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The Provision of English as a Second Language as Part of the NZAID Package.

Discussed in the Context
of English as a World Language.

A thesis completed in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Masters of Philosophy in Development Studies at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

by

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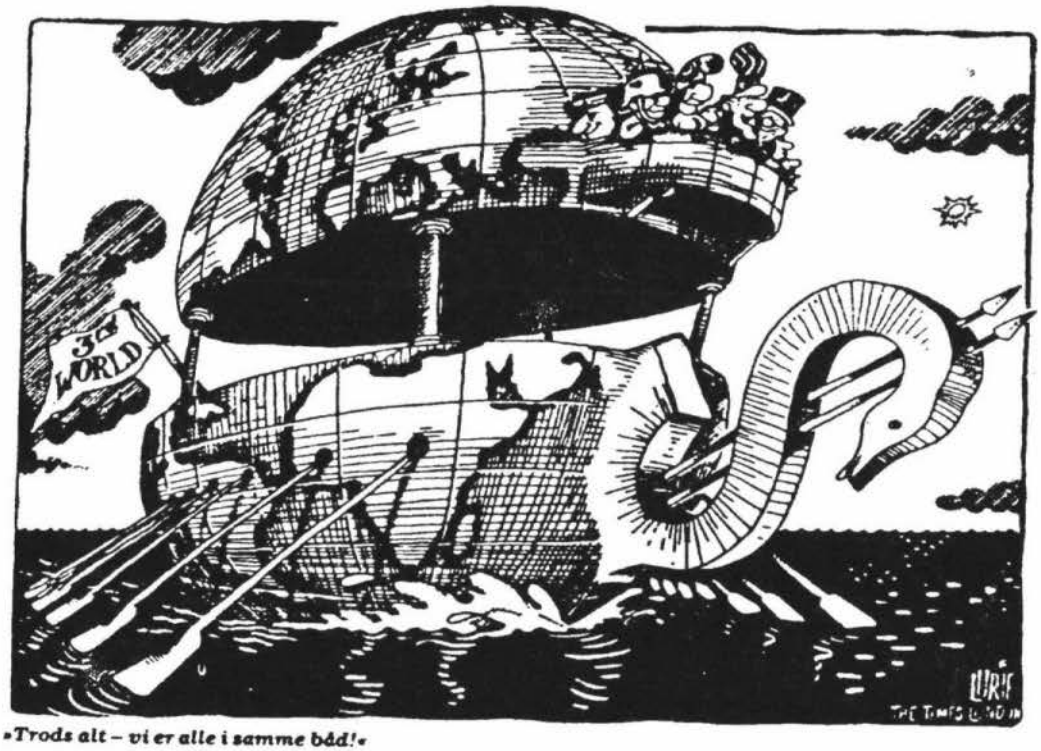
2004



»Trods alt – vi er alle i samme båd!«

"Despite everything, we're all in the same boat."

(Source: Morgenavisen / Jyllandsposten, April 27, 1983; Drawing by Lurie, The Times in Jacob Mey. Whose Language: A Study in Linguistic Pragmatics Benjamin Paperbacks, 1985)

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Introduction

It has been the aim of the nation state ideology, and nation building, to emulate a singular language and a singular culture as a means to achieving national identity and uniformity.

> While the homogenisation of language practices across the globe may have been regrettable, it was somehow seen as inevitable and natural. This idea stemmed from the belief that difference was abnormal and so monolingualism natural.
>
> (O'Driscoll, 2001, p. 488)

The nation state ideology did not stop there and has spilled over into the global sphere. Individual nations are now encouraged to belong to the global world. Monolingualism is an argument that needs to be discussed within this context. Is it right to continue to believe that one unifying language will assist in the unification of nations or should we now be discussing alternatives to this ideology that for some has meant destruction to diversity?

> It is clear that despite increasing demographic diversity, the imperatives of cultural and linguistic homogeneity continue to dominate the development and maintenance of public policy. This is the historical aim of nation states...the adoption of a common language for all citizens...but it is invariably that of the dominant ethnic group and at the expense of all other languages
>
> (May, 2002, p. 24)

The provision of English language teacher training and teaching is part of the aid package that is offered by NZAID to our aid recipient nations. In so doing, the question needs to be asked whether this contribution is facilitating a loss or a gain for New Zealand's aid recipients. In providing the instruction of English and training teachers in recipient nations to teach English are we encouraging the dominance of one language, English, over all others?

This is the first question that this research project examines. The second is the examination of the English language itself, and that is if it is to continue to be used as a means for communication between nations and nationals internationally and intra-nationally, and as such be afforded the status 'world language'.

Language learning and the role it plays in the organisation and presentation of knowledge, forms an integral part of one's learning and representation of one's learning ability. An articulate user of language is afforded the title of 'intelligent' and knowledgeable in our society.

