

## **Globalization and the Sociolinguistic Challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Critical Pedagogy: A Case for Language/Culture Minority Students**

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### **Abstract:**

*In spite of the fact that ours is a world of immigration, deepening ethnic textures, globalization, transnational histories, ethnolinguistic diversity, socioeconomic rivalries, and intercultural complexities, the role and significance of bilingual and multicultural education are far from being adequately realized. These demographic imperatives and a host of other cross-cultural and transnational praxis are bringing about a growing percentage of students who speak a first language other than English. All over the world, classrooms are experiencing a radical transformation due to an unparalleled intercultural diversity which is spreading its tentacles all across the globe including Pakistan which, of late hit by the CPEC spectacle, is likely to experience an unprecedented influx of foreign students. These are paradigm shifting questions and call for a radical re-conceptualization not just of classrooms but also of the entire pedagogic space and curricular habitus. The paper makes a coherent appraisal of these questions and advances a plea for the greater inclusion of a broad-based, bilingual, and multicultural education by laying down key guidelines for teachers, administrators, policy-makers, educators, and parents at large.*

**(Keywords)** Bilingualism, multicultural education, minority students, cultural identity

### **I. INTRODUCTION: SOCIOLINGUISTIC CHALLENGE TO THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PEDAGOGY**

Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (more especially during the last about four decades) the world has increasingly got multilingual and multicultural. This situation has crucial and far-reaching consequences for education in general and language education in particular. Classrooms have undergone a radical transformation which has taken the

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entire systems of education by storm and, of late, large-scale population shifts and other demographic imperatives have brought about an unprecedented number of students who do not have English as their first language [Campbell (2010)]. Nevertheless, in spite of these extraordinary transformations, by and large pedagogic discourses and education policies keep reflecting the aspirations and priorities of mainstream societies i.e. the (language) majority students.

Such a situation turns out to be extremely perplexing for the students whose first language is not English and who come to English as latecomers or what is commonly called ‘foreign learners’ [Caine and Cain (2011)]. For such students, it is not just language which is ‘foreign’ but also the culture which the English language represents. What is even more disturbing is the plain fact that our policymakers, educationists, and academicians seem least prepared to confront this challenge and to forge a viable response to address the requirements that the growing cultural and linguistic diversity is placing upon us [Mayo (2015)].

What the policy-makers and academicians are not realizing adequately is that our language classrooms are in a terrible flux and their makeup is changing at a far more accelerated pace than is commonly realized. In the more advanced countries, the classrooms are facing influx of Asian, Chinese, Arab, and African students. As per some of the estimates, by 2022 as many as 47% of school students in America will be of foreign origin [Banks and Banks (2010)]. According to a well-researched newspaper article, between 2004 and 2008 about 42000 Pakistani students got admitted to into Britain. Similarly, according to the Annual Open Doors Report, the total number of Pakistani students enrolled in America in 2014 rose up to 5354 which registered an increase of 8.5% [Nasir (2017)]. It is this kind of linguistic and cultural diversity that, of necessity, is going to characterize the classrooms the world over soon.

Therefore, it is not for nothing that some of the educationists have been cautioning for some time now that one of the foremost challenges in training teachers for future challenges is to tackle the growing disparity between the linguistic and cultural background of students and those of teachers:

*“A standard argument for diversity among school employees is that it should match the diversity of the students, so that each child has some teachers or other authority figures whose background matches their own, and with whom they can therefore identify” [Brighthouse (2006)].*

In such a state of affairs, what we need are bilingual and multilingual teachers as they can work with students not just as imparters of knowledge but also as intercultural mediators. This can result in what some people have termed “culturally peaceful schooling realities” that hold the promise of ensuring students’ full academic and psychosocial well-being. Teachers are not just knowledge-bearers, they are also culture-bearers and culture-makers and by entering into a cultural negotiation with their students, they can play a role in spreading intercultural understanding. For Cummins (1996), the ultimate goal of such an intercultural education is to balance the power relations existing in schools, and, finally, to address the power imbalance existing in the society at large.

