical work in general has focused on issues of class, race, or gender, in which relations of power and inequality are often at their most obvious in terms of both social or structural inequity” (Pennycook, 1999:331)

The simple argument behind critical pedagogy is this: Educational systems (at almost all levels, from primary to higher education) are designed and written by people who belong to the middle classes of the societies they come from. As a result, these people will (inadvertently) impose their middle class values on the curriculum, taking middle class children as their target audience. These middle class values and attitudes, however, are alien to those kids and learners who come from working/marginalized segments of the society; resulting in their failure due to the unfair initial assumption taken by the designers of educational programs. To put it bluntly, the mainstream educational system in many countries (including our own) is designed in such a way that the poor will remain poor (or subservient to ruling middle classes) and the middle classes and the elites will be guaranteed a privileged position.

Two people can be given credit for raising this issue in education: Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux (1988, for instance). Freire is a Brazilian educator who can be viewed as the founding father of critical pedagogy. He was regarded as a rebel and revolutionary in his own country, and as result, was persecuted and sent to exile to Chile and the US. In his writings, he has always emphasized the importance of the sociopolitical context which is part and parcel of any educational endeavor. Henry Giroux has been one of Freire’s students, and he is now currently teaching at Penn State University, US.

To understand the non-technical philosophy behind the concept of critical pedagogy, there are some terms which should be explained first. The first concept of central significance is *change*. According to Freire (Freire and Macedo, 1987), any sound educational system should bring about positive developments and changes into the lives of students. These changes will result in *human emancipation* from the social constraints imposed by sources of *power*.

Critical pedagogy, in a sense is the rejection of how things are at present, it is against the *violent process of normalization* in which marginalized groups are deprived of their *voice* and develop the misconception that their knowledge is not legitimate enough to be represented. In other words, critical pedagogy is against the idea that all the people should accept and adopt the standards of the dominant ruling middle class elites; critical pedagogy, in a sense, is against the educational forces which try to make all the people conform to the norms and ideals of middle class educationalists. Through this process of normalization, it is argued, the individuality of the students are crushed and they become subjugated to the forces imposed from the top.

Another key concept in critical pedagogy is *possibility* (a term mentioned in the post method section as well). Critical pedagogy is not much concerned with how things are at the present, it is basically concerned with the not yet realized, it is concerned with the potential, or the possibility of change and development. To put it differently, critical pedagogy tries to bring about social change through highlighting the potential and possibility of change through educational systems. Any kind of education, it is argued, should be purposeful and relevant to



# RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: A BRIEF REVIEW

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مقاله‌ی حاضر که بخش اول آن در شماره‌ی پیشین چاپ شد، مروری است بر دیدگاه‌های جدید در آموزش زبان انگلیسی که طی دو دهه‌ی اخیر مطرح شده است. مؤلف در ادامه‌ی بحث، اشاراتی دارد به آموزش انتقادی، امپریالیسم زبانی، تدریس تفکری و زبان‌شناسی کاربردی.

## چکیده

آموزش زبان انگلیسی در سال‌های اخیر تحولات چشمگیری را شاهد بوده است. با وجود این، بسیاری از این تحولات برای معلمان ایرانی ناشناخته‌اند و هنوز راهی به بحث‌های عملی یا نظری کشور نیافته‌اند. در این مقاله سعی شده است، برخی از این تغییرات مورد بررسی قرار بگیرند. کلید واژه‌ها: امپریالیسم زبانی، آموزش انتقادی، تدریس تفکری، زبان‌شناسی کاربردی.

## Abstract

Foreign language teaching has witnessed some positive changes in the course of the last two decades, specially during 1990s. Some of these changes, however, have not been well represented in our country, and many language teachers are not aware of the latest debates and developments in the ELT profession.

**Key Words:** critical pedagogy, linguistic imperialism, reflective teaching, applied linguistics

## Critical pedagogy

Another development in our field is related to the political dimension of education, and the fact that education is not always a neutral, beneficial activity to many. In other words, what critical pedagogy is trying to highlight is the

unfair process of education for many people who are marginalized or disadvantaged. In the words of Pennycook (1990), critical pedagogy “seeks to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only