The perfection of communication therefore would encompass the ability to transmit all knowledge that one individual has to another. A point of discussion might be, 'What would constitute the perfection of language?' Should humanity be in pursuit of the perfection of one language or many as a representation of its knowledge base or bases? And if perfection is to be measured, is that done by assessing the level of diversity at which one can function in one language or in many? Is language competence measured in terms of ...

...accuracy and or fluency?
...communicative competence, in one or many languages?
...one language incorporating facets of other languages?

To be able to speak a language consistent with those who speak it as their first language was and still is considered by some as being the ideal. This idea of mimicry of 'native competency' tends to influence language towards a uniform standard. The belief in 'standardisation and uniformity' of 'Western' language began in the late 19th century. The question that now arises is whether this standard suits the societies in which we live in today, and those of future generations. Is standardisation and uniformity what we should be aiming for, or does commonality rest in the recognition and celebration of individual diversity? Cultural identity provides an anchor for people's self-identification and the safety of effortless secure belonging. (Kymlicka, 1995, p.89)

If English, as a second, other, different, foreign or world language, is to be implicated in the larger social processes of multiculturalism and cultural practices 'the corrective is not to eliminate the connection between differences in favour of (uniformity or) purity, but to seek an holistic pedagogy that will enable learners and speakers of English to engage in a far richer (educational) experience.' (Canagarajah, 2000, p. 173).

Life is played forward but understood backward.

The pedagogy that shaped English Language Teaching (ELT) is a result of many influences; political, educational and cultural. These influences have meant that English has grown and developed as any living language should. Some of that development has been shaped by specific design, some of it by accident. By accident or design; has that led to a system of English teaching, learning and use that is representative of its users? As, unlike most other languages, English has crossed many more geographical, social and cultural boundaries and borders. In doing so it has not always been representative of the function and importance of the indigenous languages and cultures that it has encountered along the way.

If English language is to continue to be part of NZAID provision, examination of what constitutes effective language learning needs to be examined. This then needs to be placed within the historical, economic, political and educational framework which has shaped ESOL to date.

English language teaching as a second language has deep roots in the colonial era. This bears relevance to its present position and status and is covered in the body of the thesis. Understanding of the past allows insight into what is practised today. But to refer too heavily to historical influence and not to give enough weight to present and future influences does not effectuate change that pertains to present and future parameters. For that reason the colonial influence on English language teaching is mentioned in this thesis but more relevance has been given to the concept of where to from here.

More relevance has been placed on language and language learning and the representation of knowledge. The cost of language instruction on indigenous languages and cultures in the context of our globalised economies and politics also plays a considerable part in the question: Where is ESOL teaching leading us? Is it back to the conformity and standards promoted by our colonial forefathers or can it indeed contribute to a culture that is promoting of diversity and difference.

Language teaching and learning should be encouraging of ways in which thoughts can be expressed. How then can ESOL best be developed within an educational and aid provision system that is promoting of growth of knowledge and language, as opposed to conformity and standards that may limit the ways in which thoughts are expressed and developed?

The purpose of this thesis was to identify the method by which ESOL, as part of aid provision, could be promoting of language development that, instead of contributing to language death, facilitated and promoted linguistic diversity. If English continues to hold the position of a world language, what then is needed in order for its position not to incur costs to global language diversity and further contribute to an already 90% loss in the number of languages spoken around the world? (McKay, 2002, p. 20).

It is the aim of this thesis to formulate recommendations that would assist aid agencies that include English language provision in their aid packages, in guarding against language dominance and takeover that contributes to indigenous language loss and a global reduction in linguistic diversity. The thesis is structured so as to provide the cognitive and historical background to English language learning first and then to place that learning in the context of learning English as a world language as part of aid and development.

Chapters One and Two examine the construction of knowledge and language and the intimate relationship they have in forming personal and national identities. By understanding better this dynamic it is hoped that the question of English and its role as a

world language can also be placed within the current language teaching and learning paradigm.

The question of English in aid, and English as a world language, was then posed to the research participants. Only once their perspective had been examined did I feel it appropriate to consider other issues related to the topic in any more depth. For that reason Chapter Five has been used as a means to discuss not only the findings of the participant research but also the literature research I conducted on this topic.

The research therefore comprises a comparative analysis of what has been found by the participants, and what has been found by the researcher. The result is a theoretical proposal of what may in future years govern the parameters of a world language and the teaching of any language being provided as part of an aid package. Chapter Six outlines the proposal in the context of English as a world language and English language teaching and learning as a component of aid. Chapter Seven provides a practical checklist for the application of the proposal and is designed to be adopted by aid agencies prior to commencement of a project that involves language tuition or language teacher training.

Throughout the project formulation and implementation, the research continued to stimulate ideas for the development of English as a world language. But the predominant product of the research process was the examination of the suitability of English as part of a country's aid provision. This was related to the past and present motivations that have given rise to English holding the position of use that it does today.

It is my hope that this thesis provides a better understanding of the placement of English in the world today and that it asks the right questions and provides the right context for those involved in development to ascertain its suitability as part of NZAID.