In the multicultural milieu, it has also been noticed that attitudes like bigotry and inequity when expressed toward minority students can considerably affect their success in school [Mayo (2015)]. Therefore, it is not enough to provide all the students with equal ‘learning opportunities’, as is conventionally maintained. Rather, sufficient care should be taken that students do not experience any emotional or psychological setback on account of any racial, ethnic, or religious stereotyping. This condition calls for a radically transformed attitude on the part of the teachers and administrators and this transformed attitude can come about only if various languages and cultures are accorded somewhat equal respect and recognition.

This is the kind of critical pedagogy informed by insights emerging from multilingual and multicultural education which is primarily geared towards empowering the students coming from varied ethno-cultural backgrounds [Levinson (2009)]. This is what in the long run will result in a more integrated and equitable societal structure. This rationale for such multicultural critical pedagogy is premised upon the conviction that all students regardless of their ethno-cultural backgrounds and demographic status (i.e., whether they are from the

mainstream majority groups or from the marginalized minority groups), have to be educated to participate in the functioning of a pluralist and inclusive social order [Hemer (2017)].

However, when such participative and pluralistic role is denied to education, it can result in some of the most dismaying forms of classroom discriminations which can, subsequently, lead to prejudicial and asymmetrical social configurations, isolations, and in some cases outright ostracization. The following statement illustrates this problem with reference to 9/11 vis-à-vis Muslim students in America:

*“As an example of the changing political terrain, during the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Persian Gulf War of 1991, many Americans felt hostility toward certain segments of the Arab population, especially those from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, for example, many Arab university and college students were ostracized by their U.S. peers and in some cases this caused them to withdraw from classes and return to their home countries” [Ovando and Collier (1998)].*

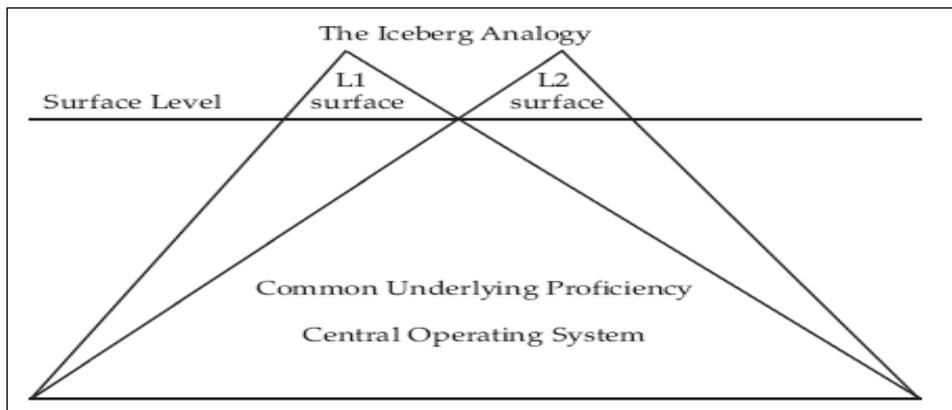
To counter such forms of overt and covert discriminations, education needs to be re-envisioned in a broader multicultural habitus in which educational institutions are expected to operate not just in pedagogic and academic contexts but also in sociopolitical and cultural contexts [Noddings (2013)]. It is mostly due to these pressures that educational institutions are experiencing a rapid transformation but the full implications of such transformations are not being adequately realized and still almost all over the world students are immersed in the English language in such a way that their first language(s) is/are thrown overboard. This kind of attitude is not just psychologically detrimental but also academically severely counter-productive.

There are various studies that indicate an optimal development of L1 coupled with an empathetic attitude on the part of the teachers toward students' culture can immensely facilitate educational experience of the learners [Freeman and Freeman (1998)]. When students are immersed in ELT programs and the first language support is instantly taken away, they are deprived of a very important learning aspect that Krashen

famously termed as *comprehensible input* [Krashen (1985) and (2013)]. The whole pedagogic exercise will be educationally valuable only if students are receiving *comprehensible input* along with some sort assurance regarding their cultural and psychological intactness. Triggering learners' prior knowledge is taken to be the first step in any purposeful pedagogic programme premised on the notion of *comprehensible input*.

Though learning tends to be a natural process that takes place all the time, students cannot learn what we actually do not comprehend. Learning, in fact, is founded on demonstrations (students observe teachers *doing* things) and engagement (they decide to do those things themselves). When the demonstration is provided in the English language to the non-native speakers, they might not comprehend what they are coming across. If they do not comprehend the demonstration, they will probably not decide to engage in the learning process [Freeman and Freeman (1998)]. Thus, the loss of this comprehensible input makes students fall behind not just linguistically but also academically. From this perspective, a broad-based and bilingual education is likely to play a significant role in reassuring all kinds of students to have faith in their abilities, to affirm their linguistic and cultural heritage and bank on it in an incremental and gradual way [Ovando and Collier (1998)].

Figure 1. The Dual Iceberg Representation of Bilingual Proficiency



Source: Cummins: (1996b).

Closely linked with Krashen's input hypothesis is Jim Cummins's notion of Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) which postulates that academic concepts and skills learned through L1 are transferable to L2 due to a shared underlying conceptual mechanism presented in the form of the above diagram.

This diagram clearly shows that different languages (in this case L1 and L2) one acquires/learns have a common underlying linguistic core which connect them at the bottom. Cummins compares the languages which a bilingual individual acquires to two tips of a huge iceberg. Whereas we can only see the tips (i.e., languages), the real part of the iceberg, which lies below the surface, contains all the concepts acquired in the two languages [Freeman and Freeman (1998)]. Therefore, the concepts, attitudes, skill one learns in L1 are not enclosed in mutually exclusive compartments; rather, they can move across the inter-lingual boundaries. To be more precise and in the words of Cummins (2017), the *content knowledge* can always be transferred from one language to any other. Therefore, the hysteria which we observe in Pakistan regarding immersing children in the English language from day one is technically speaking unfounded and as per the CUP whatever the students acquire in Urdu or any other regional language is, conceptually, transferable to English.

## **2. SOCIOCULTURAL HABITUS AND THE CHALLENGE FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PEDAGOGY**

The interface between psychology, education and mind is arguably one of the most important considerations of multicultural critical pedagogy. Good learning presupposes a togetherness of body and soul on the part of students, i.e., ensuring their holistic well-being. The ensuring of this well-being calls for an adequate recognition of their cultural and linguistic identity. Any feeling of dislocation of one's identity is fated to take considerable toll of one's learning capacities and academic performance [Campbell (2010)]. Dismissing students' linguistic and cultural heritage can jeopardize not just their academic success but can also seriously undermine their psychosocial well-being. The following quote illustrates the plight of a minority student in an American school:

*“When I came from the Dominican Republic at the age of 11 and entered the New York City public schools, I felt as if all of a sudden my previous knowledge and lived experiences were disregarded and thrown out of the window. It seemed as if most teachers focused their energies only on teaching me English. My sister and I cried many times, for we didn’t know what was going on” [Ovando and Collier (1998)].*

Affirming the identity of learners is a prelude both to successful teaching and successful learning. Students make greater progress when their culture is invoked in their learning experience which gives them a kind of conceptual proximity with the learning content. But today when English is spreading its tentacles all over the globe, and at the same time when diasporic/immigrant population is also increasing at an alarming pace, more and more students are suffering from first-language loss that is sooner or later followed by first-culture loss [Pennycook (2017)]. There is a sizable body of research identifying the negative effects of first-language loss such as negative self-image, low self-esteem, and identity crisis [Gunderson (2017)]. The education systems in the countries that face the greatest influx of foreign students do not particularly value minority languages/cultures and lay strong emphasis on assimilation. The following statement from a Vietnamese-born high school student enrolled in an American high school forcefully describes how a lack of cultural understanding and empathy can create a feeling of estrangement in foreign students studying in America. Referring to his teachers, he said:

*“They understand something, just not all Vietnamese culture. Like they just understand something outside...but they cannot understand something inside our hearts” [Nieto (1994), p. 67].*

The quote illustrates a sense of discontinuity and dislocation that the student is encountering given the lack of empathy on the part of teachers who did not develop a cultural rapport with him. Such an attitude can undermine students’ identity which sometimes has been described as the “accrued confidence that one’s ability to maintain inner sameness and

continuity is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" [De Costa (2016)].

What, in this respect, we have to bear in mind is the psychosocial fact that both personal identity and cultural identity are situated on a continuum and having disregarded the latter, the former cannot be kept intact. This psychosocial nature of identity is elucidated by American psychologist and writer Robert W. White: "By and by, this sense of identity gets compounded of bodily sensations, feelings, images, memories, and shared social experiences" (2010). As a matter of fact, cultural identity itself is marked by astonishing amount constructedness and intricacy. The real issue is that in a globalized world, identity is no longer one of the 'cultural givens' as it once used to be when the foremost goal of education was to enable the individuals to internalize certain agreed upon values, skills, attitudes, and actions essential for communal existence [Levinson (2009)]. But in the contemporary world, social, and academic pressures, diverse behaviours and widely different cultural values are compounding the question of identity-formation. In one of the interviews the researchers conducted for this paper, a South Korean student at National University of Modern Languages Islamabad explained his problem this way:

*"In my classroom, I sometimes don't know who I am or what I should be. Pakistani students, whenever some group activity is given by the teacher, form clusters and start using a strange mix of Urdu and English and I am simply left out [Eunhyuk, personal communication]" (July 29, 2016).*

Similarly, a Chinese student enrolled in an English language proficiency course at International Islamic University Islamabad described his condition in these words:

*"Though they [Pakistani class fellows] are extremely nice and respectful but sometimes they just don't know my way of doing things. I am misunderstood more often than their own Pakistani fellows. Maybe it is due to my poor English, but I think it also has to do something with cultural difference. [Youzhi, personal communication]" (March 19, 2016).*

These are real issues and cannot be addressed unless we re-think our pedagogies with relation to the challenges of living in a multicultural world. These days in our academic settings we hear a lot about multiculturalism, (inter)cultural understanding, cultural diversity, etc. However, by most of these terms what is actually meant is just celebrating some of the festivals of other cultures, period. Or, at maximum, the textbooks can contain some material about other cultures and countries. But all this is abysmally insufficient to be qualified as multicultural education. To make matters even more complicated, it is not uncommon for teachers to assign stereotypical profiling based upon preconceived cultural clichés or supposed collective statistics to their students. Describing one of her bitter school experiences, Elif Şafak says:

*“It was here that I had my first encounter with what I call the “representative foreigner.” In our classroom, there were children from all nationalities, yet this diversity did not necessarily lead to a cosmopolitan, egalitarian classroom democracy. Instead, it generated an atmosphere in which each child was seen -- not as an individual on his own, but as the representative of something larger. We were like a miniature United Nations, which was fun, except whenever something negative, with regards to a nation or a religion, took place. The child who represented it was mocked, ridiculed and bullied endlessly” (2014, November 17).*

What Şafak is describing is not unique to her. Her description is symptomatic of a larger cultural issue. Teachers, so often, become the bearers of biases and received opinions. What they sometimes fail to realize is that a student is not merely a member of this or that cultural group; rather, he/she is a human being with highly individual and nuanced behavioural patterns that go far beyond collective characterizations.

The perpetuation of these collective characterizations appears largely due to an ethnocentric attitude on the part of teachers and school administrators. The inculcation of tolerance is invariably laid down as one of the curricular objectives in our education systems; however, the

emphasis placed on this objective is mostly abstract and theoretical. Obviously, the collective learning experience of students should make them tolerant but tolerance does not mean an enhanced capacity for teeth gritting in the face of those who differ from our point of view [Schroeder (2011)]. Instead, it implies an enhanced openness and acceptance of diversity which can expand our own sensitivities without dampening them [Chickering (2009)]. It also means embracing diversity without losing sight of one's own cultural specificity. The following comment brings out the sheer educational value of such diversity:

*“A school with Muslim, Hindu, atheist, Roman Catholic, and Jewish children will do better, other things being equal, than one in which all the children are Roman Catholic. A school in which the teachers have a variety of faiths and ethnic backgrounds, and between them display a diversity of personal enthusiasms, will do better than one in which they are all cut from the same cloth”* [Brighouse (2006), p. 21-22].

This kind of cosmopolitanism is really required but the issue is that teachers and administrators are the carriers of their own cultural blinders. Therefore, in order to introduce this diversity in classrooms and to bank upon it, the following guidelines can go a considerably long way [Dunn, *et al.* (2003)]:

- In a language class, each student has a right as well as a responsibility to join discussions.
- Students and teachers should be taught to recognize the participations of one another with care and open-mindedness.
- Before commenting, students and teachers should get a point clarified when they do not properly understand it.
- If students or teachers need to challenge someone's ideas, they should do it with respect and dispassionate argumentation.
- Students and teachers should learn that if their ideas are challenged with sound logic and consistency of arguments by others, they should be willing to change their minds.
- Students and teachers should be precise in their discourse. They should make their point and then yield to others.

- By all means, they must not resort to ridicule and cultural jokes.

## 2. CULTURAL MINORITY STUDENTS AND THE LINGUISTIC CHALLENGE OF PEDAGOGY

Given the dialectical and symbiotic relation between language and culture, language minority students are also, by definition, cultural minority students [Ovando and Collier (1998)]. Nevertheless in a large number of schools all over the world, minority students' educational problems mostly remain fringe issues. In South East Asia and Africa, there are still countries that view themselves as single-ethnicity states. These states have failed to spell out workable agendas around minority students' rights. To alleviate such a state of affairs, schools should take an intercultural orientation rather than an assimilationist one while dealing with culturally diverse students. An assimilationist approach seeks to submerge the students in the dominant language of academia at the cost of their first language. In this way a stubborn monolingualism increasingly comes to be favoured. What is conveniently forgotten is the fact that bilingual and biliteral students have more potential for long-term academic as well as occupational success than students who are monolinguals and *monoliterates* [Gorter Zenotz and Cenoz (2016)]. What is more, it has also been observed that the students who achieve their optimum cognitive development in more than one language have greater cognitive benefits over monolinguals. Besides, a multicultural classroom can potentially generate new subtle insights. Recent research strongly supports bilingual education and shows that students who speak, read, and write their first language well have greater chances to succeed academically in the English language [Ovando and Collier (1998); Crawford (1989); Cummins (1996)]. Drawing upon the preceding discussion, a case for the discreet use of first language can be made based upon the following assumptions/principles:

- For delivering academic content and for inculcating higher order thinking, students can make use of the first language while, side by side, they acquire proficiency in English.
- Multi/bilingual instruction can bring about a close home-school relationship.
- Students can be helped by parents in homework and parents can have

better communication with school.

- Pragmatically and professionally, multi/bilingualism is more useful than monolingualism as the former can bring more opportunities.
- Multi/bilingual students/individuals have a broader cultural outlook and are cognitively and culturally more flexible.
- Proficient multi/bilinguals have greater self-esteem and a more secured sense of personality both socially and psychologically.
- Multi/bilingual education is anti-racist and instead of glossing over the presence of racist elements in syllabi, it seeks to address them.
- In contrast to popular belief, multi/bilingual is equally advantageous for both minority and majority students.
- In contrast to popular belief, multi/bilingual education should pervade the entire curriculum, instead of being confined to just one subject.
- Multi/bilingual education should affirm social justice and it should aim at connecting knowledge with social action.
- Multi/bilingual education is a process and not a product. It is ongoing and continuous.

However, in spite of such overwhelming consensus over the benefits of multi/bilingual education, it has been noticed that students are largely unable to reap these benefits because most of the contemporary educational settings which are by and large either rigidly monolingual or are on their way to be monolingual. Even if these programmes are available in some kind of schools or colleges, they have not been introduced in their true spirit. For example, in most of the educational settings, students enter as monolingual Urdu, Chinese, Spanish, or Arabic speakers and leave as monolingual English speakers. They often lose their first language so completely that by the time they reach high school, they need to study a foreign language. This is truer of such countries as America, Canada, UK and Australia. Even in Pakistan, it is not uncommon to come across students who, although develop considerable proficiency in English by the end of their academic career, fail to communicate in Urdu properly. All such students are in danger of losing their linguistic and cultural legacy and long-standing literary traditions as well. How crucial is to learn language(s) other than one's own can be seen from the following quote which illustrates the centrality

of languages in our social existence:

*“Many of the keys to the psychological, social, and physical survival of humankind may well be held by the smaller speech communities of the world. These keys will be lost as languages and cultures die. Our languages are joint creative productions that each generation adds to. Languages contain generations of wisdom, going back into antiquity. Our languages contain a significant part of the world’s knowledge and wisdom. When a language is lost, much of the knowledge it represents is also gone.” [Reyhner (2016), p. 4].*

The road to this linguistic loss is also paved by the sad fact that sometimes the parents in language minority families start using English at home with an earnest expectation that this way children will learn English quickly. This phenomenon is also common in Pakistani upper middle class. However, such an approach is technically unfounded and linguistically unviable. In most of the cases, it leads to linguistic impoverishment as it is based upon substandard language and low-quality input [Campbell (2010)]. Moreover, it is this attitude that results in the ancestral language loss. Sometimes, though equally unfortunately, such an approach is adopted under the pressures from schools. When this approach is adopted, the verbal interaction between children and parents gets impoverished both qualitatively as well quantitatively. For example, parents are likely to find it difficult, if not altogether impossible, to share with children their most nuanced and delicate feelings in a language they themselves are not quite proficient in.

At the same time it is important to note that such kind of broad-based, multi/bilingual education is empowering and aims at creating a just and equitable social order. Once equitable pedagogic space is provided to minority and majority students, spurious arguments about the supposedly innate incompetence of certain ethnic group will ipso facto collapse. Such an education will also do away with other forms of covert and overt racism, ethnocentrism and paternalism. Moreover, schools will achieve greater sociocultural coherence and relevance by accommodating inclusion and diversity in the contents and processes of educational experiences [Banks and Banks (2010)]. It is also important

to make it clear that the kind of broad-based multicultural education that is being proposed here is not a rigid or monolithic methodology. Instead, it is more like an awareness and an orientation that encompasses a wide range of methods, techniques, programmes, and models each one of them may promote a variety of distinct goals [Caine and Caine (2011)].

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

As the linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity of our world is increasing at an unprecedented rate, administrators, teachers, and policy-makers do not seem adequately prepared to deal with students coming from diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds and not having English as their first language. Demographic imperatives of our globalized and diasporic world call for a radical restructuring of classrooms the world over in order to better integrate language/culture minority students into the mainstream society. Such an education holds the promise of creating a civically informed and culturally conscientious citizenry. Focusing on diverse praxis, paradigms, and disciplinary insights, the paper contends that multicultural education furnishes a valuable framework for language/culture minority students to develop linguistic and sociocultural capital so foundational to live in the contemporary world. In a process-oriented way, the researchers have sought to synthesize social dynamics, demographic complexities, everyday experiences, and class experiences with reference to Pakistan as well as other more advanced countries. They have also laid down practical guidelines for the introduction of bilingual and multicultural pedagogy in classrooms with an avowed goal of creating a more just and equitable social order. Education policies, curricular decisions and policy priorities should proceed in the realization of this task.

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